

Chapter One

"I Have Seen a Good Deal of the Back Side of This World":

Childhood in Kentucky (1809-1816)

One day in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln carved time from his busy schedule to pen some wise paternal advice to a young Union captain who had been squabbling with his superiors. Quoting from Hamlet, the president wrote that a father's injunction to his son – "Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but being in, bear it that the opposed may beware of thee" – was good counsel, "and yet not the best." Instead, Lincoln enjoined the captain: "Quarrel not at all." The reasons he gave were practical: "No man resolved to make the most of himself, can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper, and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite."¹ Born into emotional and economic poverty, Lincoln early on "resolved to make the most of himself" and did so, adhering to those precepts.

ANCESTRY: PATERNAL GRANDFATHER

¹ Lincoln to James Madison Cutts, Jr., Washington, 26 October 1863, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 6:538.

Like many another exceptional child of unexceptional parents, Abraham Lincoln was quite curious about his ancestors, especially his grandfathers, neither of whom he knew.² So intrigued was he that he planned to conduct genealogical research after finishing his second term as president.³ In 1858, when asked about his forbears, he revealed more than a passing acquaintance with his family tree: “I believe the first of our ancestors we know anything about was Samuel Lincoln, who came from Norwich, England, in 1638, and settled in a small Massachusetts place called Hingham, or it might have been Hanghim.”⁴ (Lincoln loved wordplay.) The following year, Lincoln told a Yorkshireman that he planned to visit England,

² David C. Mearns, ed., The Lincoln Papers: The Story of the Collection with Selections to July 4, 1861 (2 vols.; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1948), 1:28; William E. Barton, Lineage of Abraham Lincoln (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), 1-6; Thomas L. Purvis, “The Making of a Myth: Abraham Lincoln’s Family Background in the Perspective of Jacksonian Politics,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 75 (1982): 151; Charles H. Coleman, “Lincoln’s Knowledge of His Ancestry,” Lincoln Herald 59 (winter 1957-58): 18-21; Henry Clay Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1940), 46; Lincoln to Solomon Lincoln, 6 and 24 March 1848; to David Lincoln, 24 March and 2 April 1848; to Jesse Lincoln, Springfield, 1 April 1854; to Richard V. B. Lincoln, Springfield, 6 April 1860; to Samuel Haycraft, Springfield, 28 May and 4 June 1860; to John Hanks, Springfield, 24 August 1860; to Nathaniel Grigsby, Springfield, 20 September 1860; to John Chrisman, Springfield, 21 September 1860, et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 1:455-56, 459-60, 461-62; 2:217-18; 4:37, 56, 69-70, 100-1, 116, 117. Henry C. Whitney alleged that Lincoln “told me much of his kinfolk.” Whitney to Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, n.p., 17 January 1895, copied in “Hanks Family Notes,” vol. 1, p. 102, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston. Lincoln carefully recorded in his family’s Bible the births, deaths, and marriages of his siblings and stepsiblings, parents and stepmother. Ibid., 2:94-95. For a different interpretation, see L. Pierce Clark, Lincoln: A Psycho-Biography (New York: Scribner’s, 1933), 249-50, and David Herbert Donald, Lincoln (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 19.

³ In 1877, Lincoln’s secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles, observed that the sixteenth president “knew not his own lineage and connections. . . . The deprivation he keenly felt. I heard him say on more than one occasion that when he laid down his official life he would endeavor to trace out his genealogy and family history.” Welles, “Administration of Abraham Lincoln,” The Galaxy 23 (January 1877): 15. Welles said he “had two or three conversations” with Lincoln “concerning his family history.” In Lincoln, Welles “saw a craving desire to know something more of his family history.” Welles to Robert Todd Lincoln, Hartford, 25 June, 5 July 1875, Nicolay-Hay Papers, box 1, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴ James Grant Wilson, “Recollections of Lincoln,” Putnam’s Magazine 5 (February 1909): 515.

the home of his ancestors.⁵ In two brief autobiographical sketches written for the campaign of 1860, he devoted much space to his lineage.⁶

His father's father, after whom the future president was named, was known as Captain Abraham, a rank he attained by 1776 while serving in the Virginia militia. Born in 1744 in Pennsylvania, he moved with his father John and the rest of the family to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia around 1766. They settled along Linville Creek in Augusta (later Rockingham) County, where John Lincoln farmed a tract of 600 acres, one third of which he sold to his son Abraham in 1773. The following year Abraham participated in Lord Dunmore's expedition against the Shawnees, and during the Revolution he joined General Lachlan McIntosh's futile campaign against Fort Detroit.

In 1780, for unknown reasons, the Captain departed with his wife and children on a 250-mile trek to the remote and dangerous Indian hunting grounds of Kentucky, while the Revolutionary War still raged and attacks on settlers were common.⁷ In 1784 alone, Indians killed more than a hundred migrants traveling the Wilderness Road from Virginia to Kentucky, which was little more than the trail first blazed by Daniel Boone in 1775.⁸ Perhaps Grandfather Abraham wished to avoid taxes, or he may have been lured westward by the prospect of easy

⁵ Reminiscences of George Hartley, Chicago Daily News, 28 January 1909.

⁶ Autobiography written for Jesse W. Fell, enclosed in Lincoln to Fell, Springfield, 20 December 1859, and autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 3:511-12; 4:60-67.

⁷ D. M. Coleman, "Thomas Lincoln: The Father of Abraham Lincoln" (pamphlet; privately printed, 1956), 7; John W. Wayland, The Lincolns in Virginia (Staunton, Virginia: McClure, 1946), 24-57; Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 47-55; communication from Paul H. Verduin, 25 December 1997.

⁸ Robert L. Kincaid, The Wilderness Road (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), 175. In 1783, the Rev. Mr. James Smith of Powhatan County, Virginia, toured Kentucky and reported that the Cumberland Gap, where the Wilderness Road passed from Virginia into Kentucky, "is a very noted place on account of the great number of people who have here unfortunately fallen a prey to savage cruelty or barbarity. The mountain in the gap is neither very steep nor high, but the almost inaccessible cliffs on either side [of] the road render it a place peculiar for doing mischief." Ibid., 183 n. 2.

gains in land speculation.⁹ One historian thought Captain Abraham's decision to sell a large farm in western Virginia for paper money showed "a sad lack of judgment" because "Rockingham is probably one of the best counties in the United States," which was "settled mainly by Germans, who turned it into a garden." There "for the most part the soil is very fine. That Abraham Lincoln could not make a satisfactory living there would indicate a shiftless disposition."¹⁰ Before the war, Captain Abraham had participated in Lord Dunmore's 1774 expedition against the Shawnees, and during the Revolution he joined the General Lachlan McIntosh's futile campaign against Fort Detroit. The Indian who killed the Captain in 1786 may have belonged to a tribe that had earlier fought against him.¹¹

Captain Abraham died a violent death on the "dark and bloody ground" of frontier Kentucky. As a boy, Abe often heard this harrowing tale which he called "the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory."¹² While working his farm one spring day in 1786, forty-two-year-old Grandfather Abraham was ambushed by an Indian, who shot him dead before the terrified eyes of his young son Thomas (father-to-be of the sixteenth president). As the Indian prepared to kidnap the lad, his older brother Mordecai ran back to the family cabin, grabbed a rifle, drew a bead on the silver ornament dangling from the Indian's neck, and squeezed the trigger. Luckily for Tom, his brother's aim was true, and the boy escaped

⁹ Albert J. Beveridge, Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 1:7-8. Theodore Calvin Pease speculated that "Land speculation . . . would seem a more probable reason" than tax evasion. Annotation by Pease on a draft of Beveridge's first chapter, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰ Hamilton J. Eckenrode to Albert J. Beveridge, Richmond, Virginia, 18 June 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹ For information about Captain Lincoln's military career, I am grateful to Paul H. Verduin, of Silver Spring, Maryland, who painstakingly unearthed it in contemporary records. Springfield, Illinois, State Journal-Register, 10 February 1994.

¹² Lincoln to Jesse Lincoln, Springfield, 1 April 1854, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:217.

unharméd, at least physically.¹³ The Indian may have belonged to a tribe that the Captain had battled during his militia service.

Lincoln's opinion of his namesake grandfather is unknown, though he may well have admired him. Some gifted children with disappointing fathers romanticize their grandfathers, even if they scarcely knew them.¹⁴ In an 1861 speech to New Jersey legislators, Lincoln paid tribute to Revolutionary War soldiers like Captain Abraham: "away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book . . . Weems's Life of Washington. I remember all the accounts there given of the battle-fields and struggles for the liberties 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 great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more than any single Revolutionary event . . . I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have

¹³ Louis A. Warren, Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood: A History of the Kentucky Lincolns Supported by Documentary Evidence (New York: Century, 1926), 4-9; Louis A. Warren, "Uncle Mordecai Lincoln," The Lincoln Kinsman, no. 12 (June 1939), 1-8; Dennis F. Hanks to William H. Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 35-36; statement by Augustus H. Chapman, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 95-96; James L. Nall to W. H. Sweeney, Carthage, Missouri, 2 February 1881, Lebanon, Kentucky, Standard, n.d., copied in the Louisville Courier-Journal, 18 February 1881; Nall to Sweeney, 1881, in Louis A. Warren, "James L. Nall," The Lincoln Kinsman 44 (February 1942): 2-3; Thomas Jefferson Lincoln interviewed by Walter B. Stevens, in Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Michael Burlingame (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 180; Harvey H. Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns (New York: Pioneer Publications, 1931), 231-32; J. Edward Murr, "Lincoln in Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 13 (1917): 315. According to Judge Alfred Mackenzie Brown, J. L. Nall – the eldest grandson of Mordecai's sister Nancy Lincoln Brumfield – "represented Hardin Co in the legislature once & enjoyed the reputation of a reliable man." Alfred Mackenzie Brown to Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, 17 June 1886, Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago. Nall told W. H. Sweeney, a Louisville attorney: "What I have given you is tradition, handed down from generation to generation; but I am satisfied it is correct. I always took a great deal of pride in keeping posted in the genealogical history of my ancestors and got the above facts from my grandfather and grandmother, who were conversant with them, and with whom the President's grandmother lived and died." Nall was fifteen when his grandmother died in 1845 and twenty-seven when his grandfather died in 1857. Alfred Mackenzie Brown (1811-1903) served as circuit clerk of Hardin County from 1857 to 1862, when Union army authorities imprisoned him because of his strong sympathy for the Confederacy. He settled in Elizabethtown in 1826 to work in John B. Helm's store, which he ran after Helm's death in 1840. Once released from prison, he studied law and practiced at the bar from 1863 to 1890.

¹⁴ Beethoven is a case in point. See Maynard Solomon, Beethoven (New York: Schirmer Books, 1977), 21-24.

been something more than common that these men struggled for."¹⁵ Captain Abraham, who had fought in two campaigns during the 1770s, may have been a source of inspiration to Lincoln as he later strove to make something of himself.¹⁶ In an 1860 campaign biography which Lincoln himself read and corrected, William Dean Howells asserted that his subject "had the stubborn notion that because the Lincolns had always been people of excellent sense, he, a Lincoln, might become a person of distinction."¹⁷

ANCESTRY: MATERNAL GRANDFATHER

What Lincoln knew about his maternal grandfather is hard to say. He once described him as "a Virginia planter or large farmer" who "shamefully" took sexual advantage of a "poor credulous" young woman named Lucey Hanks, granddaughter of William Lee, a plantation overseer accused of beating a slave to death.¹⁸ The fruit of that illicit union was Nancy Hanks, mother of the sixteenth president. From this aristocratic progenitor, Lincoln believed that he had inherited "his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity, his ambition, and all the qualities that distinguished him from the other members and descendants of the Hanks family."¹⁹

¹⁵ Speech of 21 February 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:235-36.

¹⁶ Purvis, "Lincoln's Family Background," 155. Purvis suggests that Lincoln may have been proud of other Lincoln relatives who held office and belonged to the lesser gentry. One of them was his great-uncle Thomas, a prosperous slave owner in Kentucky. William H. Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 16-24.

¹⁷ William Dean Howells, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Harry E. Pratt (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1938, facsimile of the 1860 edition with emendations made by Lincoln), 30. See also James Quay Howard's notes of a conversation with Lynn M. Greene, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸ Paul H. Verduin, "New Evidence Suggests Lincoln's Mother Born in Richmond County, Virginia, Giving Credibility to the Planter-Grandfather Legend," Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine 38 (1988): 4354-89, and "Plantation Overseers, Patriots, Pioneers: New Light on Lincoln and His Hanks Forebears," unpublished paper delivered at the Lincoln Home, Springfield, 12 February 1992.

¹⁹ William Herndon, "Nancy Hanks," notes written in Greencastle, Indiana, ca. 20 August 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

This grandfather's identity, unknown to history, may well have been known to Lincoln, for as a boy he was acquainted with two of his Hanks great-aunts who had been born in Virginia before or during the Revolution; he also knew his great-uncle Billy Hanks, father of Lincoln's partner in rail-splitting, John Hanks. The Hankses long played a long-lasting role in Lincoln's life, caring for his stepmother until her death in 1869. What these Hankses told Lincoln cannot be determined, but it seems unlikely that they would have kept silent about Nancy Hanks's father.²⁰

Lincoln's description of his aristocratic grandsire represent a variation on the "Family Romance," the "fantasy of being the child of other parents, usually those of higher standing, such as royalty or celebrities." Many children entertain such fantasies, which in time they outgrow. Some adults, including exceptional people or men "whose father was far removed from a palpable relationship with them," will "persist in an intense family romance."²¹ Lincoln fits this category on both counts, for he was truly exceptional and had a distant relationship with his father.

FATHER THOMAS

Lincoln's father Thomas was quite undistinguished. As his son later wrote, "by the early death of his father, and very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood [Thomas was] a wandering laboring boy."²² Born around 1776 in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, he moved

²⁰ Private communication from Paul H. Verduin, 25 December 1997. For informed speculation about the identity of Lincoln's maternal grandfather, see Verduin's essays, "New Evidence Suggests Lincoln's Mother Born in Richmond County, Virginia," and "Plantation Overseers, Patriots, Pioneers." Verduin concludes that either Elisha Lingan Hall, a distant cousin of Robert E. Lee, or Griffin Fauntleroy, a plantation overseer, may have been Lincoln's grandfather.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," Miscellaneous Papers, 1888-1938 (vol. 5 of Collected Papers; London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 74-78; Linda Joan Kaplan, "The Concept of the Family Romance," Psychoanalytic Review 61 (1974): 169-202 (quote on 183); Otto Rank, The Myth of the Hero (New York: Vintage, 1959).

²² Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:61.

with his parents and four siblings to Kentucky in 1782.²³ Finding most land in the fertile Bluegrass region already taken, the Lincolns pushed on to the hardscrabble terrain between the Cumberland and Green Rivers.²⁴ There they established a farm; later, evidently fearing hostile Indians in that remote locale, they moved to a site on Long Run in Jefferson County, where they lived in a stockade, eighteen miles from Louisville.²⁵

After Captain Abraham's death, his widow, Bathsheba, and their children resettled in Washington County, where they would be safer.²⁶ Bathsheba (d. ca. 1833) later stayed with her daughter Nancy, wife of William Brumfield, who owned a large farm near Hardinsburg in Breckinridge County. After her son Thomas bought a farm in 1803 on Mill Creek, Bathsheba and the Brumfields moved in. Three years later, the Brumfields purchased 225 acres a few miles to the north, where they built a log house. Bathsheba “was the brains of the clan,” possessing “a shrewd mind.” The son-in-law with whom she lived (William Brumfield) was “rather indolent,” but she “pushed him along.”²⁷ She also pushed young Thomas, hiring him out “at a man’s wage in Washington County.”²⁸

²³ It is not known for certain when Thomas Lincoln was born. His famous son asserted that it was January 6, 1778, but tax records in Kentucky list him in 1797 as a “white male twenty-one years or over.” If that document is accurate, Thomas was born no later than January 6, 1777. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln’s Youth: Indiana Years, 1816–1830 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1959), 4.

²⁴ Thomas D. Clark, “The Kentucky Influence on the Life of Abraham Lincoln,” (pamphlet; Address at Annual Meeting of the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, Madison, 13 February 1961; Historical Bulletin No. 20, 1962), 3.

²⁵ Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 67.

²⁶ J. L. Nall to W. H. Sweeney, Carthage, Missouri, 2 February 1881, unidentified clipping, copying an undated article from the Lebanon, Kentucky, Standard, Reuben T. Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago. Bathsheba appeared on the Washington County tax rolls in 1792. Waldo Lincoln, History of the Lincoln Family: An Account of the Descendants of Samuel Lincoln of Hingham Massachusetts, 1637-1920 (Worcester, Massachusetts: Commonwealth Press, 1923), 202. She did not appear on other surviving tax lists for 1795 or 1800, indicating that she left the county sometime between 1792 and 1795. See also R. Gerald McMurtry, The Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek (Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University, 1939), 11-12.

²⁷ Ruby Lillian Crume, “A Story of the Life of Abraham Lincoln,” Elizabethtown, Kentucky, News, 8 December 1959; McMurtry, The Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek, 53-59. Ruby Crume was the great-great-great-granddaughter of Ralph Crume, Jr., and his wife Mary Lincoln, the eldest sister of Thomas Lincoln. Lincoln, History of the Lincoln Family, 202-3; Louis A. Warren, “Lincoln’s Aunt Mary,” The Lincoln Kinsman 42 (December

The documentary record reveals little about Thomas's activities in the decade after his father died.²⁹ Under the law of primogeniture, his eldest brother, Mordecai, was the only child to inherit anything from his father's estate, which included a few hundred acres in Kentucky.³⁰ Mordecai may have treated his younger brother unkindly. Emilie Todd Helm, half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, "said that the reason why Thomas Lincoln grew up unlettered was that his brother Mordecai, having all the land in his possession . . . , turned Thomas out of the house when the latter was 12 years old; so he went out among his relations & the Berrys et al. and there grew up."³¹ In 1795, Thomas served in the Kentucky militia for a month, and the following year he worked on a milldam in Hardin County. While laboring there, he lived with his father's cousin, Hananiah Lincoln, a resident of Elizabethtown, forty-five miles southwest of Louisville.³²

Thomas and Hananiah remained in that village only till 1798, when they evidently headed south

1941): 1-8. J. L. Nall's sister, Mrs. Louise Nall Hardaway, remembered "very distinctly her great-grandmother [Bathsheba] Lincoln who lived to be near one hundred years old and died at the house of her daughter Nancy." Lincoln, History of the Lincoln Family, 200.

²⁸ Ruby Lillian Crume, "A Story of the Life of Abraham Lincoln," Elizabethtown, Kentucky, News, 8 December 1959.

²⁹ The major documents are conveniently collected in Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 280-95, 379.

³⁰ The size of Captain Abraham's land holdings has been exaggerated by historians. Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 10; Donald, Lincoln, 21. Paul H. Verduin has examined the tangled story and shown that instead of owing 5500 acres, Captain Abraham had at most 900 acres. I am grateful to Mr. Verduin for sharing his findings with me. Cf. Lyman Draper to Joseph Barrett, Madison, Wisconsin, 14, 15 June 1865, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago.

³¹ William E. Barton's notes of an interview with Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm, Lexington, Kentucky, 11 March 1921, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Barton "asked her whether it was from Abraham Lincoln she heard these particulars, and she thought not: did not know from whom she learned about these matters but had known them long." It is possible that Mrs. Helm heard this tale from her sister Mary Todd, who in turn had gotten it from her husband, Abraham Lincoln. Richard Berry and his wife Polly Ewing Berry were friends of Thomas's. At their home, Nancy lived for a while before marrying Thomas; their wedding took place in the Berrys' house.

³² For biographical information on Hananiah (b. 1756?), who was close to Grandfather Lincoln, see Louis A. Warren, "Hananiah Lincoln Family," The Lincoln Kinsman 40 (October 1941): 1-8, and Lincoln, History of the Lincoln Family, 222-25. Thomas Lincoln's youthful poverty might have been caused by the failure of Hananiah to repay money that Captain Abraham had lent him. Court records indicate that Hananiah borrowed from Abraham almost all the funds he used to buy 2700 acres of land. The Captain's heirs had to sue to recover that money. Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 70, 271-73. Cf. Louis A. Warren, "Hananiah Lincoln in Revolutionary and Pioneer History," Indiana Magazine of History 25 (1929): 28-39.

to Cumberland County.³³ While there, Thomas spent time in Tennessee with his prosperous uncle Isaac Lincoln, whose only child had died quite young. Thomas might have become his surrogate son, but Isaac disapproved of young Tom's indolence and improvidence.³⁴

Returning to Kentucky the following year, Thomas shuttled back and forth between Washington and Cumberland counties. In 1802, he moved to Hardin County, where his name appeared on the tax lists for the next fourteen years. In 1803, he purchased a 238-acre farm on Mill Creek on which he lived while working in the nearby hamlet of Elizabethtown, whose population in 1810 numbered 181.³⁵ How Thomas could afford to buy that farm is unclear. His brother Mordecai may have shared some of his patrimony with him after Thomas attained his majority.³⁶ The cash he used to purchase the Mill Creek property may have been come from savings his mother had set aside from the wages he earned when she hired him out.³⁷

³³ R. N. Smith, "Lincolns in Southern Kentucky," Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 68 (1970): 231-38. It is not entirely clear that that the Thomas Lincoln who owned land in Cumberland County was the Thomas Lincoln who sired the future president. Otis M. Mather to the editor, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 18 December, Louisville Courier-Journal, 20 December 1928; Lafe S. Pence to the editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Lebanon, Kentucky, clipping marked January 1928, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁴ Ida M. Tarbell, In the Footsteps of the Lincolns (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924), 70. A brother of Grandfather Abraham Lincoln, Isaac (1750-1816) settled in Tennessee in 1775 and prospered. Louis A. Warren, "The Tennessee Lincolns," The Lincoln Kinsman 14 (August 1939), 1-4; Lincoln, History of the Lincoln Family, 204-5; James D. Jenkins to the editor of the New York Times, Brooklyn, 12 February, New York Times, 24 February 1924; William M. Clemens, "The Father of Lincoln," Washington Post, 6 February 1916; Samuel C. Williams, "The Lincolns in Tennessee, Part 1," Lincoln Herald 43 (October 1941): 8. Isaac later adopted his wife's nephew, who inherited most of the large estate. Williams, "The Lincolns in Tennessee, Part 1," 6; statement of James G. Jenkins, Elizabethtown, Tennessee, in William E. Barton, The Paternity of Lincoln (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), 397-98. Jenkins was the grandnephew of the adoptee, William Stover. One historian, without citing any source, asserted that Thomas left Tennessee "[u]nhappy over shabby treatment by his uncle and his uncle's wife Mary." Charles H. Coleman, "Lincoln's Lincoln Grandmother," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 52 (1959): 87. Samuel C. Williams alleged that Thomas Lincoln "worked as a farm hand on the Lincoln estate He proved to be too thrifless to please his canny and hard-working uncle. What money he did earn was all too likely to be spent in a way that shocked the close-fisted Isaac, who sent Thomas away." Williams, "The Lincolns in Tennessee, Part 1," 8.

³⁵ McMurtry, The Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek, 9-43; Lewis Collins, Historical Sketches of Kentucky (2 vols.; Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1848), 2:262-65.

³⁶ William E. Barton speculated that when Thomas turned twenty-one, his brother Mordecai gave him his share of his father's estate. With this money Thomas then bought a farm on Mill Creek near Elizabethtown. Barton, Paternity of Lincoln, 267; Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 69-70. Abraham's widow was entitled to one-third of her intestate husband's estate, valued at £68. When Thomas Lincoln wed Nancy Hanks in 1806, he had enough money to

Three years later Thomas journeyed to New Orleans.³⁸ On June 12, 1806, shortly after returning from Louisiana, he married Nancy Hanks in a ceremony that took place near Poortown in Washington County.³⁹ Following a brief honeymoon, the newlyweds moved to Elizabethtown, where their first child, Sarah, was born less than eight months after her parents' wedding.⁴⁰ Their residence was "a shed . . . almost bare of household fittings and quite unfit for a human dwelling place."⁴¹ Why the couple did not live on the Mill Creek property is a mystery.⁴² Nancy probably

purchase elaborate wedding attire. From this datum, Otis M. Mather concluded plausibly "that at the time of his first marriage, at least, Thomas Lincoln was something more than a worthless and shiftless fellow." Mather, "Thomas Lincoln's Wedding Outfit," Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society 29 (October 1931): 397-99.

³⁷ Ruby Lillian Crume, "A Story of the Life of Abraham Lincoln," Elizabethtown, Kentucky, News, 8 December 1959.

³⁸ Augustus H. Chapman told Herndon that while residing in Kentucky, Thomas "made two trips down the Ohio & Miss Rivers to New Orleans with one Isaac Bush. th[e]y wa[l]ked the entire distance across t[he] country from New Orleans b[ack] to their homes in Ky." Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 102. Cf. Lincoln Lore, no. 1101 (15 May 1950), and Otis M. Mather, "Thomas Lincoln's Flatboat Trip to New Orleans," talk given in December, 1934, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

³⁹ Poortown was also known as Beechland. The wedding, performed by the Methodist minister Jesse Head, was held at the cabin of Richard Berry, who served as Nancy's guardian. The cabin was made of "hewn logs, fine for that day." Reminiscences of the Rev. Mr. George L. Rogers of Elizabethtown, paraphrased in Stephen G. Burbridge to Abraham Lincoln, Lexington, Kentucky, 8 November 1864, copy, Lincoln Collection, Brown University. At the age of ninety-nine, Christopher C. Graham described the wedding. Ida M. Tarbell, The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: McClure, 1896), 235-36. His account is suspect. Martha Stephenson to William E. Barton, 14 February 1924, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. A Mrs. Litsey, who was allegedly an eyewitness, gave her account to Charlotte Spear Hobart Vawter, who reported it in a letter which appeared in the Louisville Courier, 20 February 1874. Vawter alleged that Nancy Hanks was a cousin of her grandmother, Sarah Shipley Mitchell, who also lived with the Berrys. That document is reproduced in Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, Nancy Hanks: The Story of Abraham Lincoln's Mother (New York: Doubleday & McClure, 1899), 72-80. Cf. Lincoln Lore, no. 1418 (11 June 1956).

⁴⁰ Sarah Lincoln was born on February 10, 1807.

⁴¹ Edgar K. Webb, "Lincoln's Birthplace to Be Made a National Park," unidentified clipping, 1905, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, "Romance" folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In 1865, the circuit court clerk of Elizabethtown reported that the "house in which Thomas Lincoln lived in Elizabeth Town is yet standing but has been removed three times – used twice as a slaughter house & now as a stable & within fifty yards of its original locality, about 14 feet square." Samuel Haycraft to Herndon, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 67. Cf. Haycraft to Abraham Lincoln, Elizabethtown, 19 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. R. Gerald McMurtry claimed that Haycraft confused the cabin of Sarah Bush Johnston with that of the Lincolns. McMurtry, "The Lincolns in Elizabethtown, Kentucky" (pamphlet; Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lincolniana Publishers, 1932), unpaginated.

⁴² A student of Thomas Lincoln's complicated land transactions concluded that in all likelihood "a dispute about Lincoln's claim to the property caused him to leave it [the Mill Creek farm] not long after he acquired it in 1803." That he was not taxed on that land until 1809 suggests that he was not living there. From that year through 1814, he was assessed taxes on it, but it is not clear that he paid them. He did not live there in 1809 or thereafter and was

wished to be closer to her family (including the aunt and uncle who had raised her) than to her husband's relatives.⁴³ She may have been lonely in Elizabethtown, where she had no kin. For that reason, perhaps, at the end of 1807 Thomas moved fourteen miles to a site in "the Barrens" on the South Fork of Nolin Creek, known as the Sinking Spring farm, located near the homestead where Thomas and Betsy Sparrow lived with their foster child, Dennis Hanks, and where Nancy's aunt, Polly Hanks Friend, had settled.⁴⁴ Thomas gambled when he chose that site, for rather than a deed, he purchased a title bond (an assignment of someone's contested right to the land); he would own the land only if others met their financial obligations.⁴⁵ According to Dennis Hanks, Thomas "couldn't make a living by his trade [of carpentry]; there was scarcely any money in the country. So Tom took up some land – mighty poor land, but the best he could get when he hadn't much to trade for it."⁴⁶ Thomas Lincoln may have left Elizabethtown for

unable to lease it. In later years, when he was forced off two other farms, he did not return to Mill Creek, indicating that he probably never had a secure title. In October 1814, he conveyed the farm to Charles Melton for £100; he had paid £118 for it. Because of a defective title, he was able to sell only 200 of the 238 acres he had purchased in 1803. Kent Masterson Brown, "Report on the Title of Thomas Lincoln to, and the History of, the Lincoln Boyhood Home Along Knob Creek in LaRue County, Kentucky," [Danville, Kentucky, 1997], 5-11. This report was prepared for the United States Department of the Interior's National Parks Service. See also Wayne C. Temple, "Thomas and Abraham Lincoln as Farmers" (pamphlet; Racine, Wisconsin: Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, 1996), 12-18.

