

The Lincoln Lineage

Historians have traced President Lincoln's ancestry through 10 generations in the male line to the towns of Hingham and Swanton Morley, Norfolk, England to Robert Lincoln who died in 1543. His grandson, Richard Lincoln died in 1620 and was buried with the respected "gentry" class or gentleman in the central aisle of the Hingham Parish Church.

According to the old English law of primogeniture, Edward Lincoln, eldest son of Richard, was legal heir to his father's estate. However, Richard's fourth wife contested the estate and succeeded in obtaining all of his property. Thus, Edward was deprived of his rightful inheritance.

If it had not been for this event, American history might read quite differently. If Edward had inherited his father's very "respectable estate," he would probably have remained in Swanton Morley and it is very likely that his son Samuel would have had no reason to seek his fortune in America.

Samuel Lincoln was the first American ancestor of the President in the male line. He was one of a considerable number of emigrants who came to Massachusetts Bay Colony to settle in Hingham, Massachusetts in 1637. A weaver by trade, Samuel was active in community affairs and in his church. He died in 1690 in Hingham where he is commemorated in the Old Ship Church that he helped build.

Around 1707, Mordecai Lincoln II and his younger brother Abraham left their home in Massachusetts and moved to Freehold Township, Monmouth County, New Jersey. About 1720, the family moved to Pennsylvania.

Successful in business affairs, Mordecai Lincoln II accumulated a large estate. He was "trusted and honored by his friends and associates and occupied a high place in the social and economic community." He died in 1736 in Amity, Pennsylvania.

John Lincoln, great-grandfather of the President, was born in 1716 near Freehold, New Jersey. In 1768, John moved his family to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia where he settled on 600 acres of land. He was known to the Pennsylvania Lincolns as "Virginia John." John Lincoln was "a man of influence and prestige in the community." He died at his home in Rockingham County in 1788.

John's eldest son Abraham, grandfather of the future President, was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania in 1744 and moved with his parents to Virginia where he grew up.

He was married in 1770 to Bersheba Herring. The President's grandfather was a fairly wealthy landowner in Virginia, as well as a captain in the Virginia Militia during the Revolution.

In 1776, Thomas Lincoln, father of the President, was "born with the republic" during the turmoil of the American Revolution. Captain Lincoln is believed to have made his first visit to Kentucky in the spring of 1780 and to have fallen in love with the land. He brought his family through the Cumberland Gap to Kentucky in the autumn of 1781 or 1782.

Sometime in 1784 or 1785, Captain Lincoln and his family moved to his Long Run land grant in Jefferson County. The family lived at Hughes Station at first, a half-mile northeast of the Long Run grant, while Captain Lincoln and his boys prepared the land to be their permanent home.

The First Massacre of Abraham Lincoln

It might be said that the life of President Lincoln began and ended in tragedy. Almost all Americans know about a fateful day in April 1865 at Ford's Theater in Washington when the 16th President of the United States was assassinated by the actor John Wilkes Booth. Few know about the tragic death of the President's grandfather Abraham on a fateful day in May 1786 near Hughes Station, Kentucky.

During the spring of 1786, Captain Lincoln and his three sons, Mordecai 15, Josiah 13, and Thomas, 8, were putting in the spring crop of corn. Without warning, they were attacked by a small band of Indians and the 42-year-old Captain Lincoln was shot and killed.

It is believed that Josiah ran for Hughes Station where the family was temporarily making their home in one of the fort's eight cabins. In the meantime, Mordecai and Thomas escaped to the homestead cabin where Mordecai knew his father's gun was kept. Mordecai grabbed the weapon and placed the barrel of the rifle through a space between the logs. When an Indian crept out of a thicket to take the scalp of his father, Mordecai took aim at the Indian and killed him.

Some historians claim that young Thomas never ran to the cabin, rather he stayed by the motionless body of his dead father and was still there when Mordecai shot the approaching Indian. If Mordecai had not taken careful aim on that day, Thomas Lincoln might have been captured or killed and the course of American history changed forever.

Bersheba Lincoln buried her husband near the homestead cabin on the Long Run Farm that later became the burial ground of the Long Run Baptist Church. The location of Captain Lincoln's grave has never been found.

After Captain Lincoln's death, the English law of primogeniture prevailed and Mordecai Lincoln, the oldest son, inherited his father's entire landholdings. Documents indicate that the Lincoln family lived on the Long Run Farm through September 1786. The Lincolns retained ownership of the farm until 1797, when Mordecai sold the property to Benjamin Bridges by title bond.

A Very Special Grandmother

After her husband's death, Bersheba was left alone in the Kentucky wilderness with her three boys and two girls. Although the scarcity of women of the Kentucky frontier probably brought many suitors to her door, Bersheba never remarried.

Sometime between September 1786 and 1788, Bersheba moved her family to Beech Fork in Nelson County. Why did Bersheba move her family to Beech Fork? One popular theory is that she moved to be under the protection of Hannaniah Lincoln, her husband's cousin. Bersheba also had a debt to collect. Hannaniah had purchased a large amount of land in Kentucky and apparently borrowed money from Abraham Lincoln to make the purchase.

