



# Lincoln Lore

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## Was Thomas Lincoln Photographed?

**Editor's Note:** The controversy over whether or not Thomas Lincoln was ever photographed still remains unresolved. In almost every pictorial work about the Sixteenth President the so-called photograph of Thomas Lincoln is included with the qualifying statement that it is "a traditional portrait." The photograph appears on page 297 in Charles Hamilton and Lloyd Ostendorf's work *Lincoln In Photographs — An Album of Every Known Pose*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1963, with the caption "A traditional portrait."

In a comment concerning the photograph, the authors state that "The reflected light on the shirt indicates that this photograph is probably a copy of an old daguerreotype. It was purchased by Lieutenant O. V. Flora during the Civil War from a member of the Lincoln family. Under the picture is written in an early hand: 'Thomas Lincoln, Born 1778, Died 1851.' Many scholars doubt its authenticity, but the rugged angular features of the subject, so dramatically Lincolnesque, match contemporary descriptions of Thomas Lincoln."

In the February, 1944 issue of the *Lincoln Herald*, volume XLVI, number 1, pages 21 to 24, I attempted to delve into the problem of the identification of the photograph. While my efforts failed to convince the hard core of Lincoln students who were so vehement in their belief that the photograph was a fraud, I think it appropriate to reprint my article (with the permission of the Editor of the *Lincoln Herald*) as apparently nothing new about the identity or origin of the photograph has developed. Then, too, it is my feeling that I have delved more deeply into the matter of identity and origin than any other writer.

R. G. M.

Among Lincoln groups during the last few years there has been much discussion about a photograph which some students have claimed to be that of the President's father, Thomas Lincoln. This writer first published the photograph with an article entitled "Thomas Lincoln In Elizabethtown, Kentucky," in the *Kentucky Progress Magazine*, Winter Edition, 1933, Vol. 5, No. 2. The photograph was then labeled "traditional" and no further documentary evidence has been discovered to lead one to change the label to "genuine." However, since that date certain historians have given the photograph considerable study, even if they have been unwilling to accept it.

For several years the photograph has been the prop-

erty of Mrs. F. J. Schafer of Franklin, Indiana. It was originally owned by her father, Lieutenant O. V. Flora, who enlisted in the Union Army at the beginning of the Civil War. He served in the Tenth Ohio Battery from Springfield, receiving an honorable discharge on

May 5, 1865. For a limited period he was assigned to service in Charleston, Illinois, where United States troops were engaged in stamping out a subversive organization, known as the Knights of the Golden Circle. While in that Illinois city he bought the photograph from some member of the Lincoln family who claimed it was a genuine picture of Thomas Lincoln. Most likely the vendor was a member of the Johnston family, a descendant of Sarah Bush, the second wife of Thomas Lincoln. If the so-called Thomas Lincoln photograph is genuine, one could surmise that it was probably made by a Charleston photographer, as that was the largest town nearest the Lincolns' place of residence, although no markings or signature of a photographer can be discovered on the original print.

Half-tone reproductions of the photograph received a wide distribution in 1941 when the portrait appeared in Stefan Lorant's book, "Lincoln, His Life In Photographs." In this book there is a cut-line to the effect that the photograph was made by "one of the members of the Hanks family."

Practically every book reviewer in the Lincoln field branded the photograph a fraud and suggested that someone had imposed upon the compiler's credulity in the matter of the Thomas Lincoln picture. The consensus of their opinions was that "there is no such thing."

In November, 1943, Mrs. Schafer presented the original to the Department of Lincolniana, Lincoln Memorial University. Because of the interest it has created, we



From the Lincoln Memorial University Collection

This early photograph is inscribed in faded ink on one line the name and dates "Thomas Lincoln — Born 1778 Died 1851".