⁴³ Thomas Lincoln's mother and sister lived near the Mill Creek farm, four miles north of Elizabethtown. Otis M. Mather, "In Defense of Thomas Lincoln," essay dated 1941, pp. 14-15, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁴⁴ Otis M. Mather, "Thomas Lincoln and His Neighbors, 1808-1811," essay dated 11 September 1934, pp. 4-5, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky; Mather, "Thomas Lincoln in Larue County, Kentucky," talk given 26 June 1937, pp. 1-2, *ibid.* A Kentucky tradition suggests that Thomas and Nancy Lincoln spent a few months living in a cabin in George Brownfield's orchard, quite near the Sparrows, before moving to the Sinking Spring farm. Otis M. Mather, "In Defense of Thomas Lincoln," essay dated 1941, pp. 14-15, *ibid.* Mather doubted the story, which was vouched for by Judge R. W. Creal. Cf. Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 31 July 1924, 25 June 1925, and 9 June 1926, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. William E. Barton accepted the story. Barton, Paternity of Lincoln, 69-70.

⁴⁵ Otis M. Mather, "In Defense of Thomas Lincoln," essay dated 1941, pp. 16-17, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky; Brown, "Title of Thomas Lincoln," 19-21.

⁴⁶ Dennis Hanks, quoted in an unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. In 1862, an Elizabethtown woman whose mother claimed she knew the Lincolns alleged that "Thomas Lincoln never had enough work to keep his family as he liked to here; and mother allus said they did a heap better arter they moved to the farm." Robert H. Browne, Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1901), 1:74. At the time he spoke with this informant, Browne was serving as lieutenant in the 25th Illinois

Nolin Creek because he believed that his reputation as a carpenter had been damaged when the influential Denton Geohegan sued him for shoddy work.⁴⁷ The nearest settlement to the Nolin Creek farm, two and a half miles to the south, was in the vicinity of Hodgen’s Mill.⁴⁸ There, on February 12, 1809, in a log cabin termed “a miserable habitation,” Nancy delivered a baby boy, who was named Abraham after Thomas's father.⁴⁹

The Lincolns remained in Kentucky until 1816, when they removed to Indiana.⁵⁰ There Nancy Hanks Lincoln died two years later. Thomas remarried in 1819; eleven years afterwards he moved to Illinois, where he remained till his death in 1851. He had known more than his fair share of hardship and sorrow.

Volunteers. Thomas Boslooper, Robert H. Browne, M.D. (1835-1909) of Bloomington and Mahomet, Illinois; Kirksville, Missouri and Wichita, Kansas ([Tampa, Florida]: T. Boslooper, 1995).

⁴⁷ Otis M. Mather, “Thomas Lincoln and His Neighbors, 1808-1811,” essay dated 11 September 1934, p. 4, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky. Denton Geohegan (d. 1850) farmed extensive holdings before he settled in Elizabethtown around 1806. In the census taken four years later, he is listed as the owner of eight slaves. He served as a justice of the peace and also as sheriff of Hardin County.

⁴⁸ In 1818, the settlement became the town of Hodgenville. Otis M. Mather, “Hodgen’s Mill and Hodgenville,” talk given on 3 June 1937, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky; Mather, “Early History of Hodgenville and LaRue County,” talk given in 1925, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Otis M. Mather, “Thomas Lincoln in Larue County, Kentucky,” talk given 26 June 1937, 2, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky. Mather called Thomas Lincoln “a good, substantial citizen.” *ibid.*, 9. A parishioner of J. Edward Murr told him that her grandmother was present at Lincoln’s birth. That grandmother “described the evidences of poverty – the rude bedstead, the one room log cabin – the bear skin placed upon the bed.” Murr, “Wilderness Years of Lincoln,” 74. Harvey H. Smith alleged that his great grandmother, Sally Gentry Smith, and her daughter Nancy, then eleven years old, along with an aged slave, were the only persons present at the delivery of Lincoln. Thomas, Smith said, was away on jury duty. H. H. Smith to Esther C. Cushman, Vine Grove, Hardin County, Kentucky, 11 February 1934, Lincoln Collection, Brown University. One unlikely tradition suggests that the baby was named after Abraham Enlow, a neighbor whom Thomas Lincoln asked to fetch a midwife when Nancy was ready to deliver. This story was told by Mrs. Betsy Middleton, who in turn imparted it to Mrs. Mary J. Churchill, a sister of Judge Alfred Mackenzie Brown. Alfred Mackenzie Brown to Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, 12 May 1886, Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago. See also J. L. Nall to W. H. Sweeney, Carthage, Missouri, 2 February 1881, unidentified clipping, copying an undated article from the Lebanon, Kentucky, Standard, *ibid.* Nancy Hanks told the Rev. Mr. George L. Rogers of Elizabethtown that young Abe was baptized (“sprinkled”) in the traditional Methodist fashion. Stephen G. Burbridge to Abraham Lincoln, Lexington, Kentucky, 8 November 1864, copy, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

⁵⁰ On Thomas Lincoln’s Kentucky years, see Otis Mather, “In Defense of Thomas Lincoln,” essay dated 1941, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

While the documented facts of Thomas Lincoln's life are meager, descriptions and characterizations of him are not.⁵¹ Thomas resembled his famous son in a few respects. Dennis Hanks said "Old Mr L. had one trait that Abraham inherited," namely "story telling," an art highly prized and widely practiced by the country people among whom Lincoln grew up.⁵² An Indiana neighbor, David Turnham, noticed other similarities between father and son: "Both were humorous – good natured – Slow in action Somewhat."⁵³ (A surviving example of Thomas's humor concerns his second wife, who remarked one day: "we have lived together a long time and you have never yet told me whom you like best, your first wife or me." Thomas responded: "Oh now Sarah, that reminds me of old John Hardin down in Kentucky who had a fine looking pair of horses, and a neighbor coming in one day and looking at them said, 'John, which horse do you like best?' John replied, 'I can't tell, one of them kicks and the other bites and I don't know which is wust.'")⁵⁴ The Reverend Mr. J. Edward Murr, who interviewed the children of Thomas's brother Josiah, observed that almost all of them had "coarse black hair, dark eyes," and were "somewhat given to humor."⁵⁵ Murr concluded that President Lincoln "received from his father certain qualities of mind as well as physical characteristics," among them his "unruly hair, his dark complexion, his unusual wit and humor as well as his well known gift for story telling, his

⁵¹ Louis A. Warren contended that the recollections about Thomas Lincoln in Kentucky are unreliable, for the men who supplied them (Dennis Hanks, Johns Hanks, and Austin Gollaher) did not really know Thomas well in that state. Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 157-58. But several other sources corroborate their accounts of Thomas in the years between 1817 and 1851.

⁵² Dennis Hanks, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 598; Otis M. Mather, "Lincoln's Debt to the Hills of Kentucky," talk given 13 February 1933, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky. Cf. Howells, Life of Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 20: "From his father came that knack of story-telling."

⁵³ Turnham, interview with Herndon, Elizabeth, Indiana, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 122.

⁵⁴ George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father, George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute, Indiana, Star, 11 February 1923.

⁵⁵ Murr, "Lincoln in Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 13 (1917): 310. Cf. Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 83, 98-99.

uncanny cunning, his mirth-provoking mimicry, his ready and eager disposition to take the stump or mount the platform and, above all, his proverbial honesty and truthfulness."⁵⁶ Like his son, Thomas was an able wrestler.⁵⁷ In Hancock County, Illinois, Lincoln had several cousins, one of whom (Robert) strongly resembled him physically and told stories well.⁵⁸

But the qualities that were to make Abraham Lincoln famous – his intellectual power, his ambition, his idealism, his eloquence, his spirituality, his integrity, his political wisdom, his judgment, his leadership – were lacking in Thomas. Henry C. Whitney, to whom Lincoln described his childhood, said that from Thomas Lincoln his son “inherited only ‘infancy, ignorance and indigence.’”⁵⁹ Few of Thomas’s neighbors could remember anything special about him other than that he was “a plain unpretending plodding man,” “a good average man,” who “attended to his work” and was “among the very commonest of the plain pioneers,” “honest and harmless,” “illiterate, yet always truthful, conscientious and religious,” “peaceable good and good natured.”⁶⁰ He “always stood by his friends in a rough and tumble fight.”⁶¹ Nathaniel

⁵⁶ Murr, “He Knew Lincoln’s Neighbors,” in Bess V. Ehrmann, The Missing Chapter in the Life of Abraham Lincoln: A Number of Articles, Episodes, Photographs, Pen and Ink Sketches Concerning the Life of Abraham Lincoln in Spencer County, Indiana, between 1816–1830 and 1844 (Chicago: Walter M. Hill, 1938), 97.

⁵⁷ Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 28; A. H. Chapman, written statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 96.

⁵⁸ Orville F. Berry, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 13. See also Professor Marcy Gordon Bodine of Western Illinois University, “Story of the Lincolns of Hancock County,” paper delivered before the Illinois State Historical Society, published in the Macomb, Illinois, Journal, 12 February 1955.

⁵⁹ Whitney, manuscript version of Lincoln the Citizen, p. 24, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. This passage was omitted from the published edition of the biography. The words quoted by Whitney are from Henry Clay’s description of his own paternal inheritance.

⁶⁰ Samuel Haycraft to Herndon, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 67; Jack Peck (b. 1800), interviewed by Harvey H. Smith in 1888, Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 168; the Rev. Mr. Thomas Goodwin, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 167; Janesville, Illinois, correspondence, 30 May 1880, Chicago Chronicle, n.d., copied in La Porte Weekly Herald (Indiana), 27 [?] October 1921, clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; George B. Balch, “The Father of Abraham Lincoln,” manuscript pasted into a copy of Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. Jack Peck, who lived in the Mill Creek area, was the son of Mrs. John Henry Peck, Sr. (née Elinor Thomas) and claimed to have known the Lincoln family in Kentucky. His father was born in 1770 and

Grigsby of Indiana thought "there was nothing on commin [uncommon] a bout him only his onisty and industry."⁶² Thomas evidently could read a little but was unable to write anything other than his signature.⁶³

Unlike his tall, rangy son, Thomas was thick and compact.⁶⁴ Various relatives, friends, and neighbors described him as a "square stout built man of only ordinary height," "heavy built," "clumsy," "bulky," "dark skinned," "a man of great strength & courage," "a little Stupt Shouldered," "rather clumsy in his gait," "heavy and square-built," "not nervous – nor Sinewy," "Somewhat raw boned," "solid built," "of great muscular power," "well proportioned," weighing between 180 and 200 pounds and standing about five feet ten inches.⁶⁵ Dennis Hanks found it

died in 1856. This may be the John S. Peck who bought Thomas Lincoln's Mill Creek farm in 1828. McMurtry, Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek, 39-40.

⁶¹ Albion, Illinois, Journal, 7 February 1889.

⁶² Nathaniel Grigsby to Herndon, Gentryville, 4 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 94.

⁶³ Dennis Hanks in Robert McIntyre, "Lincoln's Friend," Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., copied in the Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885; William G. Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated "on the cars," 12 April 1881, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881; John Hanks to Jesse W. Weik, Linkville, Oregon, 12 June 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 615; Harriet A. Chapman, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886-87], ibid.; George B. Balch, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], ibid. See also Samuel Haycraft to John B. Helm, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, 5 July 1865, ibid., 84.

⁶⁴ There is no authenticated photograph of Thomas Lincoln, though one purporting to be of him has been widely reproduced. R. Gerald McMurtry, "Was Thomas Lincoln Photographed?" Lincoln Herald 46 (1944): 24; [Mark E. Neely, Jr.], "Was Thomas Lincoln Photographed?" Lincoln Lore, no. 1577 (July 1969), 1-3. The nose on the gentleman in the photo is not as large as the one that Thomas Lincoln was reported to have had. W. H. Cunningham, a journalist who interviewed John J. Hall (husband of Thomas's stepdaughter, Matilda Johnston), reported that "No photograph or likeness was ever taken of Thos. Lincoln." Greenup, Illinois, Press, 22 September 1895. Hall allegedly said that he and Sarah Bush Lincoln insisted that Thomas have "a picture taken just a year or two before his death, but he neglected to have it done." Statement by John Hall, in the notes of Charles Coleman, in Robert W. Sterling, ed., "Thomas Lincoln: Father of the Nation's Sixteenth President," Eastern Illinois University Research and Review Series 4 (August 1993): 21. Robert Todd Lincoln said he had "never heard of any picture of my grandfather, Thomas Lincoln." Robert Todd Lincoln to Isaac Markens, Washington, 13 February 1918, Paul M. Angle, ed., A Portrait of Abraham Lincoln in Letters by His Oldest Son (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1968), 56.

⁶⁵ Samuel Haycraft to Herndon, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 67; Haycraft to John B. Helm, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, 5 July 1865, ibid., 84; statement of Samuel Haycraft, quoted in Elizabethtown correspondence, 30 December, Louisville Commercial, n.d., [ca. 1886], clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, p. 9, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress; David Turnham, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 122; Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], ibid., 598; Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, ibid., 28; Dennis

"singular" that Thomas, though "not a fleshy man," was "built so compact that it was difficult to find or feel a rib in his body."⁶⁶ His eyes were dark grey, and his "coarse features" were distinguished by a "remarkable large roman Nose," his "most prominent feature."⁶⁷ He "had an unusually low forehead, long eyebrows and lashes that almost obscured his view, a large hook nose and a long sharp chin."⁶⁸ Thomas was "Careless in his personal appearance." His sartorial casualness was complemented by his gastronomic indifference, both of which his son Abraham inherited. Thomas "cared but Little what kind of food he had, was satisfied if he had plenty [of] corn Brod & Milk."⁶⁹ He "was slow in speech and slow in gait, and his whole appearance denoted a man of small intel[lect] and less ambition, and such he was."⁷⁰ Thomas maintained that the "world's too purty and life too short to throw it away fighting and scrambling for nothing."⁷¹

If Thomas lacked intellect and ambition, he impressed people as "a good, clean, social, truthful & honest man," a "remarkable peac[e]able man," a "man of good morals – good habits and Exceedingly good humored," who "never appeared to be offended," had "good strong horse

Hanks to William H. Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, ibid., 37; Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 96-7; Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 17 December 1865, ibid., 145; John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 454; John Hanks, interview with John Miles, Decatur, Illinois, 25 May 1865, ibid., 5.

⁶⁶ Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 28.

⁶⁷ Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 96-7; Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 17 December 1865, ibid., 145.

⁶⁸ Janesville, Illinois, correspondence, 30 May 1880, Chicago Chronicle, n.d., copied in La Porte Weekly Herald (Indiana), 27 October 1921.