Bersheba and her children lived in Hannaniah's home when they first came to Washington County. They later moved into the Beech Fork cabin until the children were grown. Mordecai and Josiah were the only children of Captain Abraham Lincoln who remained in the Beech Fork area of Washington County.

The President's Mother

There is much controversy about the ancestry of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, mother of the President. However, it is generally agreed that Nancy Hanks was born on February 5, 1784 in Virginia and was brought to Kentucky as a young child.

Although disputed by some, several noted historians have concluded that Nancy was the only child of James and Lucy Shipley Hanks and that after her father's death she was brought to Kentucky by her mother. They lived with Lucy's eldest sister, Rachel Shipley Berry and her husband Richard Berry, Sr.

As a young girl, Nancy was noted for her beauty, grace, vivacity, and intelligence. She is believed to have been tall, slender, and delicate. Her son said of her, "She was intellectual by nature, had a strong memory, acute judgment, and was cool and heroic."

Some historians claim that Nancy could neither read nor write, but it is now generally accepted that she could read. The President's autobiography tells of his mother instructing him "in letters and morals and especially the Bible stories." The autobiography also states, "...the Bible she had read and had taught him to read, was the greatest comfort he and his sister had after their mother was gone."

The President's Father

Thomas Lincoln grew up in Washington County at the Beech Fork cabin of his mother Bersheba. When he was 17 years old, he served in the Kentucky Militia organized to protect settlers against Indian uprisings. Thomas was of medium height with dark hazel eyes and black hair. It is said that he could be terse, yet was known to reel off many yarns and jokes. He had quite a reputation as a storyteller.

Many disparaging things have been written about Thomas, representing him as a shiftless sort of man. According to most historians, however, humility, sobriety, industriousness, and integrity are some of the traits that characterized the President's father.

In 1803, the 27-year-old Thomas purchased a 238-acre tract of land located on Mill Creek in Hardin County about seven or eight miles from Elizabethtown. He lived there from 1803 to 1808 and worked as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. His mother Bersheba, his sister Nancy, and his sister's new husband, William Brumfield, came to live with him at Mill Creek in 1803.

A few months before his marriage in 1806, Thomas was hired by Elizabethtown merchants Bleakley and Montgomery to build a flatboat to transport merchandise on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. When it was completed, he was hired to take a load of goods to New Orleans. Like his famous son, Thomas Lincoln always sought new adventures and opportunities. President Lincoln spoke of his father as a "wandering laboring" young man "who grew up without education."

After his return from New Orleans, Thomas went on a buying spree in preparation for his wedding to Nancy Hanks. His purchases included calfskin to be made into new boots and fabric that an Elizabethtown tailor made into a handsome suit of clothes especially for his wedding. Thomas courted Nancy Hanks in the Francis Berry House. It is said that he proposed to her in front of large living room fireplace.

Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg gives the following account of the wedding:

"June 12, 1806 came and the home of Richard Berry at Beechland in Washington County saw men and women on horseback arriving for the wedding of 28-year-old Thomas Lincoln and 22-year-old Nancy Hanks.



"The groom was wearing his fancy new beaver hat, a new black suit, his new silk suspenders. The bride's outfit had in it linen and silk, perhaps a dash somewhere of the one-fourth yard of scarlet cloth Thomas had brought at Bleakley and Montgomery's.

"They had many relatives and friends in Washington County and the time was right to go to a wedding, with spring planting and corn plowing over and the hay harvest yet to come. Nancy Hanks was at home in the big double long cabin of the Berry's. She had done sewing there for Mrs. Berry and it was Richard Berry who had joined Thomas Lincoln in signing the marriage bond, below his name writing "gardin" meaning guardian.

"The six Negro slaves owned by Richard Berry were busy getting ready the food and fixin's to follow the wedding ceremony. The Reverend Jesse Head arrived on his gray mare. He was a man they rhymed about: "his nose is long and hair is red, and he goes by the name of Jesse Head." A hater of sin, he

liked decency and good order ...

"The bride and groom stood up before him. He pronounced them man and wife and wrote for the county clerk that on June 12, 1806, Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks had joined together in holy estate of matrimony agreeable to the rites and ceremonies of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Then came the infare."

Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, who claimed he attended the wedding, noted that "even those who happened in the neighborhood were made welcome at the wedding infare." He told of how he heard of the wedding while "out hunting for roots," and went "just to get a good supper. I saw Nancy Hanks Lincoln at her wedding, a fresh looking girl, I should say over 20. I was at the infare too ... We had bear meat; venison' wild turkey and ducks; eggs, wild and tame so common that you could buy them at two bits a bushel; maple sugar swung on a string to bite off for coffee or whiskey; syrup in big gourds; peaches and honey; a sheep that the two families barbecued whole over coals of wood burned in a pit and covered with green boughs to keep the juices in ... and a race for the whiskey bottle."