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are reviewing again some facts concerning the disputed picture. The photograph is cabinet size, oval in shape, and it has been mounted on flexible cardboard  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches by 10 inches. It is slightly faded and has every appearance of being of the period claimed. We have made an effort to discover the names of Charleston photographers of the 1850s and our search has resulted in the finding of the name of John Simpson who is listed in an early directory as a daguerreotypist in Charleston in 1854. Unfortunately he left no record of his work and his name is of no significance in this study.

It seems unlikely that a member of the Hanks family, as suggested by the cut-line in the Lorant book, would have made Tom Lincoln's photograph. Photography was first introduced into the United States in 1839 when Abraham Lincoln was thirty years old, and his first photograph is believed to have been made by N. H. Shepherd in Springfield, Illinois, in 1846. The earliest method known as daguerreotypy was popular about fifteen years and in the 1850s gave way to the ambro-

type, an improved and less expensive method. Step by step other improved methods were introduced and the possibility that Thomas Lincoln sat for a photograph is not out of the realm of probability. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a photographer in the Lincoln family. His name was Thomas Johnston, a son of John D. Johnston, who in turn was a step-son of Lincoln's father. In Eleanor Gridley's work, "The Story of Abraham Lincoln," Estill & Co., 1901, pages 26 and 27, the following information, in the words of John Hall, are given concerning Tom Johnston:

"Uncle Abe give him a pass to go all over the Army takin' picters."

While there is a remote possibility that Thomas Johnston might have taken Thomas Lincoln's "picters," because quantities of such a photograph would have had a commercial value, such a supposition is doubtful. However, as an itinerant photographer he might have offered for sale quantities of the photograph taken by some other member of his profession.

On the other hand, taking into consideration the evidence of both sides of the case, Mrs. Schafer's father bought the photograph from some person whom he believed to be a member of the Lincoln family; he secured the photograph in the community where Thomas Lincoln had lived; he purchased it in good faith and had no qualms in his lifetime concerning its authenticity. Moreover, the photograph is labeled in contemporary ink in old fashioned letters:

"Thomas Lincoln. Born 1778. Died 1851."

The birth and death years inscribed on the photograph are accepted by most historians as correct; however, those who have delved into Kentucky court house records have found Thomas Lincoln's name listed in the Hardin County tax list for the year 1797 as "twenty-one years old or older," and maintain that he was "born with the Republic" in the year 1776. Needless to say, most biographers as well as the Lincolns recorded the birthdate as 1778.

A study of the original photograph reveals no clue or lead for additional research. The physiognomy of the traditional Thomas Lincoln in this picture is not out of harmony with the personal descriptions of the pioneer that have been recorded by the men who knew him. There are deep-set eyes, high cheek bones, a pro-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Early photograph of the grave stone of Thomas Lincoln in the Shiloh (sometimes called Gordon) Cemetery near Janesville, Coles County, Illinois. Tombstone gives death date as January 15. Thomas Lincoln died January 17, 1851. This monument was erected in May 1880 and Robert T. Lincoln is reported to have contributed \$118. toward the cost. Today the original stone stands near the entrance to the cemetery and a new monument has been placed over the grave. It was dedicated May 16, 1924, under the auspices of the Illinois Lions Clubs.



From the Lincoln Memorial University Collection

Lieutenant O. V. Flora, who purchased the so-called Thomas Lincoln photograph from some member of the Lincoln family in Charleston, Illinois.

truding lower lip and other Lincolnian characteristics that are worthy of consideration.

One of the best descriptions of Thomas Lincoln, written by Dr. W. H. Doak, appeared in the *Terre Haute Star* of February 11, 1923:

"Thomas Lincoln stood very erect. Always clean shaven . . . He was five feet, ten or eleven inches in height, standing very erect, with large bones and strong, heavy muscles—not fat, weighing about 170 or 175 pounds, with a medium high forehead. Straight nose, gray or light blue eyes, rather a broad face and black hair, which he wore combed straight down, cut off square at the ends, and not combing his front locks behind his ears, it gave him something of a picturesque appearance."

