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INDIANA'S CONTRIBUTION TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Address delivered by Dr. Louis A. Warren on his installation as an Honorary Companion of Indiana Commandery of The Military Order of The Loyal Legion of The United States at Foster Hall in Indianapolis on Thursday, September 28, 1944.

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MANSHIP'S STATUE OF "ABRAHAM LINCOLN—HOOSIER YOUTH" AT THE PORTAL OF THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA.

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The achievements of Abraham Lincoln are seldom associated with his early days in Indiana, and it is not until recent years that any attention whatever has been paid to the formative period which he spent in the Hoosier state. It is not common knowledge that one-quarter of Lincoln's whole life was spent in Indiana—twice as long as he lived in Kentucky, twice as long as he remained at New Salem, Illinois, twice as long as he made his home in Washington, D. C., and two-thirds as long as he resided in Springfield, Illinois. The Lincoln log cabin home in Spencer County, Indiana, was occupied within a year or two as long as the famous Eighth Street residence of Mr. Lincoln in the Illinois state capital.

It might be said that Lincoln actually personified the pioneer history of Indiana. He arrived in the territory in 1816 within a few days of the establishment of the state. He was then but a small lad and the infant state had but sixteen counties. When he left the state he had reached the height of six feet and four inches, and the state had grown until it contained fifty-six counties.

When the Lincolns came from Kentucky, there were but four people in the family, but on immigrating to Illinois the caravan, including in-laws and grand children, had reached thirteen in number. During this period they had seen the population of Indiana grow from 60,000, in 1816, to 360,000, in 1830. According to the Indiana Pioneer Association, the year 1830, which marked the departure of the Lincolns, has also been set as the date which concludes the pioneer history of the state in southern Indiana. Abraham Lincoln grew up with the Hoosier commonwealth.

In approaching the subject of *Indiana's Contribution to Abraham Lincoln*, the fact that we are in the midst of a presidential campaign might suggest the contribution which Indiana made toward bringing about its favorite son's nomination in 1860 at

Chicago. No visiting group worked more zealously for Lincoln's success than the delegates from Indiana, and their efforts were rewarded by the appointment of Caleb Smith as Secretary of the Interior in the Lincoln cabinet.

The fact that the Nation is in the midst of a great war would seem to invite some statements about the contribution which Indiana made in the war of the rebellion, and indirectly to Abraham Lincoln as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the Republic. This approach might well be made before this Loyal Legion group, whose own ancestors collaborated with Abraham Lincoln in the preservation of the Union.

As timely as a discussion of these two endowments might be in this political and war time atmosphere, it seems more appropriate to recall a much earlier gift which the state of Indiana made to Abraham Lincoln, and which laid the foundation for his immortality.

Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter to a friend on one occasion in which he included a short statement of a dozen words about himself. He said: "I was born in Kentucky, raised in Indiana, now live in Illinois." The birth of Lincoln in Kentucky is an event familiar to every school child, and commemorated by the Nation with a magnificent shrine, enclosing the birthplace cabin. The place that Illinois occupies in the Lincoln story is universally known. But the fact that Lincoln was raised in Indiana is a truth about which not many citizens of the state itself have a conversational knowledge.

The outstanding contribution which Indiana made to the development and remarkable achievements of this recognized world figure was in surrounding him with certain helpful environmental influences. His home, the neighborhood, and the very atmosphere of the frontier, augmented the building of an unusually strong body, the basic training of a keen intellect, and the strengthening of a moral structure which withstood every subtle challenge.

In view of the accepted conclusions of child psychologists with respect to the relative importance of one's early years in determining habitual tendencies of an individual, it will not be neces-

sary to stress the tremendous contribution which Indiana made in directing the trend of Abraham Lincoln's behavior throughout his entire life. In approaching a study of the Hoosier environment which in a large measure fixed some of the more distinguishing characteristics in Lincoln's life, three sources of primary evidence will be utilized, namely: A Book, A Poem, and A Sketch.

A Book

There are three books which might be selected as outstanding publications among those which contributed to the advancement of Lincoln: the Bible, a Life of Washington, and the works of Clay. The Bible was first read to him by his mother during the Kentucky days. Weems' Washington appears to have been the best remembered book for the Indiana period, and Epes Sargent's Life and Speeches of Henry Clay, studied in Illinois, contributed most to the final consummation of his political philosophy. It is the book by Weems, however, which becomes of particular interest in this discussion.

Weems' work may not be in very good repute among modern students of history, but as an inspirational biography for the growing boy of one hundred and twenty-five years ago, it had no equal. On his way to the inauguration at Washington, Lincoln was invited to make a speech before the State Legislature, at Trenton, New Jersey. In his opening remarks he stated: "May I be pardoned if upon this occasion I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book, such a one as few of the younger members have ever seen,—'Weems' Life of Washington.'"