Soon after their marriage, Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln lived in Elizabethtown where Thomas continued his work as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. He is said to have owned "the best set of carpenter's tools in Hardin County." Items he made included door frames, window sashes, mantels, furniture, and an occasional coffin; but corner cupboards seem to have been his specialty.

The Lincoln's first child, a daughter named Sarah, was born in Elizabethtown on February 10, 1807. On December 12, 1808, Thomas Lincoln purchased 300 acres of land on the South Fork of Nolin Creek, approximately three miles south of present-day Hodgenville. At the time the farm was known by various names, the most prevalent being Sinking Spring Farm. Before the

end of 1808, Thomas Lincoln moved his small family from Elizabethtown to the Sinking Spring Farm where his son Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809.

The home into which the child came was typical of the western pioneer - a one-room cabin with a huge outside chimney. It is believed that the original size of the cabin was 16 feet by 18 feet. The descriptions of the Lincoln family as "wretched and poor" are drastically exaggerated. They were at worst an average pioneer family on a new farm.

In the spring of 1811, the Thomas Lincoln family moved to the 230-acre Knob Creek Farm located approximately seven miles northeast of Hodgenville on the road to Bardstown. Here the family lived until 1816. Knob Creek Farm is the first home the President remembered. Abraham's brother, Thomas, was born at Knob Creek in 1812 and died in infancy.

Hardin County records reveal that Thomas Lincoln provided well for his family at the Knob Creek Farm. In 1814, he stood 16th in property value among the 98 persons listed on the tax rolls. In 1815, only six of 104 taxpayers owned as many horses as Thomas Lincoln. The family was hardly the picture of poverty that is sometimes painted.

In 1815, an ejectment suit was brought against Thomas Lincoln and nine of his neighbors by a group of Philadelphians who claimed prior title to the land. In late 1816, before Abraham was 8 years old, the Lincoln family left Kentucky and moved to what is now Spencer County, Indiana. President Lincoln said of the move, "This removal was partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of the difficulty of land titles in Kentucky."

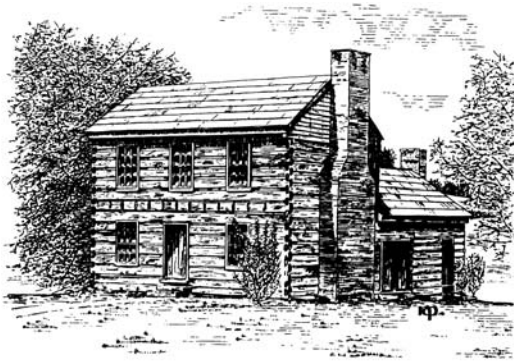
The first tragedy in the life of Abraham Lincoln occurred two years after the family moved to Indiana. The "milk-sick" epidemic struck, taking not only the lives of cattle, but also the life of Nancy Hanks Lincoln on October 5, 1818.

A little more than a year after Nancy's death, Thomas Lincoln went back to Elizabethtown and courted an old acquaintance, Sarah Bush Johnston. They were married in Elizabethtown on Dec. 2, 1819.

Lincoln Homestead Buildings

THE LINCOLN CABIN

The Lincoln Cabin is a replica of the log home in which President Lincoln's grandmother, Bersheba, lived and raised her three sons Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas and her two daughters Mary and Nancy. The widow Lincoln brought her children to Beech Fork several months after the death of her husband, Captain Abraham Lincoln, who was killed by Indians at their Long Run Farm in Jefferson County. Thomas Lincoln, father of the President, lived here until he was 25 years old. The cabin is furnished in pioneer style. Several pieces of furniture made by Thomas Lincoln are preserved here, including a corner cupboard. The bed is also thought to have been made by Thomas.



THE FRANCIS BERRY HOUSE

The large, two-story log home of Francis Berry is original and was moved to the park from the Beechland section about a mile away. The Berry house was closely associated with the Lincoln family. Richard Berry, Sr., a native of Virginia, moved to Kentucky about 1785. His wife Rachel Shipley was the sister of Lucy Shipley, who married a Hanks. Lucy Shipley was the mother of Nancy Hanks, who became the wife of Thomas Lincoln. Nancy lived with Richard and Rachel Berry until Rachel died. She then moved to the Berry house on Beech Fork to live in this home when she was courted by Thomas Lincoln. Thomas is said to have proposed to Nancy in the living room before the fireplace. This home is furnished with pioneer relics of the Lincoln era.

THE BLACKSMITH SHOP

It is believed that Thomas Lincoln learned his trade in a blacksmith and carpenter shop similar to the replica near the creek at the rear of the homestead cabin. Thomas Lincoln probably learned his trade under the tutelage of Richard and Francis Berry, who were master craftsmen.

MORDECAI LINCOLN HOUSE

The structure known as the Mordecai Lincoln House was owned and believed to have been built by Mordecai Lincoln, the eldest son of Captain Abraham Lincoln and Bersheba Lincoln. Mordecai Lincoln was one of the leading citizens in Washington County, Kentucky. He lived here until 1811 with his wife Mary Mudd Lincoln and their three sons and three daughters, who were all born in Washington County.