⁶⁹ Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 96-7.

⁷⁰ George B. Balch, "The Father of Abraham Lincoln," manuscript pasted into a copy of Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. Cf. Francis F. Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: N. D. Thompson, 1886), 82-83.

⁷¹ Julia Taft Bayne, "Julia Bayne, 84, Tells of Lincoln She Knew at 16," unidentified clipping, [ca. 1927], Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, Library of Congress. A frequent guest at the White House, Mrs. Bayne may have heard this from the president himself.

sense," "loved Company – peep & their Sports very much," with a disposition both "unpretentious" and "kind." They remembered that he was "good humored " and "could beat his son telling a story – cracking a joke."⁷² Illinois neighbors could not remember "a time when he spoke a cross word either in or out of his family."⁷³ Dennis Hanks, however, reported that Thomas "used to swear a little, and one day his baby girl picked up a foul oath and was bruising the bitter morsel in her sweet mouth, when Nancy called, 'Thomas!' and said: 'Listen, husband.' He stopped that habit then; never swore again."⁷⁴ (One day during his presidency, Lincoln used the expression "by jings" while visiting the telegraph office. When asked about that expression, he apologized to the operators for his profanity, explaining that "by jings is swearing, for my good old mother taught me that anything that had a by before it is swearing.")⁷⁵ When William G. Greene visited Thomas in 1836, he found his manners "Back[w]oodsish" but was "charmed" by his wit and humor and thought him a "mighty hospitable, and a very entertaining host."⁷⁶

⁷² Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 37; Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, ibid., 28; Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 96; Robert McIntyre, "Lincoln's Friend," Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., copied in the Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885; J. L. Nall, reporting what "several old men who knew Thomas Lincoln intimately" told him, Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 10n; George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father, George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute Star, 11 February 1923; Thomas L. D. Johnston, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 533; Johns Hanks, interview with Herndon [1865-66], ibid., 454; John Hanks, interview with John Miles, Decatur, Illinois, 25 May 1865, ibid., 5; Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, ibid., 111.

⁷³ Janesville, Illinois, correspondence, 30 May 1880, Chicago Chronicle, n.d., copied in La Porte Weekly Herald (Indiana), 27 October 1921.

⁷⁴ Robert McIntyre, "Lincoln's Friend," Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885.

⁷⁵ William Bender Wilson, A Glimpse of the United State Military Telegraph Corps, and of Abraham Lincoln (pamphlet; Philadelphia: Holmburg, [1889],) 18-19.

⁷⁶ William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 20 December 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 145; Greene interviewed by George A. Pierce, dispatch dated "on the cars," 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881.

For all his humor, Thomas could be "taciturn" and "Very quiet" and "often got the 'blues,' and had some strange sort of spells, and wanted to be alone all he could be when he had them. He would walk away out on the barrens alone, and stay out sometimes half a day."⁷⁷ Bouts of depression would hardly be surprising in someone who, as a youngster, had witnessed his father's murder and who then suffered poverty as a wandering, laboring boy. After Thomas had endured other losses – recurring financial setbacks and the deaths of his second son in 1812, of his wife in 1818, and of his daughter in 1828 – he displayed further understandable signs of depression. He often said, "Why everything that I ever teched either died, got killed or was lost."⁷⁸ On other occasions he lamented, "It's the hand of Providence laid upon me."⁷⁹

Thomas's susceptibility to depression may have been in part genetic. His brother Mordecai and Mordecai's sons of Hancock County, Illinois, were known "as men who at times communed with themselves, absorbed in their own thoughts."⁸⁰ A. R. Simmons, son of a neighbor of Lincoln's, heard his father talk about "moody spells" as a common phenomenon among the Lincoln family.⁸¹ Mordecai reportedly "was affected with all kinds of nervous disorders," the most prominent of which were the so-called "hypos" ("sustained periods of melancholia and depression") and "horrors" (gloomy spells). Mordecai would allegedly "come into his mother's house and sit down for long periods of time without saying a word unless it

⁷⁷ Joseph Gentry, notes of an interview conducted by Thomas Fortune, 1881, Fortune Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon, 26 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 176; Browne, Lincoln and the Men of His Time, 1:82-83.

⁷⁸ John J. Hall in Gridley, Story of Lincoln, 62.

⁷⁹ George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father, George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute, Indiana, Star, 11 February 1923.

⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson Lincoln, interviewed by Walter B. Stevens, in Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 185.

⁸¹ Simmons to William E. Barton, Colchester, Illinois, 7 March 1923, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. See also Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 99-123.

were to mutter an oath against something or curse somebody.” The “horrors” resembled bouts of delirium tremens, when Mordecai “would take up his violin . . . and pace the floor.” He betrayed signs of paranoia, accusing Catholics of stealing his father’s land. His hatred of priests intensified over time.⁸² Those bouts may in fact have the result of delirium tremens, for he reportedly “exercised the privilege (very common in those days) of ‘indulging freely’ whenever he pleased which happened very often.”⁸³ Mary Rowena Lincoln, mother of Thomas’s nephew James Lincoln, was reportedly a victim of the “Lincoln hippo.” Benjamin Mudd, son of Elizabeth Lincoln Mudd, suffered from what was called “the Lincoln horrors.”⁸⁴ An uncle of Thomas’s informed a court that he (the uncle) suffered from “a deranged mind.”⁸⁵ Another relative in the same county, Mary Jane Lincoln, was committed to the Illinois Hospital for the Insane after a court hearing in which a jury determined “that the disease is with her hereditary.”⁸⁶ She had gone insane in 1854 at the age of 26, was committed to the state asylum in 1867, and died there twenty-one years later.⁸⁷

⁸² Bodine, “Story of the Lincolns of Hancock County.” See also William E. Barton, “Why Lincoln Was Sad,” Dearborn Independent, 28 August 1923. Barton alleged that the correspondence of Mordecai Lincoln’s children shows that “they were all subject to the same depression and melancholy which was so characteristic of Abraham Lincoln.” The correspondence about Thomas Lincoln’s nephew, Mordecai, Jr., is contained in two scrapbooks, both marked “The Illinois Lincolns,” Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Another of Thomas’s nephews, the second Mordecai, and Lovely to W. A. Evans, Colchester, Illinois, 21 April 1921, and Lovely to Barton, Colchester, Illinois, 14 May 1922, ibid.

⁸³ James S. Pirtle, summarizing the testimony of his father, who was a neighbor of Mordecai’s in Kentucky. James S. Pirtle to Joshua F. Speed, Louisville, November 1877 [no day of the month indicated], Joseph Gillespie Papers, Chicago History Museum.

⁸⁴ Bernice V. Lovely to W. A. Evans, Colchester, Illinois, 21 April 1921, and Lovely to Barton, Colchester, Illinois, 14 May 1922, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Mary Rowena Lincoln was Bernice V. Lovely’s grandmother.

⁸⁵ Complaint filed in Lincoln v. O’Nan et al., 31 March 1810, (File 215, Fayette Circuit Court), in Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 19.

⁸⁶ Hancock County Court, “Verdict of Jury in the Matter of Mary Jane Lincoln Alleged to be Insane,” 17 May 1867, Illinois State Archives, in Joshua Wolf Shenk, Lincoln’s Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 12.

⁸⁷ Admission Book, Illinois Hospital for the Insane, record # 2715, 23 May 1867, Illinois State Archives, ibid.

Thomas Lincoln, who "Walked rather Slow [and] never seemed to be in a hurry," and for whom "Happiness was the End of life," did not prosper either as a carpenter or farmer.⁸⁸ He learned woodworking from Nancy Hanks's uncle Joseph Hanks, Jr., and made his living as a "Cabinet & House Carpenter" until he wed. Thereafter he supplemented his income by cultivating the soil.⁸⁹ He was known as "a Kind of rough Carpenter" "versed only in the skill of a rude carpenter," a "cheap carpenter that could put doors, windows, and floors in log houses."⁹⁰ A historian of Elizabethtown recorded that Thomas, "a moderately good house carpenter," did a "tolerable" job of joining on some houses.⁹¹ When Thomas later moved to Indiana, he continued

⁸⁸ Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 17 December 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 145; Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon, [December 1865?], ibid., 149; John Hanks, interview with Herndon [1865-66], ibid., 454.

⁸⁹ John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 454. According to Dennis Hanks, "Thomas Lincoln learnt his trade as a Carpenter in Hardin Co Ky with my Uncle Joseph Hanks and married Joseph Hanks Niece which was my own cousin – Lincoln was a farmer and mechanic and worked at either that was most profetable." Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chica "was a carpenter By trade he lirn trade of Jo. Hanks." John Hanks to Jesse W. Weik, Linkville, Oregon, 12 June 1887, ibid., 615. Augustus H. Chapman told Herndon that "Thos Lincoln A Lincolns Father was a Cabinet Maker by trade. Learned the trade or what he Knew about it with Josiah Hanks in Elizabeth Town Ky." A. H. Chapman, statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 102. A daughter-in-law and a grandson testified that Joseph Hanks, Jr. (1784?-1856) "was employed in the same carpentry shop in Elizabethtown, Kentucky where Thomas Lincoln worked." Paul H. Verduin, "Brief Outline of the Joseph Hanks Family," ibid., 782.

⁹⁰ E. R. Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 31 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 240; George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute, Indiana, Star, 11 February 1923; "Abraham Lincoln's Boyhood," anonymous manuscript written on the stationery of the Spencer County Assessor's Office, assessor Bartley Inco, 189_, copy, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University. Inco married James Grigsby's daughter Nancy. See also an interview with Joseph Bean, conducted by William E. Barton, 18 September 1922, Barton Papers, University of Chicago; Joseph Gentry, interview with Anna C. O'Flynn, ca. 1895, O'Flynn Papers, Vincennes University; William Wood, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 123.

⁹¹ Samuel Haycraft, quoted in Elizabethtown correspondence, n.d., Louisville Courier Journal, n.d. [ca. 1886], clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress.

Haycraft recalled that "In the years 1805. 1806. 1807. & 1808. I was intimately (though a boy) intimately acquainted with Thomas Lincoln father of Abraham Lincoln. Thomas Lincoln . . . [who] was a house Carpenter by trade done the joiners work on my fathers house – & the entire joiners work on the house of Hardin Thomas 2 miles out the work still exists to show for itself." Samuel Haycraft to William H. Herndon, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 67. On another occasion Haycraft called Thomas Lincoln "a tolerable Country house Carpenter" who "worked some on my fathers house – in 1805 and afterward done all the Carpenter work on Hardin Thomas' house, the work is yet to be seen tolerably sound." Samuel Haycraft to John B. Helm, Elizabeth Town, 5 July 1865, ibid., 84. See also Haycraft, History of Elizabethtown, 55, 74. John B. Helm

to work as a carpenter, "Making rough Tables & such other articles as was most Needed in that community," like coffins, doors, and window casings.⁹² He would "work energetically when a job was brought to him, but he would never seek a job."⁹³ Some customers who sought him out were unhappy with his work. In 1807, Denton Geohegan of Elizabethtown complained of Thomas's "unworkmanlike manner" in hewing timbers: seven of the twenty-five logs were either too long or too short for Geohegan's sawmill. When Geohegan refused to pay, Thomas successfully sued him.⁹⁴

If Thomas was little more than a rough, tolerable carpenter, he was even less successful as a farmer, partly because he chose unpromising land to till. Hodgenville's town clerk described the Nolin Creek property – birthplace of the future president – unflatteringly: "it is rather poor and at that day [ca. 1806] . . . not worth over 1\$ per acre." At the time Abraham Lincoln was born, "it was a barren waste So to Speak, Save Some little patches on the creek bottom."⁹⁵ When in 1811 Thomas abandoned the Nolin Creek farm (after the owner took title and refused to lease the property to him) and moved to another one on Knob Creek, nine miles to the northeast, it

expressed skepticism about Thomas's joinery in the Hardin Thomas house: "when a boy going to school I boarded at old Hardin Thomas and in this same house and did not remember any joining work on the house a rough log house with two or three glass windows – plenty of rough room good cheer and honest friendship was all they had and joiners work was scarce." John B. Helm to Herndon, n.p., 1 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 81. Cf. R. Gerald McMurtry, "The Hardin Thomas House," Lincoln Herald 76 (1974): 4-7.

⁹² Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 98. An Indiana neighbor recalled that "his business chief[ly] was farming but he was a cabinet maker and a carpenter there is yet in this contry furniture that he maid also houses standing that he done the carpenters work." Nathaniel Grigsby to Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 4 September 1865, ibid., 94. Another neighbor recalled that "Thomas Lincoln was a carpenter by trade – relied on it for a living – not on farming." John Romine, interview with Herndon, 14 September 1865, Lincoln Farm, Indiana, ibid., 118.

⁹³ Austin Gollaher, interviewed by D. J. Thomas, Los Angeles Times, 18 August 1895.

⁹⁴ Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 162-64.

⁹⁵ E. R. Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, 31 March and 25 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 240, 257. Half a century later, it was still considered poor land, for "the country round about is rather level, that is no hills of note but in many places Small Basins (as they are called here) which renders the face of the country uneven & disagreeable to work for farming." Ibid., 257.

represented little improvement. In 1816, Thomas was equally inept when choosing a farm site in Indiana; he selected 160 acres of heavily timbered land and located his cabin more than a mile from a reliable water source.⁹⁶ In Illinois during the 1830s and 1840s, Thomas showed similarly bad judgment.⁹⁷

Even if he had appraised land more shrewdly, Thomas, lacking industry, ambition, and intellectual power, would in all likelihood have failed to prosper. He “took the world Easy,” “never thought that gold was God,” and “was v[er]y careless about his business, a poor Manager, at time[s] accumulated considerable property which he always managed to make way with about as fast as he made it, . . . & was what is generally called an unlucky Man in business.”⁹⁸ In 1835, Thomas and four partners leased a mill for a year; when they failed to pay the rent, they were sued and lost in court.⁹⁹

Several times Thomas took boatloads of pork and other goods down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, usually making little money. Once his vessel capsized and he returned home empty-handed.¹⁰⁰ In a particularly unfortunate transaction, “he sold one entire load on a credit & never realized a cent for the same.”¹⁰¹ His son Abraham described that calamity: “Father often told me of the trick that was played upon him by a 'pair of sharpers.' It was [in 1815] the

⁹⁶ Warren, Lincoln's Youth, 51.

⁹⁷ As soon as he reached Illinois in 1830, Thomas squatted on land near Decatur but abandoned it after a year because “he thought [it] poorly situated.” Temple, “Thomas and Abraham Lincoln as Farmers,” 23.