With little data on hand to make a case for or against the so-called Thomas Lincoln photograph, no conclusions can be reached as to its authenticity. Limited knowledge of a thing usually provokes a negative reaction, and conservative students always take a safe position until documentary facts can prove the point in question; nevertheless it is believed that if the Thomas Lincoln photograph is not genuine the hoax was perpetrated in the 1860s. It is unfortunate that this photograph was not brought to light at an earlier period and that Lieutenant Flora was not carefully interviewed by some competent historian before his death on December 23, 1915. Some revealing statement, coming directly from him might have cleared up the puzzling problem.

### Thomas Lincoln Furniture

Editor's Note: The Editor does not wish to bear the responsibility of declaring these particular pieces of furniture, discussed in this article, as being genuine Lincoln productions. While numerous other items of furniture, claimed to have been made by Thomas Lincoln, have been brought to my attention, I have selected the kitchen safe, chest of drawers and desk as best fitting the yardstick of authenticity as to date, place and association.

R.G.M.

In *Lincoln Lore* Number 1476 (Thomas Lincoln's Corner Cupboards) February, 1961 and Number 1512 (Furniture Made By Thomas Lincoln) February, 1964, attention was directed to Thomas Lincoln as a cabinet maker with considerable discussion devoted to the corner cupboards, wall cupboard, hutch, chest, desk, chest of drawers, day bed and mantelpiece which are believed to be the handwork of Lincoln's father.

The publication of these articles led to considerable correspondence, and as a result, additional furniture attributed to Thomas Lincoln was discovered.

#### Kitchen Safe

One piece is a kitchen safe owned by The University of Chicago Library. It is made of cherry wood, and measures 35½" x 62" x 12", outside dimensions. It contains three shelves and two full-length doors which are paneled with perforated tin. The overall appearance, even discounting age and use, is rough hewn.

The safe was a part of the William E. Barton collection and was acquired along with the books, manuscripts and artifacts of the prominent biographer. In fact, the Barton collection formed the nucleus of the Lincolniana now owned by The University of Chicago Library.

At various times in the past, the kitchen safe has been on exhibit, but at the present time it is kept in a non-public area of the Library's Department of Special Collections.

The following affidavits giving the history of the kitchen safe were acquired by Dr. Barton in 1929:

A Statement Concerning the Kitchen Safe Made by Thomas Lincoln by Nancy A. Hall, Daughter of John J. Hall Who Owned and Occupied and Sold in 1892 The Lincoln Log Cabin.

I certify that the wooden safe with perforated tin panels which I have sold this day to Dr. William E. Barton was made by Thomas Lincoln and for years until her death in 1860 was used by his wife Sarah Bush Lincoln in the Lincoln Log Cabin in Coles County Illinois. I was born in that cabin and the safe was a familiar article of furniture in my childhood. It was never removed from the cabin until that cabin was taken down for removal in 1892 and since then has stood in my house on the farm adjacent. Tin such as is used in this safe brought up the Wabash river from Cincinnati or Pittsburgh and sold at Terre Haute and inland towns and used by local carpenters of whom Thomas Lincoln was one, protecting food from dust and flies while giving it ventilation. These safes were very popular and the housewife who owned one was very proud. My great-grandmother Lin-

coln prized this safe very highly, and I am glad to sell it to be added to the Lincoln collection of my friend Dr. Barton.

Signed: Nancy A. Hall

I, Clarence Hall, hereby witness the signature of my mother, and add my own affirmation that her statement is in full accord with what I have always been told and believe.

Signed: Clarence T. Hall

Janesville, Illinois

May 10, 1929

A second affidavit follows:

#### The Lincoln Kitchen Safe

The kitchen safe which I have sold to Dr. William E. Barton was made by Thomas Lincoln and was used by my great-grandmother, Sarah Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's step-mother until her death, December 10, 1869.