The boy Lincoln probably was not more than twelve years old when first he secured the famous book about the Father of the Country. It gave the impressionable lad a lifelong admiration for Washington, and there can be little doubt but what the often criticized cherry tree story was a contributing factor to Lincoln's moral integrity which caused him to be known as "Honest Abe."

Lincoln was deeply-moved at Trenton, as he so stated, because he was standing where one of the great battles of the Revolu-

tionary War took place. With reference to the Weems' version, he said to his audience: "I remember all the accounts there given of the battlefields and struggles for the liberty of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New Jersey. The crossing of the river, the contest with the Hessians, the hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more than any single Revolutionary event, and you all know, for you have all been boys, how these early impressions last longer than others."

In the vivid account of the Trenton battle Weems introduced his famous mythical figure, the forerunner of "Uncle Sam," called the "Genius of Liberty." Weems referred to her as a "heaven-born goddess." He brings her into the picture at Trenton just before the battle in a striking figure with these words: "Pale and slowly moving along the neighboring hills was seen (by Fancy's eye) the weeping Genius of Liberty." Weems then explained the cause of her weeping. She had been driven from all the rest of the world to the wild woods of America, feeling that here she might find "an assured asylum of rest. But the inhuman few with fleets and armies had pursued her flight. Her children had gathered around her but they had been destroyed or dispersed. All were desponding. But one little band was left, perhaps she was to witness the last conflict."

This blank verse of Weems into which he often digressed reminds one of Lincoln's literary style. Possibly Weems may have contributed something to Lincoln's diction, but the most far-reaching influence of this Washington story is recalled by Lincoln himself in this same Trenton speech, when he relates his reaction to the early reading of the biography:

"I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that these men struggled for, I am exceedingly anxious that that thing—that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come—I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that

struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be a humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle."

Lincoln as a youth nourished this early and important vision he had for America's mission to the nations and believed that the people would preserve a heritage of freedom which would be "the envy of all the world beside," a phrase he often used in referring to the country.

Beside the valuable lessons in integrity and patriotism which Lincoln learned from the small leather-bound volume, he must also have been intensely interested, as any boy of twelve years would be, in Washington's athletic achievements. Weems printed the following story as coming from John Fitzhugh, Esq., who knew Washington intimately: "Egad! he ran wonderfully, we had nobody hereabouts that could come near him." Col. Lewis Willis, a playmate, said that he had often seen him throw a stone across the Rappanhannock, at the lower ferry of Fredericksburg. While living with the Widow Stevenson, "when his daily toils of surveying were ended, George, like a young Greek training for the Olympic games used to turn out with his sturdy young companions, 'to see' as they termed it, 'which was the best man, at running, jumping, and wrestling.'"

How much the story of Washington as an athlete may have induced Lincoln to enter into the athletic contests of his day we do not know, but what is more important we have noted that he built a strong and rugged body, and this observation allows us to make a transition from the gleanings of a book to the sentiments of a poem.

A POEM

Lincoln wrote to a friend, "In the Fall of 1844 I went into the neighborhood in which I was raised, where my mother and only sister were buried, and from which I had been absent about fifteen years." He continued; "Seeing it and its objects and inhabitants, aroused feelings in me which were certainly poetry." He had some

misgivings, however, that the lines he had jotted down as an expression of those feelings could be called poetry. The poem fell into three divisions which might be given the abbreviated titles of Home, Pathos, and Humor.

The opening lines of the poem indicate how deeply Lincoln was moved by his visit:

*"My childhood's home I see again,
And sadden with the view
And still, as memory crowds my brain,
There's pleasure in it too.*

*"O Memory! thou midway world
'Twixt earth and paradise,
Where things decayed and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise."*

Lincoln recalled "the woods and fields and scenes of play" but the prevailing sentiment of the entire canto is one of sorrow. Not only are the departed mother and sister mourned, but he feels that "half of all are dead." The concluding two verses of the theme bear out this melancholy review of the childhood home:

*"I hear the loved survivors tell
How naught from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.*

*"I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs."*

There is every indication that Lincoln did not lack, possibly the most essential contribution to the building of his character, a helpful home environment, sustained by both a pious father and stepmother. Nor should the more far reaching influence of his angel mother be forgotten in thinking of his Hoosier heritage, which was primarily responsible for the freedom he enjoyed from the common vices of his associates.

There is no expression which would imply poverty or want in those early days, or the whinings of an underprivileged child. One of the finest poetic lines in the entire poem would dismiss any idea that Lincoln was an undernourished child, even if he did not carry the evidence along with his six-foot four-inch heavy muscular frame. He needed to make no apology for the artistry of this following verse of poetry:

*“The very spot where grew the bread
That formed my bones I see,
How strange old field on thee to tread
And feel I’m part of thee.”*

Lincoln was akin to the very soil of the wilderness and was as truly indigenous to the frontier as any of the giant trees of the forest. The pioneer atmosphere which he breathed was a definite Hoosier contribution to his freedom-loving soul.