⁹⁸ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 37; Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 97. See also Mrs. Andrew H. Allison, quoted in Charles H. Coleman, “The Father of Abraham Lincoln,” St. Louis Post Dispatch, 12 February 1952. Mrs. Allison (1822-1923) lived in Coles County from 1832 to her death.

⁹⁹ Charles H. Coleman, Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois (New Brunswick: Scarecrow Press, 1955), 30-31, 54.

¹⁰⁰ Reminiscences of Christopher Columbus Graham, in “Hanks Family Notes,” vol. 2, pp. 136-37, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.

¹⁰¹ Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 100.

year before we moved from Kentucky to Indiana that father concluded to take a load of pork down to New Orleans. He had a considerable amount of his own, and he bargained with the relatives and neighbors for their pork, so that altogether he had quite a load. He took the pork to the Ohio River on a clumsily constructed flat boat of his own make. Almost as soon as he pushed out into the river a couple of sleek fellows bargained with him for his cargo, and promised to meet him in New Orleans where they arranged to pay him the price agreed upon. He eagerly accepted the offer, transferred the cargo to the strangers and drifted down the river, his head filled with visions of wealth and delight. He thought that he was going to accomplish what he had set out to do without labor or inconvenience. Father waited about New Orleans for several days, but failed to meet his whilom friends. At last it dawned upon him that he had been sold, and all that he could do was to come back home and face the music.”¹⁰²

Thomas Lincoln also lost money buying and selling farms, especially in Kentucky, where an archaic surveying system – permitting claims to be identified by trees, stones, creek bends, and other such imprecise landmarks – produced a chaotic situation in which "entries, surveys, and patents, were piled upon each other, overlapping and crossing in endless perplexity," causing innumerable “sorrows, lawsuits, and heart-rending vexations.”¹⁰³ Kentucky law did not require a qualifying examination for surveyors, who reportedly were never correct except by accident.

Years later, Lincoln recalled how Kentuckians “used to be troubled with . . . mysterious relics of

¹⁰² These words are what Lincoln uttered “in substance,” according to John J. Hall, the son of Lincoln’s stepsister, Matilda Johnston Hall. Gridley, Story of Lincoln, 61-62. Hall told this story to Gridley, the secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Log Cabin Association, in 1891, when she visited him in Coles County, Illinois; his words were recorded by a stenographer who accompanied Gridley.

¹⁰³ Collins, Historical Sketches of Kentucky, 23. The survey of some of Grandfather Abraham Lincoln’s land specified that he owned 440 acres “Beginning at the west side of the Long Run at 4 Walnuts & running thence W 243 poles to 4 Sugar trees E 253 poles to 4 Iron Woods standing on an island in Long Run S 253 poles to 4 iron woods W 253 poles to the beginning.” Survey dated 26 March 1784, Surveyor’s Book, Jefferson County, copy, Reuben T. Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago.

feudalism, and titles got into such an almighty mess with these pettifoggin' incumbrances turnin' up at every fresh tradin' with the land, and no one knowin' how to get rid of 'em."¹⁰⁴

Because the size of the Mill Creek farm was unclear, Thomas was able to sell it for only £100 in 1814, though he had paid £118 for it a decade earlier. For \$200 he purchased a title bond to the 300-acre Nolin Creek farm, which he lost, including all the improvements he had made on it.¹⁰⁵

An ejectment suit led him to abandon the thirty-acre Knob Creek farm, which he had leased, not purchased.¹⁰⁶

In Indiana he fared little better. He squatted on a 160-acre tract of government land which, after ten months, he bought on credit for \$320.¹⁰⁷ Thomas probably delayed making a down payment for the same reason that most pioneers did: a lack of cash.¹⁰⁸ In 1817 he put down \$80, but over the following decade made no further payments. Finally in 1827 he relinquished half the farm, reducing his debt to \$80, which he met by turning over to the government title to eighty acres in a distant county, a piece of property that he had mysteriously acquired four weeks earlier. In 1830 he sold this \$160 farm for \$125.¹⁰⁹ When a decade later Thomas found himself

¹⁰⁴ George Tuthill Borrett, Letters from Canada and the United States (London: J. E. Adlard, 1865), 253 (letter dated "on board the Kangaroo," November 1864).

¹⁰⁵ The farm was owned by Richard Mather, who, according to the articles of agreement made on 1 May 1805, sold it to David Vance, who conveyed it to Isaac Bush, who in turn conveyed it to Thomas Lincoln. Thomas moved onto the land, improved it, then lost it when Vance failed to carry out his end of the bargain. In 1816, a court ruled that Thomas should be refunded his \$200, but that year he moved to Indiana and probably never recovered a cent. Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 292; Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 113, 117-19, 190; Brown, "Title of Thomas Lincoln," 19-21. According to the Rev. Mr. George L. Rogers of Elizabethtown, in 1814 Thomas was paid in wildcat currency which quickly depreciated in value. Stephen G. Burbridge to Abraham Lincoln, Lexington, Kentucky, 8 November 1864, copy, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

¹⁰⁶ Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 120-22, 190; Brown, "Title of Thomas Lincoln," 31-33, 44-47.

¹⁰⁷ At the time Federal law stipulated that buyers must purchase at least 160 acres at \$2 per acre. In 1820, the law was amended to allow minimum purchases of 80 acres and to reduce the price to \$1.25 per acre.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Lincoln was hardly unique. In 1828, two thirds of the farmers who had settled in Illinois were squatters. John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 54-55.

¹⁰⁹ Temple, "Thomas and Abraham Lincoln as Farmers" 18-21; George R. Wickham, "Gleams from the Darkened Archives: A Sketch of the Father of Abraham Lincoln," typescript enclosed in F. M. Goodwin to Albert J.

unable to meet the obligations he had assumed for four parcels of Illinois land, his generous son gave him what amounted to a gift of \$200 for a fifty-acre tract that had cost Thomas only \$50.¹¹⁰ Shortly thereafter Abraham again rescued his father by paying off a mortgage that Thomas had assumed.¹¹¹

On these various farms Thomas was “very poor” because he “had ‘cleared up’ only a few acres, just enough for a garden and ‘a patch’ of corn.”¹¹² According to Dennis Hanks, he “Jest Raised a Nuf for his own use” and “Did Not Send any produce to any other place Mor than Bought his Shugar and Coffee and Such Like.” At Knob Creek, Thomas allowed most of his

Beveridge, Washington, 30 August 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress; William E. Bartelt, “The Land Dealings of Spencer County, Indiana, Pioneer Thomas Lincoln,” Indiana Magazine of History 87 (1991): 211-23; “Disposal of the Lincoln Farm,” Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 11 January 1934. “In April, 1827, for a consideration which is unknown, James McCrery assigned to Thomas Lincoln an eighty-dollar interest in an eighty-acre tract in Posey County, Indiana.” Harry E. Pratt, The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943), 4-5.

¹¹⁰ As titular owner of the property, Abraham passed “the o[c]cupation, use, and entire control, of said tract” to his father and stepmother. Documents dated 25 October 1841, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:262-63. The tangled story of Thomas Lincoln’s land acquisitions in Illinois is recounted in Temple, “Thomas and Abraham Lincoln as Farmers,” 21-32, and in Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 19-49. From 1830 to 1831, Thomas lived in Macon County near Decatur. From 1831 to 1834, he squatted on a quarter-section (forty acres) of public land in Buck Grove, Pleasant Grove Township, Coles County. Thereafter he and his stepson John D. Johnston lived at various locations in the same township. The first was a forty-acre farm at Muddy Point, for which Thomas paid \$75 in 1834; that same year he bought eighty more acres of government land on credit for \$102. Three years later he purchased eighty acres (apparently for \$100 cash) of government land and left the Muddy Point farm, which he sold for \$140; in 1840 he exchanged this for a similar tract known as the Goosenest Prairie farm near Farmington and later that year bought forty acres from his stepson for \$50. It was this last-named parcel that Abraham Lincoln purchased from his father. According to a later owner of part of this 40-acre parcel, the total farm of 120 acres had passed to John J. Hall, Thomas Lincoln’s stepgrandson; Hall’s heirs “had to bring Suit against Robert T Lincoln of Chicago, Abrahams son to get a good title to that 40 as the Records Showed it belonged to Abraham Lincoln. Robert Lincoln Said he would not fight them in court as it really belonged to them by fulfillment of a contract to Keep Thomas Lincoln as long as he lived and Thomas’s wife Sarah bush as long as She lived, and he Said he would not Sign a quit claim deed. But he would not fight them in court. He Said to Serve the papers on him to appear in court but he would not be there, and then the court would make them a deed and they would have it against the world, and it was done in that way.” J. D. Martin to Albert J. Beveridge, Sullivan, Illinois, 24 May 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹¹ Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 63. According to Eleanor Gridley, John J. Hall alleged that Lincoln himself paid the mortgage installments on his father's farm. Gridley, Story of Lincoln, 57. John Hanks recalled that “Lincolns Father bought 40 acres of Land in Coles Co Ills but he A Lincoln had to advance the Money 200 Dollars to pay for it & prevent his Father from Loosing it.” Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 103.

¹¹² John Romine in J. M. Griffin, article in the Louisville Commercial, n.d., copied in the Evansville, Indiana, Journal, 27 June 1887.

holdings lie fallow; Hanks asserted that the farm "contained in cultivated land only six acres running up & down the branch – about 40 feet wide on either side."¹¹³ Thomas's stepson-in-law, John J. Hall, said of that farm: "only a small portion of the land was cleared and merely enough food raised to sustain life." Hall added that "Thomas Lincoln did not improve with age nor with increasing responsibilities. He was still the same kind and genial 'fellow,' but grew more and more shiftless and good for nothing as the years rolled on." The Nolin Creek farm "was 'rocky and weedy and scrubby,' and he did not cultivate the soil nor 'fix up' the old shanty."¹¹⁴ Nathaniel Grigsby, an Indiana neighbor of the Lincolns, called Thomas "a piddler – always doing but doing nothing great – was happy – lived Easy – & contented. . . . He wanted few things and Supplied them Easily."¹¹⁵ One thing he wanted was tobacco, which he grew and peddled for ten cents a pound.¹¹⁶ On at least one occasion, he tried to use that commodity to satisfy a debt. He had bought a horse for \$10 on credit and failed to pay at the appointed time. After two or three years, his creditor called on Thomas, who offered to compensate his guest with tobacco. The creditor replied: "A man that would give up his tobacco don't owe me anything. Your honesty has more than paid for the mare."¹¹⁷

After removing to Illinois in 1830, Thomas continued the pattern he had established in Kentucky and Indiana. In the Prairie State, he and his stepson, John D. Johnston, along with

¹¹³ Dennis Hanks to Herndon, n.p., 26 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 176; Dennis Hanks, interview with Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 8 September 1865, ibid., 104. For tax purposes, Thomas Lincoln declared that the Knob Creek farm consisted of thirty acres. Abraham Lincoln remembered that there were three fields on the Knob Creek farm, one of which, known as the "big field," contained seven acres. Lincoln said this on 5 June 1864. Statement by J. J. Wright, 18 April 1896, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹¹⁴ John J. Hall in Gridley, Story of Lincoln, 48, 45.

¹¹⁵ Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 113.

¹¹⁶ James C. Latimer in the Rockport, Indiana, Journal, 3 October 1902.

¹¹⁷ Janesville, Illinois, correspondence, 30 May 1880, Chicago Chronicle, n.d., copied in La Porte Weekly Herald (Indiana), 27 October 1921.

Johnston's five sons, tilled only 40 of their 120 acres.¹¹⁸ To the census taker in 1850, Thomas declared that his land was worth only \$100. Because the average farm in the Muddy Point precinct where he lived was worth \$1600, Thomas ranked behind 79% of that precinct's farmers in terms of wealth, even though he was much older than most of his neighbors and thus had had time to accumulate property. Moreover, his household contained more eligible males to work the land.¹¹⁹ A neighbor, George B. Balch, declared that Thomas supposedly "was a farmer, and such he was, if one who tilled so little land by such primitive modes could be so called. He never planted more than a few acres, and instead of gathering and hauling it [his crops] in a wagon he usual[l]y carried it to his [reception?] in a basket or large tray." Balch characterized Thomas as "uneducated, illiterate, and contented with a 'from hand to mouth' living," in sum, "an excellent spec[imen] of poor white trash," "rough," "lazy," and "worthless." He owned "few sheep" behind which he "talked an[d] walked slow." Balch added that "[s]everal anecdotes of his ignorance and singularity might be related, but we for bear."¹²⁰ Other neighbors said he was "rough, unaggressive, uncouth," "ignorant," and belonged to "that ne'er-do-well class who let each day provide for itself." Thomas was likened to the fabled Arkansas farmer who was asked, "Why don't you cover your house?"

"It's a rainin' now, so I can't."

"Why don't you cover it when it's dry?"

¹¹⁸ Temple, "Thomas and Abraham Lincoln as Farmers," 27-29. In 1850, Johnston's sons were aged thirteen, twelve, nine, seven, and one.

¹¹⁹ Kenneth J. Winkle, The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 143-44.

¹²⁰ George B. Balch, "The Father of Abraham Lincoln," manuscript pasted into a copy of Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington; Balch, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 597. Cf. Browne, Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln, 85-86.

“Huh-uh (a yawn)! Hit don’t need it then.”¹²¹

William G. Greene spent time at the Lincolns’ farm in Goosenest Prairie and observed that Thomas was barely able to eke out a living. Greene found Thomas residing “in a little cabin that cost perhaps \$15, and with many evidences of poverty about him.” The cabin “looked so small and humble” that Greene “felt embarrassed.” It had no stable, no outhouse, and no shrubbery or trees.¹²² An early historian of Coles County, who interviewed acquaintances of Thomas Lincoln, called him “one of those easy, honest, commonplace men, who take life as they find it, and, as a consequence, generally find it a life of poverty.” He “possessed no faculty whatever of preserving his money, when he made any, hence he always remained poor. He was easily contented, had few wants, and those of a primitive nature. He was a foe to intemperance, strictly honest, and, supposing others the same, often suffered pecuniary losses.”¹²³ Sophie Hanks’s son attributed Thomas Lincoln’s lack of ambition to frontier isolation: “he was like the other people in that country. None of them worked to get ahead. There was n’t no market for nothing unless you took it across two or three states. The people raised just what they needed.”¹²⁴ William E. Grigsby regarded Thomas Lincoln as “no account,” the opposite of “hardworking.”¹²⁵

Robert Mitchell Thompson of Kentucky, whose mother was a cousin of Nancy Hanks and lived

¹²¹ Janesville, Illinois, correspondence, 30 May 1880, Chicago Chronicle, n.d., copied in La Porte Weekly Herald (Indiana), 27 October 1921; Albion, Illinois, Journal, 7 February 1889; George E. Mason, “Thomas Lincoln, Father of Abraham Lincoln,” San Diego Mirror, undated clipping, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Thomas Lincoln” folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The neighbor was Andrew Jackson Whisnand, who described Thomas Lincoln to a friend. That friend, in turn, gave this description to a journalist. Professor S. E. Thomas of Eastern Illinois University interviewed Whisnand. Thomas to William E. Barton, Charleston, 6 September 1922, Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

¹²² Greene to Herndon, Tallulah, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 12; Greene interviewed by George A. Pierce, dispatch dated “on the cars,” 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881; Browne, Every-Day Life of Lincoln, 87; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 74.

