

## Lincoln Lore

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FOUNDATION

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## LINCOLN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

It does not seem to be known, generally, outside the circle of students who have become interested in the life of Abraham Lincoln, that at the request of different parties he prepared some sketches about himself. These autobiographical notes have been the source of our most valuable information about his family history, early life, and public service. When first approached about writing some notes for a newspaper editor he replied that it would be folly to attempt to make anything out of his early life as it could be condensed into a single line found in Gray's Elegy: "The short and simple annals of the poor." However he set about preparing for this editor, Mr. Scripps, his most complete autobiographical sketch, too long to print in these columns.

### Dictionary of Congress—1858

Possibly the most condensed data which he presented, was sent to the editor of the Dictionary of Congress for 1858, upon the usual request for a sketch of his life. It follows in six brief sentences.

"Born, February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky.

"Education defective.

"Profession a lawyer.

"Have been a captain of volunteers in Black Hawk War.

"Postmaster at a very small office.

"Four times a member of the Illinois Legislature, and was a member of the lower house of Congress."

Yours, etc.

A. Lincoln.

### Dictionary of Congress—1864

If Abraham Lincoln prepared another sketch for a revised issue of the same publication in 1864, the editor must have taken some liberties with it, or confused a portion of it at least with some other biographical notice. Aside from the reference to his schooling in Stafford County, Virginia, his subsequent occupation as a school teacher and his law training in Culpepper County, Virginia, the item seems to be fairly accurate.

Abraham Lincoln—He was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, February 12, 1809; removed with his father to Indiana in 1816; received a limited ed-

ucation; spent two years at school in Stafford County, Virginia; taught school and studied law for a time in Culpepper County, of that State; removed to Illinois in 1830, and turned his attention to agricultural pursuits; he served as a Captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk war; was at one time Postmaster in a small village; and he served four years in the Illinois Legislature, during which time he turned his attention again to the study of law, and settled at Springfield in the practice of his profession. He was a member of the National Convention which nominated General Taylor for President in 1848, and was a Representative in Congress, from Illinois, from 1847 to 1849, serving on the Committees on the Postoffice and Post-roads, and on Expenses in the War Department. In 1858 he acquired distinction by stumping the State of Illinois, for the United States Senate, against S. A. Douglas; and in 1860 he was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate for President of the United States, and was duly elected to that position for the term commencing the 4th of March, 1861. By the Baltimore Convention, held in 1864, he was nominated for re-election to the Presidency.

### Autobiography Written for Fell

The autobiographical efforts to which authors most often refer was prepared by Mr. Lincoln for Jesse W. Fell and sent to him December 20, 1859, with the following letter:

J. W. Fell, Esq.

My dear Sir: Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the material. If it were thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objection. Of course it must not appear to have been written by myself.

Yours very truly,

A. Lincoln.

I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon County, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where a year or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New

England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten—the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics; and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused me again. What I have done since that is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Yours truly,

A. Lincoln.