I was born in the Lincoln cabin, the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln last visited his step-mother in January 1861, and in which both she and her husband, Abraham Lincoln's father died. My parents owned the cabin and my father sold it to the Lincoln Log Cabin Association in 1891 for removal to Chicago. I have lived all my life in that cabin and the home I now occupy on the adjacent farm.

The safe was in the home when I was born and had been there for many years. It has never been out of possession of our family. It was used by my grandmother, Matilda Johnston Hall, wife of my grandfather Squire Hall, and by my parents, Mr. and Mrs. John J. Hall who owned the Lincoln cabin after the death of Lincoln's step-mother until its sale in 1891.

Signed: Nancy A. Hall

Clarence T. Hall

Witness

Janesville, Illinois

May 10, 1929

#### Chest of Drawers

Arthur E. Patterson I of Indianapolis, Indiana stated in a letter dated February 25, 1964 that a highly prized item in his family is a "cherry chest of drawers made by Thomas Lincoln for Mr. and Mrs. David Turnham." The owner stated that "The chest was (a piece) of their 'wedding furniture' and is in perfect condition. I believe it is recorded that the Turnhams came to Indiana and settled in Spencer County, C. 1819. It is said that Mr. Turnham, who was a constable, loaned Abraham Lincoln the Revised Statutes of Indiana, which was probably the first law book Lincoln ever studied."

If this chest of drawers belonged to David Turnham, it was one of two pieces of furniture made by Thomas Lincoln that he owned. In *Lincoln Lore* Number 1476 a corner cupboard designated as No. III The Turnham-Johnson cupboard of walnut wood is described. It is owned by the Evansville, Indiana Public Museum. Ac-



Cherry tilt-top desk attributed to Thomas Lincoln. Owned by John J. Fierst of Jasper, Indiana.

ording to relatives of Turnham, the walnut lumber used in the construction of this cupboard was cut on the Turnham farm. This piece was never out of the Turnham family until it was placed in the Evansville museum.

#### Desk

According to a letter from John J. Fierst, Jasper, Indiana, dated August 2, 1964, a lift-top desk of cherry wood made by Thomas Lincoln is in his home. While no affidavits are available concerning the history of the desk, Mr. Fierst has made an interesting statement as to its origin: "While the Lincolns lived in Spencer County, they used to have corn ground at Huffman's Mill on Anderson Creek and at Enlow's Mill here in Jasper. During one of their trips they traded the desk for meal. The desk was used in the old Enlow mill and passed from one mill owner to another until it reached the Eckert family. The younger generation of Eckerts sold it to my grandfather, Louis P. Joseph. When he bought it I am not sure.

"The desk is a lift-top desk made of cherry wood. It has a large drawer below the desk compartment. The wooden knob on the desk is not part of the original desk because a souvenir seeker took it while the desk was on display. Almost every time the desk has been displayed at furniture shows in the United States, someone takes the knob.

"... Thomas Lincoln constructed quite a bit of furniture and was good at it. I feel in time we will come to find out that he was a better man than most people have given him credit of being."

It is difficult to discover in Thomas Lincoln's furniture any stylistic trends in construction that would enable one to determine what is and what is not a genuine product of his cabinet shop. So far as is known, he only placed his initials "T. L. 1814" in one corner cupboard which is now the property of The J. B. Speed Memorial Museum of Louisville, Kentucky.

The one exception to the above statement about stylistic trends is to be found in the study of his inlaid designs. Four of the cupboards constructed by Thomas Lincoln indicate that he preferred the dental or "hole and tooth" inlay along with a design called "star and streamer." Perhaps, Lincoln's father revealed one distinct idiosyncrasy in that on three of his cupboards he inlaid strips to be attached to the facing of his furniture rather than placing the inlay directly on the furniture. Unfortunately, however, few pieces of Lincoln furniture are inlaid.

### Thomas Lincoln's Tools and Supplies

Thomas Lincoln was said to have one of the best sets of carpenter's tools in Hardin County, Kentucky, and perhaps the best set in pioneer southern Indiana.