¹²³ The History of Coles County, Illinois (Chicago: Lebaron & Co., 1879), 422.

¹²⁴ Morgan, “New Light on Lincoln's Boyhood,” 213.

¹²⁵ Recollections of William E. Grigsby, recounted by his great granddaughter, Elizabeth Decker of Arizona, memorandum on the Grigsby family, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, Lincoln City, Indiana.

at the Berry home with her, reported that “Thomas Lincoln was always poor” and “was all the time going hunting or roaming around, not satisfied to stay long in any one place.”¹²⁶ Other neighbors testified that Thomas was “rather indolent and improvident,” had an “aversion to work,” and was “careless and inert and dull.”¹²⁷

Thomas preferred hunting to farming. Dennis Hanks recalled that he “delighted in having a good hunt.” Killing deer, turkeys, bears, wildcats, and panthers “afforded him no small amusement and pleasure.”¹²⁸ Hanks added that “We all hunted pretty much all the time, Especially so when we got tired of work – which was very often I will assure you.”¹²⁹ Such a pattern was not uncommon on the Midwestern frontier. A northeasterner who moved to central Illinois described that region as “destitute of any energy or enterprise among the people, their labors and attention being chiefly confined to the hunting of game.”¹³⁰ In sketches of pioneer life in that same locale, Francis Grierson portrayed a representative farmer, Zack Caverly, who explained: “My ole daddy larnt me te go through this sorrowin’ vale like the varmints do – easy

¹²⁶ Robert Mitchell Thompson, interviewed in the Louisville Times, clipping, ca. 1891, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. Thompson alleged that his mother, a first cousin of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, lived with Nancy at the home of Richard Berry until she wed. This is confirmed in a letter by C[harlotte] S[pear] H[obart] V[awter] to the editor of the Indianapolis Journal, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, p. 9, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress. This communication, based on data gathered at Kentucky in 1859 and 1866, alleged that Sarah Shipley Mitchell was the daughter of Nancy’s aunt, who married Robert Mitchell. After her parents died, Sarah moved to the Berrys’ home, where she and Nancy became as “intimate as sisters.” Vawter offered a similar version of this story to Caroline Hanks Hitchcock. Vawter to Hitchcock, n.p, 8 October 1895, copied in “Hanks Family Notes,” vol. 1, p. 91, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.

¹²⁷ Interview with Austin Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895; Joseph Davis Armstrong, undated article in the Oakland City, Indiana, Enterprise, copy, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University; “Abraham Lincoln’s Boyhood,” anonymous manuscript written on the stationery of the Spencer County (Indiana) Assessor’s Office, Assessor Bartley Inco, 189_, copy, ibid. Between 1858 and 1879, Armstrong, editor of the Oakland City Enterprise, interviewed people who had known the Lincolns in Indiana. Inco married James Grigsby’s daughter Nancy.

¹²⁸ Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 27.

¹²⁹ Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 39.

¹³⁰ Faragher, Sugar Creek, 97.

en nat'ral like, never gallopin' when ye kin lope, en never lopin' when ye kin lay down. It's a heap easier."¹³¹

Thomas was a classic Southern backcountry cracker (a term originating in northern Britain).¹³² Often of Celtic background, crackers were proverbially easy-going, improvident, unacquisitive, lazy, and restless. They liked to spend their days hunting, fishing, and loafing rather than farming. They had little use for education and were often illiterate. Their folkways and culture derived largely from northern England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and the Hebrides.¹³³

Lincoln's view of his father's indolence is unrecorded, but he did scold his stepbrother John D. Johnston for that character flaw in letters which may reflect his attitude not only toward Johnston but also toward Thomas Lincoln. In 1848, when Johnston asked him for a loan, Lincoln declined, saying: "At the various times when I have helped you a little, you have said to me 'We can get along very well now' but in a very short time I find you in the same difficulty again. Now this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not lazy, and still you are an idler. I doubt whether since I saw you, you have done a good whole day's work, in any one day. You do not very much dislike to work; and still you do not work much, merely because it does not seem to you that you could get much for it. This habit of uselessly wasting time, is the whole difficulty; and it is vastly important to you, and still more to your children that you should break this habit." Three years later, when his

¹³¹ Francis Grierson, The Valley of Shadows: Sangamon Sketches, ed. Robert Bray (1909; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 44.

¹³² David Hackett Fischer, Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 756-58.

¹³³ Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1988), passim; Fischer, Albion's Seed, 605-782.

stepbrother, who was who was “born tired,” proposed to leave Illinois for Missouri, Lincoln scolded him in language that could well have applied to his peripatetic father: “such a notion is utterly foolish. What can you do in Missouri, better than here [in Illinois]? Is the land any richer? Can you there, any more than here, raise corn, & wheat & oats, without work? Will any body there, any more than here, do your work for you? If you intend to go to work, there is no better place than right where you are; if you do not intend to go to work, you can not get along any where. Squirming & crawling about from place to place can do no good. You have raised no crop this year, and what you really want is to sell the land, get the money and spend it – part with the land you have, and my life upon it, you will never after, own a spot big enough to bury you in. Half you will get for the land, you spend in moving to Missouri, and the other half you will eat and drink, and wear out, & no foot of land will be bought. Now I feel it is my duty to have no hand in such a piece of foolery.”¹³⁴

Thomas Lincoln’s indolence, lack of ambition and disdain for education put him at odds with his smart, enterprising son. Thomas, Abraham said, “grew up litterally without education” and “never did more in the way of writing than to bunglingly sign his own name.”¹³⁵ This patronizing language (especially the word “bunglingly”) lends credence to testimony given by Dennis Hanks, a cousin who spent three years living with the Lincolns during Abe’s youth.¹³⁶ Hanks, who called Lincoln “a mother’s boy,” doubted “whether Abe loved his farther Very well

¹³⁴ Lincoln to John D. Johnston, Washington, 24 December 1848, and Shelbyville, Illinois, 4 November 1851, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:16, 111; William H. Herndon to a clergyman in New York, Springfield, 24 November 1882, Washington Post, 4 February 1883..

¹³⁵ Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:65.

¹³⁶ Dennis Hanks, autobiographical statement, 1877, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago; June Cardell Cooper, “Dennis Friend Hanks: A Biography,” Masters Thesis, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, 1969

or Not," and concluded that "I Don[']t think he Did."¹³⁷ The feeling was mutual.¹³⁸ According to Augustus H. Chapman, Dennis Hanks's son-in-law, Thomas Lincoln "never showed by his actions that he thought much of his son Abraham when a Boy. He treated him rather unkind than otherwise" and "always appeared to think much more of his stepson John D Johnston than he did of his own Son Abraham."¹³⁹ This preference is not surprising, for Thomas, who shared much in common with his improvident stepson, lacked his own son's intellect, ambition, and character.¹⁴⁰

Lincoln's aversion to his father persisted into adulthood. He never once invited Thomas to Springfield during the entire twenty-four-year span Lincoln lived there. He rarely lent money to his cash-strapped sire.¹⁴¹ When his law practice took him near his father's home in Coles County, Illinois, Lincoln stayed with Dennis Hanks rather than under the paternal roof.¹⁴² As Thomas lay dying in 1851, his forty-one-year-old son refused a deathbed appeal for a visit; Lincoln icily enjoined his stepbrother to tell their father "that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant."¹⁴³ After Thomas died, Lincoln failed to

¹³⁷ Dennis Hanks in Robert McIntyre, "Lincoln's Friend," Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885; Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon, n.p., 26 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 176. McIntyre was a minister in Charleston. Another minister, J. Edward Murr, interviewed many of the Lincolns' Indiana neighbors and concluded that Lincoln "was from first to last a mother's boy." J. Edward Murr, "The Wilderness Years of Abraham Lincoln," unpublished typescript, 6, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹³⁸ See John Y. Simon, "House Divided: Lincoln and His Father" (pamphlet; Fort Wayne: Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, 1987), and Rodney O. Davis, "Abraham Lincoln: Son and Father" (pamphlet; Galesburg, Illinois: Knox College, 1997).

¹³⁹ Augustus H. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 28 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 134. Chapman noted that "after Abe was grown up and had made his Mark in the world the old man appeared to be very proud of him."

¹⁴⁰ On John D. Johnston's character, see below, chapter two.

¹⁴¹ Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 65-66.

¹⁴² Amanda Hanks Poorman, daughter of Dennis Hanks, "New Stories about the Great Emancipator," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 26 May 1901.

¹⁴³ Lincoln to John D. Johnston, Springfield, 12 January 1851, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:97.

attend the funeral, nor did he have a tombstone placed on his grave.¹⁴⁴ Lincoln did not name a son after his father until after Thomas's death.¹⁴⁵ He indirectly belittled his father when, referring to one of Thomas's brothers, he told a friend: "I have often said that Uncle Mord had run off with all the talents of the family."¹⁴⁶

Lincoln's estrangement stemmed not just from Thomas's emotional reserve, painful though that may have been. More deeply wounding, perhaps, was "his father's cold and inhuman treatment of him."¹⁴⁷ Caroline Dall, who spoke with William H. Herndon (Lincoln's law partner and biographer) in 1866 and spent three days examining the biographical materials

¹⁴⁴ Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 134-41. Lincoln talked about marking the site with a stone. According to Augustus H. Chapman, with whom Lincoln spoke at length in January 1861, "Mr Lincoln said he intended to have the grave enclosed and suitable Tomb Stones erected over his Fathers grave & requested me to ascertain what the cost would be & he would furnish Dennis Hanks the money to have it done. Said he would furnish an inscription for the Tomb-[stone, such] as he wished inscribed on it, Said he would do it as soon as he got time for me then to see the marble dealer & write him the cost & he would furnish Dennis the Mony to have it all done just as he wished." Augustus H. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 8 October 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 136. See also The History of Coles County (Chicago: Lebaron & Co., 1879), 423-24. In 1867, Mary Todd Lincoln told her mother-in-law that the president "a few weeks before his death mentioned to me, that he intended that summer, paying proper respect to his father's grave, by a head & foot stone." Mary Todd Lincoln to Sarah Bush Lincoln, Chicago, 19 December 1867, Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 465. George T. Balch stated that as president, Lincoln sent money to have a tombstone put on his father's grave, but that it was not done; so Balch's father, George B. Balch, raised money by writing and delivering poetry about Lincoln and used the proceeds to mark the grave of Thomas Lincoln. George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father, George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute, Indiana, Star, 11 February 1923. Lincoln's failure to carry out his plans suggests a deep estrangement from his father, despite his pious intentions.

¹⁴⁵ Abraham Lincoln's fourth son, born in 1853, was named Thomas after his grandfather, who had died two years earlier. Mary Todd Lincoln to Francis B. Carpenter, Chicago, 15 November 1865, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 284.

¹⁴⁶ Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1879), 38. Lincoln called Uncle Mordecai "a man of very great Natural gifts." Augustus H. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 8 October 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 137. Mordecai was praised by a colleague in the Kentucky legislature, according to Judge Paul I. Brooker, who told his nephew in 1860 that if Abraham Lincoln were "as good a man as his uncle Mordecai, you need have no fears." W. F. Booker to Joseph H. Barrett, Washington County, Kentucky, 26 March 1895, Joseph H. Barrett, Abraham Lincoln and His Presidency (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton, 1924), 1:6n. According to J. L. Nall, "Old men who knew Uncle Mordecai said that he was a very smart man and exceedingly popular; but was a sporting man and somewhat reckless." Henry C. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, ed. Marion Mills Miller (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1908), 8n. On Mordecai, see William E. Barton, "'Mord' Lincoln, the Woman-Hater," Open Court 38 (1924): 287-303.

¹⁴⁷ William H. Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

he had accumulated, said Thomas Lincoln “ill-treated A[braham] to such an extent that he drove him from home.”¹⁴⁸ Augustus H. Chapman deplored Thomas’s “great barbarity” in dealing with his boy.¹⁴⁹ Dennis Hanks recalled that Thomas would whip young Abe for minor indiscretions. “Sometimes Abe was a little rude,” Hanks testified. “When strangers would ride along & up to his fathers fence Abe always, through pride & to tease his father, would be sure to ask the stranger the first question, for which his father would sometimes knock him a rod. Abe was then a rude and forward boy.” Whenever he was “whipped by his father” he “never bawled but dropt a kind of silent unwelcome tear, as evidence of his sensations – or other feelings.” Thomas Lincoln “would pick up a big clod and knock little Abe off the fence, crying: ‘Let older people have the first say, will you boy?’”¹⁵⁰ Whenever he was “whipped by his father” he “never bawled but dropt a kind of silent unwelcome tear, as evidence of his sensations – or other feelings.”¹⁵¹

Thomas “would not whip Abe or scold him before folks, but he would take him by himself and tend to him after they was gone.”¹⁵² One day a poor neighbor named Jenkins, who usually went

¹⁴⁸ Caroline Dall to James Freeman Clarke, Chicago, 1 November 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

¹⁴⁹ Ward Hill Lamon, The Life of Abraham Lincoln: From His Birth to His Inauguration as President (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1872), 40n.

¹⁵⁰ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 39; Amanda Hanks Poorman, “New Stories about the Great Emancipator,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 26 May 1901. Hanks repeated this story in 1866: “Abe was one of those forward Boys I have Seen his farther Nock him Down of the fence when a Stranger would Call for Information to neighbour house Abe allways would have the first word.” Dennis Hanks to Herndon, 26 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 176. In 1885, Hanks told an interviewer: “If a man rode up horseback Abe would be the first one out, up on the fence asking questions, till his father would give him a knock side o’ the head; then he’d go and throw stones at snowbirds or suthin’, but ponderin’ all the while.” Robert McIntyre, “Lincoln’s Friend,” Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885.

¹⁵¹ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 39; Amanda Hanks Poorman, “New Stories about the Great Emancipator,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 26 May 1901.