One line in the first section of the rather long poem may serve as a transition to the second canto. Lincoln recalls “the playmates loved so well,” but there was one of his boyhood friends who was the victim of a tragedy, that may have influenced the impressionable Abraham more than we know.

Lincoln stated, “When I visited my old home in the Fall of 1844 I found an insane man, Matthew Gentry, still lingering in this wretched condition. He is three years older than I and when we were boys we went to school together . . . at the age of nineteen he unaccountably became furiously mad. . . . I could not forget the impression his case made upon me.” Apparently Lincoln had been one who helped “his dangerous strength to bind” but possibly it was not so much the episode of the attack of insanity which so greatly influenced Lincoln, as his “Mournful Song” which could be heard in the neighborhood.

This is Abraham’s strange reaction to the “Mournful Song:”

*“I’ve heard it oft as if I dreamed,
Far distant, sweet and lone,
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason dead and gone.*

*"To drink its strains I've stole away,
All stealthily and still,
Ere yet the rising god of day
Had streaked the eastern hill.*

*"Air held her breath; trees with the spell
Seemed sorrowing angels round,
Whose swelling tears in dewdrops fell
Upon the listening ground."*

This reaction of a sixteen year old boy, who for the next five years lived under the spell of this tragedy, and found something in the "Mournful Song" that drew him from his bed before day-break to "drink its strains," is of far more importance than an attempt to trace the origin of Lincoln's melancholy to an alleged discovery of some skeleton in the Lincoln family closet, which is supposed to have worried Lincoln all his life; or, the purely fictitious narrative about Lincoln's collapse at the time of Ann Rutledge's death.

The tragedy of this boyhood playmate prefaced by the death of his own mother, whose grave he could see each morning as he came from the cabin door, and supplemented by the death in childbirth of his only sister, might have been responsible for Indiana's sending into Illinois, in 1830, a melancholy man.

The blending of melancholy and mirth seems to have been a peculiar lifelong practice of Lincoln and the last division of his long poem, inspired by his visit to his old Indiana home, as he stated "is in lighter vein." He chose for the subject of this last canto, "A Bear Hunt."

In a brief description which Lincoln wrote about his Indiana playground, he stated, "It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods." The opening verses of the poem support this description of the Indiana wilderness in this stanza:

*"When first my father settled here,
'Twas then the frontier line:
The panther's scream, filled night with fear,
And bears preyed on the swine."*

Lincoln's poetic story of the bear hunt evidently is the record of a specific one he remembered, as he relates certain incidents such as Nick Carter's horse throwing his rider, and Mose Hill dropping his gun. The aspiring bard gets some action in the movement when the dogs finally surround the bear and the hunters arrive for the kill. Aesop-like, however, Lincoln brings his narrative to a close with a moral.

The climax of the chase did not end with the killing of the bear, but with the decision as to which hunter's bullet first drew blood, and this was often a much disputed question as the reward was the skin of the bear. In the early part of the poem Lincoln mentioned a short-legged pup called a "fice," which took up the chase with the larger dogs, but was soon distanced. Here are Lincoln's concluding stanzas:

*"Aforesaid fice, of blustering mood,
Behind, and quite forgot.
Just now emerging from the wood,
Arrives upon the spot—*

*"With grinning teeth, and up-turned hair—
Brim full of spunk and wrath.
He growls, and seizes on dead bear,
And shakes for life and death—*

*"And swells as if his skin would tear,
And growls and shakes again;
And swears, as plain as dog can swear,
That he has won the skin—*

*"Conceited whelp! we laugh at thee—
Nor mind, that not a few
Of pompous, two-legged dogs there be
Conceited quite as you."*

It is evident from this poem and other primary sources that Lincoln's boyhood days in Indiana were enjoyable ones. Leonard Swett's reminiscences of what Lincoln told him about the early days in Indiana, are much more to be relied upon than the pov-

erty-stricken, slovenly, environment portrayed by William Herndon.

This is Swett's version of what Lincoln recalled about the Indiana days: "Mr. Lincoln told this story as the story of a happy childhood. There was nothing sad nor pinched, and nothing of want, and no allusions to want, in any part of it. His own description of his youth was that of a joyous, happy boyhood. It was told with mirth and glee, and illustrated by pointed anecdote, often interrupted by his jocund laugh which echoed over the prairies. His biographers have given to his early life the spirit of suffering and want, and as one reads them, he feels like tossing him pennies for his relief. Mr. Lincoln gave no such description, nor is such description true. His was just such life as has always existed and now exists in the frontier States, and such boys are not suffering, but are rather like Whittier's 'Barefoot boy with cheeks of tan.' "

If we are to find contributing sources of Lincoln's melancholy in angel mother, departed sister, and demented playmate, we may also discover the background of his humor, and aptitude for anecdotes, in his story-telling father, and the little book of Aesop's Fables he is known to have possessed.

