

LINCOLN LORE

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THE OTHER NANCY HANKS

Upon learning of Abraham Lincoln's nomination for the presidency people in Kentucky where he was born became interested in his paternity. Samuel Haycraft of Elizabethtown, under the impression that Lincoln was the son of Thomas Lincoln's second wife, the former widow Johnston who once lived there, wrote to the presidential candidate inquiring about his parents. Lincoln replied in part: "You are mistaken about my mother—her maiden name was Nancy Hanks." Papers confirming the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks in Washington County, Kentucky on June 12, 1806, one hundred and forty-nine years ago yesterday, had not been discovered in 1860, and it was many years after Lincoln's death that they came to light.

Not only was Samuel Haycraft misinformed but many other Kentuckians were mistaken about the identity of Lincoln's mother. Adding to the confusion, there was living in the same community at the time of Abraham Lincoln's birth another woman whose name before her marriage had been Nancy Hanks. It is "The Other Nancy Hanks," daughter of Joseph Hanks, who will occupy our attention in this bulletin.

The pioneer Joseph Hanks was in Kentucky as early as 1786 and on February 28, 1787 purchased 150 acres of land not far from where Thomas Lincoln was to settle in 1811 on Knob Creek. Joseph made a will on January 1, 1793 and died sometime between then and May 14 of that year when the will was probated. He named his living children Thomas, Joshua, William, Charles, Joseph, Elizabeth, Polly and Nancy and in the last bequest stated: "I give and bequeath to my wife Nanny all and singular my whole estate during her life, afterwards to be equally divided between all my children." There is no evidence available that would indicate he did not name all of his living children in this will, and they were to share equally in the division of the estate upon the death of the widow.

There is a well established family tradition that very soon after the death of Joseph Hanks in 1793 the widow returned to the old homestead in Virginia with her youngest son, named for his father. Apparently Nancy went to live with her sister Polly who had married Jesse Friend. On May 15, 1799 Nancy gave birth, out of wedlock, to a child named Dennis Friend Hanks, whose father was Charles Friend, brother of Polly's husband Jesse. Three years later Charles Friend, then twenty-eight years old was before the court charged with the paternity of Nancy Riley's child born Nov. 7, 1802 and on November 19, 1804 this same Charles Friend was married to Sarah Huss, daughter of Edward Huss.

William Hanks, brother of Nancy married Elizabeth Hall, whose brother Levi had a deformed foot. Levi was put under a peace bond signed by William Hanks as bondsman in August 1800 because George Lindsay feared Hall would burn his house or do him some private injury. Apparently it was about this time that Levi Hall married Nancy Hanks as the wedding took place a short time after the birth of Dennis.

It was the wedding of Levi Hall and Nancy Hanks, daughter of Joseph that was largely responsible for the confusion about the parentage of Lincoln and especially the character of Lincoln's mother. William Herndon in a letter to Ward H. Lamon suggested the probability of Lincoln's illegitimacy and stated that "Prentice (George D. Prentice, editor of *Louisville Journal*) got

up some evidence on the question in 1860 and the rumor reached here (Springfield, Ill.)"

Some years later, in 1873, Robert Lincoln at Chicago was to hear the same confused report of his father's parentage. John Nicolay who was then visiting with him tried to get some information about the wedding ceremonies. Even up to this time marriage papers of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln in Washington County, Kentucky had not been discovered and the official returns of the 1800 wedding of Levi Hall and Nancy Hanks in Hardin County performed by Rev. Alexander McDougal had not then appeared, and never have been found. Apparently McDougal was not very careful about reporting the weddings he solemnized as only nine of the forty-nine marriage returns he filed with the county clerk give the specific day of the month on which the marriage was performed. Apparently no report on the Hall-Hanks wedding was ever made.

The version of the wedding, with the name of the bridegroom changed to Lincoln, which was in circulation in 1860 and which Robert Lincoln heard about in 1873 was preserved by Mrs. Elizabeth Middleton, a daughter of Rev. McDougal who married Levi Hall and Nancy Hanks, daughter of Joseph, or as we have called her "the other Nancy," is here presented in part:

"Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married at a Mr. Todd's who at that time lived about three miles southeast of Hodgenville on the Little South Fork. . . . Nancy Hanks at that time was working for and living at Mr. Todd's and Thomas Lincoln was working for and living at Hodgen's Mill." The Todd home where the wedding took place was on a farm adjacent to the property of Jesse and Polly Hanks Friend.

Mrs. Middleton aside from being confused in the name of the groom also had the wrong Nancy Hanks for the bride. The young lady whom Thomas Lincoln was to make his wife six years later was then living in Washington County where she was married on June 12, 1806. But the unsavory reputation which had been associated with "the other Nancy" mother of Dennis Hanks was ascribed to Lincoln's mother.

The name of Levi Hall appears on the U. S. census report for Hardin County, Kentucky in 1810. It reveals that both Levi and his wife Nancy were between 26 and 45 years of age and that there were two boys under ten and two girls under ten already in their family. This supports the tradition of Dennis Hanks, who is listed with the Thomas Sparrow family, that his mother married Levi Hall shortly after his birth, at least she had borne Hall four children previous to 1810. By the time of the 1820 census was recorded their family had increased to four sons and four daughters.

Not only has "The Other Nancy" been confused with the mother of Lincoln in the wedding ceremonies but Nancy Hanks Hall is said to be interred by the side of Lincoln's mother in the burial lot in Indiana. Two sons of "The Other Nancy," Dennis Hanks and Squire Hall, married Elizabeth and Matilda Johnston, the two daughters of Lincoln's stepmother. According to Dennis, Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow and her husband were buried on one side of Lincoln's mother and Nancy Hanks Hall and her husband, about six years later were buried in the same cemetery lot on the other side of Nancy Lincoln. All five people are said to have died of a malady that was termed "milk sickness."