¹⁵² Dr. James LeGrande, paraphrasing remarks he heard from his mother, Sophie Hanks, undated interview with Arthur E. Morgan, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress; Arthur E. Morgan, “New Light on Lincoln's Boyhood,” Atlantic Monthly 125 (1920): 214. Sophie Hanks (1809-93), illegitimate daughter of Nancy Hanks’s sister, Sarah (Polly) Hanks, came to Indiana with the Sparrow family and lived in the Lincolns’ cabin off and on from 1818 to

barefoot, called on the Lincolns. Abe greeted him heartily: "Hello, Mr. Jenkins. You are doing better than you used to. You have a new pair of boots." Thomas Lincoln took his son aside and "gave Abe a little drilling" because his remarks may have wounded Jenkins's feelings. "'Well,' said Abe, 'he's got the boots.'"¹⁵³ Lincoln's cousin Sophie Hanks, who lived in his family's Indiana cabin for several years, "always said that the worst trouble with Abe was when people was talking – if they said something that wasn't right Abe would up and tell them so. Uncle Tom had a hard time to break him of this."¹⁵⁴ She also recalled how Lincoln "very often would correct his father in talking when his father was telling how anything happened and if he didn[']t tell it jest right or left out any thing, Abe would but[t] in right there and correct it."¹⁵⁵ Thomas would then slap the lad.¹⁵⁶ When he let loose a bear cub from one of Thomas's traps, Lincoln was reportedly "beaten by his father."¹⁵⁷

1826. Arthur E. Morgan, "Sophie Hanks," typescript, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress; Paul H. Verduin, "Brief Outline of the Joseph Hanks Family," Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 781. Morgan found LeGrande "intelligent and reflective," an "intelligent, observing, practical country doctor," in his sixties, "well preserved" with a "keen" mind, a man "of considerable personal dignity." Morgan "thought Dr. LeGrand[e] to be a reasonably clear-headed and straight forward person, who was somewhat proud of his relationship to Lincoln, but would have been ashamed to make capital of it." Morgan to Adin Baber, Yellow Springs, Ohio, 25 November 1949, photocopy, Indiana Boyhood Memorial, Lincoln City, Indiana.

¹⁵³ Notes of Arthur E. Morgan's interview with Nancy Davidson, half-sister of Sophie Hanks's son James LeGrande, February 1909, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁴ "Notes on Arthur E. Morgan's first trip – Jasper [Arkansas, February 1909]," Morgan Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁵ Undated questionnaire filled out for Arthur E. Morgan by Dr. James LeGrande, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁶ Reminiscences of John J. Hall in Eleanor Gridley, The Story of Abraham Lincoln, or The Journey from the Log Cabin to the White House (n.p.: Juvenile Publishing Co., 1908), 60. John J. Hall (1829-1909) was the grandson of Abraham Lincoln's great-aunt Nancy and the son of his stepsister Matilda Johnston Hall. As an infant, he was a member of the Lincoln family caravan that moved from Indiana to Illinois. Upon Thomas Lincoln's death in 1851, he bought his farm and lived there with his family and with Thomas's widow, Sarah Bush Lincoln. She spent the rest of her life at Hall's home.

¹⁵⁷ An Indiana tradition reported in S. Louise Marsh, Young Abe Lincoln (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1929), 52.

Lincoln's father, who "looked upon bone and mussel [as] sufficient to make the man" and thought "that time spent in school [w]as doubly wasted," would "slash" Abe "for neglecting his work by reading."¹⁵⁸ Sometimes Thomas hid and even threw out Lincoln's books.¹⁵⁹ Five years after Lincoln, at the age of twenty-two, left his father's home, Thomas Lincoln scoffingly remarked: "I suppose that Abe is still fooling hisself with eddication. I tried to stop it, but he had got that fool idea in his head, and it can't be got out. Now I hain't got no eddication, but I get along far better than ef I had." Thomas then showed how he kept his accounts by marking a rafter with a piece of coal and proudly declared: "That thar's a heap better 'n yer eddication." He added that "if Abe don't fool away all his time on his books, he may make something yet."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ John B. Helm to Herndon, Hannibal, Missouri, 20 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 48; Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, ibid., 41. Cf. William Makepeace Thayer, The Pioneer Boy and How He Became President (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1863), 131-32. Thayer's source may well have been Dennis Hanks. See pp. 126-29. Lincoln's stepmother reported things differently. In 1865, she said: "As a usual thing Mr Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it. He would do it himself first. Mr. Lincoln could read a little & could scarcely write his name: hence he wanted, as he himself felt the uses & necessities of Education his boy Abraham to learn & he Encouraged him to do it in all ways he could – . . . When Abe was reading My husband took particular Care not to disturb him – would let him read on and on till Abe quit of his own accord." Sarah Bush Lincoln, interview with Herndon, near Charleston, Illinois, 8 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 107-8. Noteworthy in Mrs. Lincoln's account are the qualifiers: "as a usual thing" and "if he could help it." Lincoln allegedly said that "My father had suffered greatly for the want of education, and he determined at an early day that I should be well educated. And what do you think he said his ideas of a good education were? We had an old dog-eared arithmetic in our house, and father determined that somehow, or somehow else, I should cipher clear through that book." Leonard Swett, in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1886), 458.

¹⁵⁹ Mrs. Mary J. Scott, a great-niece of Lincoln's friend Joseph C. Richardson, in Charles T. Baker, "How Lincoln Saved the Farm," Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 14 October 1926, copied from the Monitor of 26 August 1920. Cf. Charles T. Baker, "The Lincoln Family in Spencer County," Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 16 February 1928. Based on what he learned from several of the Lincolns' neighbors and friends, J. Edward Murr, a vigorous defender of Thomas Lincoln's reputation, asserted that it was "true beyond all peradventure of a doubt that Tom Lincoln was stoutly opposed to Abe's reading, and in certain stormy ways opposed Abe's habit of borrowing books." Thomas manifested his disapproval of Abe's reading "in an ugly fashion." Murr, "Wilderness Years of Lincoln," 141-42. According to Murr, Thomas abruptly changed his mind about Abe's reading after the lad at the age of sixteen thwarted a scheme to defraud the family of its farm; he did so by reading a legal paper which a neighbor had prepared for Thomas to sign. He was about to do so when Abe, after perusing the document, alerted his father that if he signed it he would lose the farm. Murr, "Some Pertinent Observations Concerning 'Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,'" 8, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹⁶⁰ William G. Greene in Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 75; Browne, Every-Day Life of Lincoln, 88. William G. Greene shared his reminiscences of Lincoln with Whitney. Lincoln the Citizen, 83. Greene said he "spent a few

MOTHER NANCY

Though Lincoln's estrangement from his father is well documented, little is known about his relationship with his mother, who died when Abe was just nine years old. In fact, little is known about her at all. She was born in Virginia around 1783 or 1784.¹⁶¹ Accounts of her appearance differ widely: her complexion was variously described as "dark," "sandy," "pale," and "exceedingly fair," while her hair was deemed light by some and dark by most. Her eyes were evidently hazel. Some observers remembered her as tall (one estimate placed her at six feet), while another said she was "a heavy built Squatty woman" of "rather low stature;" most who recalled her thought she was "rather above Mediate hight." She had "a spare delicate frame," weighed "about 120 pounds," and was "not at all good looking," with a face "Sharp & angular," "high forehead," and "rather Coarse" features which gave her "the appearance of a laboring woman."¹⁶² (Lincoln's boyhood chum Austin Gollaher demurred, calling her "middling good looking.")¹⁶³ A minister who interviewed people who knew the Lincolns in Indiana described Nancy Hanks as "about five feet ten inches" tall, "bony, angular, lean and . . . 'thin'" with "long arms, large head, with the forehead exceedingly broad and not at all a retreating forehead." Her

nights" with Thomas Lincoln. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 12.

¹⁶¹ Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 236.

¹⁶² John Hanks to Jesse W. Weik, Linkville, Oregon, 12 June 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 615; Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], ibid., 598; Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, ibid., 113, 111; Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], ibid., 97; John Hanks, interview with John Miles, Decatur, Illinois, 25 May 1865, ibid., 5; Elinor Peck's reminiscences of Nancy Hanks as recounted by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Henry B. Peck (née Catherine Smith, 1827-1909), the daughter of Dr. William B. Smith, in Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 11-12; Samuel Haycraft to John B. Helm, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, 5 July 1865, and to Herndon, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 84, 67; Henry Brooner, paraphrased in David Turnham to Herndon, Dale, Indiana, 19 November 1866, ibid., 403; John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 454; Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, ibid., 113.

¹⁶³ Austin Gollaher, interviewed by Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, ca. October 1895, in "Hanks Family Notes," vol. 1, p. 45, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.

eyes “were small, deep sunken and gray-blue in color” and her “ears were very large and stood out from the head; her mouth was large and nose quite prominent. Her cheek bones were very high, chin prominent and a long ‘stringy’ neck with the chest ‘sunken.’”¹⁶⁴

Nancy Hanks was evidently intelligent. Her son called her "an intellectual woman, a heroic woman," and "a woman of genius."¹⁶⁵ Dennis Hanks thought her "highly intellectual by nature," with a "strong" memory and a "quick perception."¹⁶⁶ Nathaniel Grigsby reported that she was known "for the Extraordinary Strength of her mind among the family and all who knew her: she was superior to her husband in Every way. She was a brilliant woman."¹⁶⁷ She enjoyed a reputation for outdoing all the local women at spinning flax.¹⁶⁸

She was also “known for kindness – tenderness – charity & love to the world” and was “V[er]y affectionate in her family.”¹⁶⁹ Both in Kentucky and Indiana, “her cheerful disposition

¹⁶⁴ J. Edward Murr, “Some Pertinent Observations Concerning ‘Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,’” 5, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹⁶⁵ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Herndon to John W. Wartmann, Springfield, 19 February 1870, copy, Southwestern Indiana Historical Society Papers, Evansville Central Library.

¹⁶⁶ Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 37. According to William Herndon and Jesse Weik, Lincoln in 1851 described his mother as “highly intellectual by nature and had a strong memory, acute judgment, was cool and heroic.” William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, Herndon's Lincoln, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (1889; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 22. They evidently confused Lincoln's words with those of Dennis Hanks, who in 1865 stated that Nancy Hanks was “highly intellectual by nature. Her memory was strong – her [perception?] was quick – her judgement was accute almost.” Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 37. Why Herndon and Weik ascribed Dennis Hanks's words to Lincoln is a mystery.

¹⁶⁷ Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 113. For similar assessments, see John Hanks, interview with John Miles, Decatur, Illinois, 25 May 1865, ibid., 5; John Hanks, interview with Herndon [1865-66], ibid., 454; William Wood, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, ibid., 124.

¹⁶⁸ Undated letter by C. S. H. V. (Charlotte Spear Hobart Vawter) to the editor of the Indianapolis Journal, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, p. 9, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁹ Augustus H. Chapman's written statement, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 97; Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, ibid., 40. He added that she was “affectionate, the most affectionate I ever saw – never knew her to be out of temper.” Cf. Dennis Hanks, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], ibid., 598; John Hanks, interviewed with John Miles, Decatur, 25 May 1865, ibid., 5;

and active habits were a dower” to the pioneers with whom she lived.¹⁷⁰ She was meek, quiet, amiable, and "would not talk very much."

She was, however, "not very sociable” and “didn't go out among the neighbors," who “wanted to be sociable but they stopped going to see her because she would not come to see them.”¹⁷¹ Some thought she had “a sad appearance” and was “rather gloomy.”¹⁷² Her son described her as "somewhat sad," and John Hanks detected a "Sadness" about her.¹⁷³

Her passivity and anti-social tendencies may have been partly rooted in depression.¹⁷⁴

Indiana neighbors recalled that she “possessed great melancholy.”¹⁷⁵ A Kentuckian attributed her

John Hanks, interview with Herndon [1865-66], ibid., 454; William Wood, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, ibid., 124.

¹⁷⁰ Undated letter by C. S. H. V. (Charlotte Spear Hobart Vawter) to the editor of the Indianapolis Journal, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, p. 9, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress; J. Edward Murr, “Some Pertinent Observations Concerning “Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,”” 5, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹⁷¹ Dennis Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, 8 June 1865, and Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 27, 37; John Hanks to Jesse W. Weik, Linkville, Oregon, 12 June 1887, ibid., 615; reminiscences of Pamela Cowherd (b. 1804), daughter of William McMahan, a good friend of Thomas Lincoln, in an 1885 interview, and Jack Peck, in an 1888 interview, Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 151, 170; affidavit of John Walker McCoy, grandson of John Tuley and Elizabeth Hesson Tuley, recalling what he heard from his grandfather, his grandfather's sister (Elizabeth Tuley Hesson), Nathaniel Grigsby, and from “other old friends, neighbors and acquaintances of Abraham Lincoln in Spencer County, Indiana,” 1937, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University.

¹⁷² Reminiscences of Pamela Cowherd (b. 1804), in an 1885 interview, Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 151; William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 10 October 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷³ William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 19 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 454.

¹⁷⁴ Herndon called Nancy Hanks Lincoln “a rather sad woman, especially at times in Indiana where she was high above her surroundings including all the Hanks’ & I may say the same thing in Ky.” Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 10 October 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who discussed Lincoln with Herndon, told an interviewer that Nancy Hanks Lincoln “had been an unhappy woman in many ways.” Stanton claimed that young Abe was his mother’s “confidant in all her sorrows. She had told him that often in her early married life, before he was born, she wished as she awoke in the mornings that she were dead.” New York Times, 13 February 1896 or 1913*CHECK.

¹⁷⁵ J. Edward Murr, “Some Pertinent Observations Concerning “Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,”” 5, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

depressions to gossip: "People talked about her sometimes, and that depressed her, hurt her."¹⁷⁶

Those hurtful rumors perhaps concerned the unchaste ways of Nancy's mother, Lucey Hanks,

who bore Nancy out of wedlock in Virginia and was later charged with fornication in

Kentucky.¹⁷⁷ At first, Lucey turned baby Nancy over to her own parents; later the youngster was

raised by her childless aunt and uncle, Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow. She also lived for a time

with Richard Berry and his wife Polly Ewing Berry, friends of Thomas Lincoln.¹⁷⁸ (In 1861,

Abraham Lincoln told a biographer that Nancy "was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Richard

Berry.")¹⁷⁹ Her mother's lack of interest in her may have predisposed Nancy to depression.¹⁸⁰

That she was "base-born" was well known in Indiana and was probably also common knowledge

in Kentucky, too.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Elinor Peck's reminiscences of Nancy Hanks, recounted by her daughter-in-law, Catherine (Mrs. Henry) Peck (b. 1826), the daughter of Billy Smith, in Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 76. Elinor Peck (1773-1853), who was born in Pennsylvania and lived most of her life near Mill Creek Farm in Kentucky, was allegedly a friend of Nancy Hanks. Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁷⁷ Herndon to Charles H. Hart, Springfield, 28 December 1866, Hart Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Nancy's mother, Lucey, married Henry Sparrow in 1790; she bore him eight children and died ca. 1825. For documents about Lucey's fornication case, see James A. Peterson, In Re Lucey Hanks (Yorkville, Illinois: privately published, 1973), 26-35. A presentment was brought against Lucey on 24 November 1789. The following May 25, the court discontinued the case, evidently because one month earlier she had applied for a license to wed Henry Sparrow. J. Edward Murr asserted that "Nancy Hanks knew that Lucy Hanks was her mother and likewise knew and brooded over other things traceable to that fact which readily accounted for her melancholy." Murr, "Some Pertinent Observations Concerning 'Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,'" 7, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

¹⁷⁸ Nancy was evidently a cousin of Berry. Undated letter by C. S. H. V. (Charlotte Spear Hobart Vawter) to the editor of the Indianapolis Journal, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, p. 9, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress. The author of this article had interviewed people in Kentucky in 1859 and 1866.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph H. Barrett to [Caroline Hanks Hitchcock?], Loveland, Ohio, 14 November 1902, copied in "Hanks Family Notes," vol. 1, p. 45, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.