A SKETCH

Lincoln had so little to say about himself, and especially with respect to his early surroundings, that any statement that does refer to the formative period of his life is of great importance. The reason for the migration of his father from Kentucky to Indiana, he stated in this brief but important sketch: "This removal was partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of difficulty in land titles in Kentucky." We have documentary evidence which reveals the difficulty with land titles in Kentucky and we have no reason to believe, as some authors have alleged, that Lincoln made the assertion about slavery for political reasons.

The land title difficulties of Thomas Lincoln in Kentucky caused him to sacrifice the earnings of the best fifteen years of

his life, due to the losses sustained in both cash and labor invested in three different pieces of property. Two of the places which he acquired, comprising a total of 578 acres of land, apparently were a total loss in money invested and a far greater loss in the time expended in making improvements, etc. Another piece of property which he purchased, containing 240 acres, because of a mistake in recording the survey, showed a loss of forty acres. There is no reason to doubt that if Thomas Lincoln had been able to clear the title for any one of the three purchases, two of which were acquired for "cash in hand paid," he would have been reasonably successful. Two years after Abraham Lincoln was born his father had approximately 1000 acres of land in his possession. When he started for Indiana in 1816 he did not have a clear title to a single acre, although he had realized something on 200 acres of one tract.

The land in Indiana was laid out in sections so one might be reasonably sure that after he had made the preliminary payments he would have no prior claims for his property. If Thomas Lincoln moved to Indiana chiefly on account of land title difficulties, his object was successful, as he was able to hold the land he had purchased and suffered no reverses on account of land titles in Indiana. He remained on the same piece of property for fourteen years. This fact is important in that Abraham Lincoln had an established home, due to his father's wisdom in forever settling the land title question by removal.

The other reason for Thomas Lincoln's removal was on account of slavery. It is of greatest importance as far as Abraham is concerned.

When Abraham Lincoln was speaking at Alton, Illinois, in 1858, he put a rhetorical question to the audience, and strangely enough it was answered. He said, "How many Democrats are there about here who have left slave states and come into the free state of Illinois to get rid of the institution of slavery?" One voice interrupted here and said a thousand, another added one thousand and one, to which Lincoln responded, "I reckon there are a thousand and one."

When the boy was born in Kentucky, in 1809, the South Fork Church, about a mile from the Lincoln cabin, was closed on account of the intensity of the slavery controversy among the members, who, according to the record book, "could not meet in peace." Not far from the Knob Creek home of the Lincolns there was established the Little Mount Anti-Slavery Church, with which Lincoln's parents affiliated.

Lincoln on his mother's knee, at the services in this church, heard two of the greatest anti-slavery advocates in the West; David Elkins and William Downs. It is not strange that he could say, "I am naturally anti-slavery, if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember the day I did not so think and feel." It was the free state of Indiana that nourished these early reactions. It was also in Indiana that he first began to read the long abolitionist addresses of Henry Clay. In the short space of two years when Abraham was about seventeen or eighteen years old, eighteen of these speeches of Clay's were printed in full in the *Western Sun*, which came into the Lincoln community.

It will also be remembered that it was while Abraham Lincoln lived in Indiana that he made his first trip to New Orleans and saw the slave markets in that city. If he ever made any pronouncement about what he would do to the system if he ever got a chance, which was very doubtful, it must have been made when he viewed this most unfavorable feature of slavery for the first time when undoubtedly the reaction would be more pronounced.

If Indiana had any major contribution to make to Abraham Lincoln, which was to become a guiding principle of his whole life, it was in nourishing his opposition to the extension of slavery. Home environment, neighborhood sentiment, church policy, state laws, colonization society, and Lincoln's own observation of the slavery traffic on both the Ohio river and at New Orleans, sent him into the Illinois country at twenty-one years of age, a champion of that cause that was finally to establish him as the Emancipator.

From the primary sources vested in a Book, a Poem, and a Sketch, we have observed some of the far-reaching influences that

guided Abraham Lincoln through his formative years. From the book we learned of his hero worship, proclivities which led to his patriotic fervor. In the poem we were able to observe certain emotional climaxes which left deep and abiding reactions. The brief sketch allowed us to discern the importance of economic and social questions which were of basic importance in the achievements of "the Man for the Ages." May these observations encourage us to glean from other primary sources further contributions which Indiana made to Abraham Lincoln.



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