A review of the Bleakley & Montgomery ledgers (See *Lincoln Lore* Number 1479) a mercantile establishment in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, for a period from 1804 to 1808, indicates that Thomas Lincoln occasionally bought tools and supplies for his carpenter and cabinetmaking needs.

An itemized list of tools and supplies follows:

Aug. 8, 1804	1 castel saw
Sept. 6, 1804	1 plane bit
Nov. 10, 1804	1 file
Feb. 27, 1805	1 saw
Aug. 23, 1805	1 Foot Adze
June 21, 1806	1 shoe knife
July 2, 1807	½ Dozen screws
Sept. 19, 1807	1 Gimlet
June 3, 1808	Sandpaper & Screws

At Thomas D. McIntire's public sale in Hardin County, on January 15, 1807, Thomas Lincoln purchased for \$3.00 a sword. Perhaps he converted this piece of tempered steel into a home-made drawing knife.

If Thomas Lincoln served some kind of apprenticeship under Jesse Head in Washington County, Kentucky, he might have received from the master craftsman a joiner, foreplane, jack and smoothing plane. These were the types of tools Jesse Head contracted to furnish his apprentices who completed three and one-half years in his service.

While this sketch falls far short of an inventory of Thomas Lincoln's tools, the remarkable thing about this compilation is that we have this much information.

### Thomas Lincoln Manuscripts

The Foundation has in its archives numerous manuscripts pertaining to Thomas Lincoln and his family. Some twenty-nine documents relate to the immediate family in Coles County, Illinois. These have been acquired over a period of many years, and except for those documents in the handwriting of his famous son, the Kentucky manuscripts relating to the father constitute one of our most prized collections.

The Kentucky items follow:

1. Account book (1796-1801) of Samuel Haycraft, Sr., listing cash payments to Thomas Lincoln for labor in digging a raceway for an Elizabethtown, Kentucky, mill. The payments are recorded in shillings and pence (Virginia and Kentucky sterling).

July 13, 1796

Thomas Lincoln, Dr.  
To cash paid to him 39/

Sept. 17, 1797

Thomas Lincoln  
By cash paid him 27/

Sept. 1797

Thos. Lincoln  
By cash paid him 10/

Accounts of Race Digging  
(Reverse side of account sheet dated March 1801)

No Date

Thomas Lincoln  
By cash paid him 2/15/6

No Date

Thomas Lincoln  
12½ rods digging 2/9/5

No Date

Thomas Lincoln  
To cash paid to him 39/

No Date

Thomas Lincoln  
To 7½ Rods diging in the race 30/

No Date

Thomas Lincoln  
2 days work on the dam 6/

No Date

By Thomas Lincoln  
Race diging 5/

No Date (Fragment of ledger page)

By hands working on the milldamm  
To Lincoln 3 days (No payment)

2. June 26, 1803

Thomas Lincoln signed his name as a witness to a promissory note of Jacob Van Meter who promised to pay "Samuel Haycraft, executor of Letis Van Meter, dec'd. on order the just sum of L 26/17/3 in currancy to be upon demand."

3. 1804-1808

Bleakley & Montgomery ledger  
Elizabethtown, Kentucky  
(See *Lincoln Lore* No. 1479)

4. 1809

Hardin County Court  
(Account of Ben Helm D. H. C.)  
By cash paid to Thomas Lincoln  
as guard 11/67

5. May 11, 1811

Hardin County, Kentucky, Estray Book (1806-1815) "Gray mare (426). 11th of May 1811. Taken up by Thomas Lincoln in Hardin County on Knob Creek on the road leading from Bardstown to Nolin a gray mare 8 years old 14 hands high Branded on the near thigh but not legible a scar on her off side with a dark spot on her neck on the off side under the main about the size of a dollar a sore Back trots natural Appraised to \$20. Peter Ather-ton J. P. H. C."