¹⁸⁰ J. Edward Murr found no one in Indiana who believed that Lucey Hanks ever showed any interest in her daughter Nancy. Murr, "Wilderness Years of Lincoln," 54-55.

¹⁸¹ J. Edward Murr, "Lincoln in Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 13 (1917): 333-35. William E. Barton's statement that "Her Indiana neighbors never suspected that Thomas and Betsy Sparrow were not her parents" is contradicted by Polly Richardson and Murr's other informants. Barton, Lineage of Lincoln, 237.

Questions were raised about Nancy Hanks's chastity as well as her mother's. Polly Richardson, a neighbor of the Lincolns in both Kentucky and Indiana, told her daughter "that not only was Nancy Hanks an illegitimate child herself but that Nancy was not what she ought to have been herself. Loose."¹⁸² Judge Alfred M. Brown of Elizabethtown informed a historian that she was a "rather loose woman."¹⁸³ According to Brown, "Rumor says that Nancy Hanks had one child before she married Tho[mas] Lincoln[,] a Son, the father of whom was Isaac Friend."¹⁸⁴ A fellow member of the Kentucky bench, John B. Helm, thought Nancy "of low character."¹⁸⁵ Another Kentuckian recalled that she "did not bear a very virtuous name."¹⁸⁶ A resident of Greensburg "considered her disreputable."¹⁸⁷ Lincoln's law partner and biographer William H. Herndon believed that Nancy Hanks "fell in Kentucky about 1805 – fell when unmarried – fell afterward."¹⁸⁸ According to Herndon, the "reputation of Mrs. Lincoln is that she was a bold – reckless – dare devil kind of a woman, stepping to the very verge of propriety."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² J. Edward Murr to Albert J. Beveridge, [New Albany, Indiana, 21 November 1924], Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Murr omits the remarks about Nancy Hanks's reputation as a loose woman in the published version of the remarks of Mrs. Lanman (née Polly Richardson). See Murr, "Lincoln in Indiana," 333-34. In his letter, Murr refers to Mrs. Lanman as "Mrs. Laymon." Her full name, correctly spelled, was provided me by Paul H. Verduin, to whom I am grateful.

¹⁸³ Alfred M. Brown, interview with Jesse W. Weik, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, 23 March 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 612.

¹⁸⁴ Brown to Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, 12 May 1886, Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago. In this letter, Brown reported that Austin Gollaher believed that Abraham Lincoln was sired by George Brownfield, not Thomas Lincoln. Durrett thought Brown's letter ought never to be made public, even if what Brown alleged was true. Durrett to Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, Louisville, Kentucky, [ca. December 1895], copied in "Hanks Family Notes," vol. 1, p. 98, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.

¹⁸⁵ John B. Helm to Herndon, n.p., 1 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 82.

¹⁸⁶ Presley Nevil Haycraft to John B. Helm, 19 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 86.

¹⁸⁷ The father of Mrs. Charles Ridgely, paraphrased in an interview conducted by William E. Barton with Mrs. Ridgely, (née Jane Maria Barret, 1836-1922), Springfield, [1921], Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

¹⁸⁸ Herndon to Charles H. Hart, Springfield, 28 December 1866, Hart Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

¹⁸⁹ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 19 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

A Kentucky woman who “was well acquainted with Nancy Hanks” maintained that Nancy lived in her home on South Fork Creek, near the residence of Thomas Sparrow, where Thomas Lincoln often visited Nancy. The courtship “became so ardent that Thomas and Nancy would make long trips together to camp meetings and such places,” until the woman with whom Nancy was staying “informed Thomas that she disapproved of the long nocturnal absences of Nancy and him, and considered such conduct as unbecoming to unmarried people.” This scolding may have prompted “Nancy’s temporary removal to Washington County and later to her marriage there, instead of her adopted home.”¹⁹⁰

Other sources testify that Nancy lived in Bourbon County “with first one family & then another doing weaving, sewing, or whatever she could, to make her way.” While there, she was courted by Thomas Lincoln, “whose shiftless character caused her friends to think him not worthy of her.” A neighbor unrelated to Nancy, “a good kind old lady – a motherly sort of woman,” took “a great interest in Nancy” and was upset because the young woman “got herself ‘talked about’ from allowing this ‘shiftless Linkhorn’ to wait on her, & the old lady, because she was motherly, & the girl young, & motherless, & seeing that her conduct was about to bring reproach on the Hanks name . . . talked to her & persuaded her to go . . . to Washington County, with some of her Berry relations” who were attending a camp meeting nearby. “This, the girl consented to do, & did do,” but Thomas Lincoln “got in the wagon . . . & went with her.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ In 1930, Otis M. Mather learned this from the aunt of the mother of a prominent former resident of Hardin County. Otis M. Mather, “Nancy Hanks Lincoln,” talk given 13 July 1930 in Lincoln City, Indiana, pp. 5-6, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹⁹¹ This is based on research done by John Y. Ewing of Louisville. Ida N. Pendleton to Ida Tarbell, Hartford, Kentucky, 17 June 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Ewing gleaned his information from several sources: James Thompson, his father-in-law; William Hardesty; Mitchell Thompson, whose mother (Sarah Shipley Mitchell Thompson) was a niece of Richard Berry’s wife and lived in the Berry cabin while Nancy was resident there; and John Clay of Paris, Kentucky. Clay spoke with the woman solicitous of Nancy’s well-being. In 1891, a Kentuckian whose mother was a first cousin of Nancy Hanks and who had lived with her at the home of Richard Berry until she wed, told an interviewer that “stories about her looseness” were untrue. Robert Mitchell Thompson of Washington

(Nancy was “a highly religious woman” who “believed in shouting” at camp meetings, urging others to repent.)¹⁹²

Nancy Hanks’s wayward behavior may have inspired the rumor that she was in “a fair wrestle, she could throw most of the men who ever put her powers to the test.” Jack Thomas, clerk of the Grayson County Court, alleged “that he had frequently wrestled with her, and she invariably laid him on his back.”¹⁹³ William Cessna, who had the reputation of being “rather inclined to the company of Women,” told a friend “that he Knew Nancy as well as he ever Knew any woman.”¹⁹⁴

Nancy Lincoln Brumfield, Thomas Lincoln's sister, asserted that Nancy Hanks “was more sinned against than sinning.” Mrs. Brumfield explained that Nancy “would go over to Elizabethtown when Tom Lincoln was away, and that she thought that gave rise to some talk. Folks in those days thought women ought to stay at home and do the work.” Owen Cowley and Elinor Peck believed that Nancy Hanks was “conversationally sinned against in that community.”¹⁹⁵ William H. Herndon observed that “the noblest of women can lose their

County, interviewed by a reporter for the Louisville Times, clipping, ca. June 1891, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

¹⁹² Interview with Austin Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March 1895, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895.

¹⁹³ Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar, 39.

¹⁹⁴ Cessna told this to E. R. Burba. Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 31 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 240.

¹⁹⁵ Mrs. William Maffitt Smith (1814-1902), who claimed to be related to Nancy Hanks Lincoln through her mother (Jane Gray), interviewed by Harvey H. Smith in 1889, in Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 219, 71. Her family lived about two miles from the Lincolns. See also the 1883 interview with Nancy Melton by Ben Irwin, who alleged that Nancy Lincoln Brumfield said that “she had heard some talk about Nancy Hanks that was not complimentary but she believed not one word of it.” Ibid., 196. William E. Barton contended that no such rumors circulated in Kentucky: “there was in Hardin and La Rue Counties in 1860 no memory of any charge against the chastity of Nancy Hanks.” She “left no scandal behind her in Elizabethtown.” Peggy Walters told Richard Creal, judge of the La Rue County Court in Kentucky, that “‘Mrs. Lincoln was a fine woman.’ She affirmed that at that time she knew every woman who lived in this vicinity, knew their reputation, was on terms such that any such report concerning any of them was almost certain to come to her, and that she never heard during the lifetime of Mrs. Thomas Lincoln any charge or rumor affecting her moral character.” John E. Burton also denied that there were any rumors about

character quickly in a little village or in a new and sparsely settled country. Everybody knows everybody, and any man's business is the business of the whole community. Such people love to tattle and to lie about one another. They have nothing to do but to tattle and to lie in small things."¹⁹⁶

Stories about his mother's unsavory reputation, accurate or not, may have reached the ears of her son Abe and made him ashamed of her and her family. Herndon ascribed Lincoln's melancholy in part to his awareness of "the origin and chastity of his near and dear relations" and speculated that Lincoln may have felt suicidal because of "the knowledge of his mother's origin."¹⁹⁷ Lincoln "was informed of all this," Herndon believed; "probably it was thrown up to him in Indiana." He reported that "Lincoln remembered the scorn of her neighbors."¹⁹⁸ J. Edward Murr, an Indianan who interviewed several Hoosier acquaintances of the Lincolns, speculated that Abraham "early knew that his mother was an illegitimate & this troubled him."¹⁹⁹ Lincoln told Herndon "about Dennis Hanks' bastardy," described his grandmother Lucey as "a halfway prostitute," and acknowledged "that his relations were lascivious, lecherous, not to be trusted."²⁰⁰ Lucey Hanks's sister Nancy had a bastard (Dennis Hanks), and Lucey's daughter Sarah bore six

Nancy Hanks's chastity: "Nothing of the sort was ever heard in Elizabethtown while Thomas Lincoln lived here, nor have I ever been able to trace it back of the Civil War." Barton, Paternity of Lincoln, 161, 167, 174, 188.

¹⁹⁶ Herndon to Truman H. Bartlett, Springfield, October 1887, Bartlett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Herndon added: "In cities no man's business is his neighbor's, and so each man and woman attends to his or her business and goes no unnoticed and uncriticized, but woe to the woman in a little village if she makes a false step."

¹⁹⁷ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Herndon, "Nancy Hanks," memo written in Greencastle, Indiana, ca. 20 August 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁹⁸ Herndon told this to Caroline Dall in 1866. Dall, "Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866," entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

¹⁹⁹ Murr to Noble L. Moore, New Albany, Indiana, 17 August 1942, Murr Papers, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

²⁰⁰ Herndon to Charles H. Hart, Springfield, 28 December 1866, Hart Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Herndon to Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, ibid.

illegitimate children.²⁰¹ It is no wonder that in Indiana the Hankses were “known as a peculiar people – not chaste.”²⁰²

Other evidence supports Herndon's contention that Lincoln was ashamed of his mother and the Hanks family in general. Lincoln's autobiographical writings focus on his paternal ancestry and say little about the Hankses. In one of those documents he stated: "My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families – second families, perhaps I should say."²⁰³ He described himself “as one of the class known as ‘scrubs’ down South.”²⁰⁴ A niece of Nancy Hanks's niece said there “was always something queer about the Hankses, for although they were among the earliest settlers in Illinois and had their pick of the land, and plenty of it, and some of them had large, productive farms, yet every one of them turned out as poor as Job's cat.”²⁰⁵

Herndon contended that although Lincoln was ashamed of his mother and other Hankses, he did praise her one day around 1850 as the two men were riding in a buggy ride: "All that I am or hope ever to be I get from my mother – God bless her."²⁰⁶ Often misinterpreted as a sentimental

²⁰¹ Verduin, “Brief Outline of the Joseph Hanks Family,” Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 780-81.

²⁰² David Turnham, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 122.

²⁰³ Autobiography written for Jesse W. Fell, 20 December 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:511.

²⁰⁴ J. O. Cunningham, “Some Recollections of Abraham Lincoln: Delivered before the Firelands Pioneer Association, at Norwalk, Ohio, July 4, 1907, and reprinted from the Pioneer of Dec. 1909” (pamphlet), 16. Cunningham probably heard this from Lincoln in May, 1856, when the future president regaled him and others with “stories and reminiscences with the greatest abandon.” Ibid., 6.

²⁰⁵ Helene Hall Moore, daughter of William J. Hall, who was a nephew of Nancy Hanks, quoted in “In Lincoln's Birthplace,” clipping from the Boston Globe, [1903], Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, vol. 8, pp. 1886-87, Library of Congress.

²⁰⁶ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Cf. same to same, 25 February 1870: “Lincoln himself told me that his mother was a bastard, that she was an intellectual woman, a heroic woman, that his mind he got from his mother, etc.” Cf. Herndon to Weik, Springfield, 19 January 1886: “Lincoln said to me on that occasion this: ‘All that I am or hope ever to be I got from my mother, God bless her.’” Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. In his correspondence and other writings, Herndon never quotes Lincoln referring to his “angel” mother. That locution originated in an interview Herndon gave to George Alfred

paean to Nancy Hanks, that statement was in fact a tribute to the genes she inherited from her aristocratic father.²⁰⁷ Lincoln confided to Herndon that his mother was “a bastard,” the “daughter of a nobleman so called of Virginia. My mother's mother was poor and credulous, etc., and she was shamefully taken advantage of by the man. My mother inherited his qualities and I hers. All that I am or hope ever to be I get from my mother, God bless her. Did you ever notice that bastards are generally smarter, shrewder, and more intellectual than others?”²⁰⁸ Herndon explained that “When Lincoln spoke to me as he did, he had reference to his mother’s mind, nothing else.”²⁰⁹ (Lincoln also told Nicholas Vedder of Green County, Illinois, “that he owed his mind and intellect to his mother.”)²¹⁰

In 1887, Herndon wrote that Lincoln believed "his mother was an illegitimate child of a Virginia planter or large farmer. . . . The father of Nancy Hanks is no other than a Virginia planter, large farmer of the highest & best blood of Virginia & it is just here that Nancy got her good rich blood, tinged with genius. Mr Lincoln told me that she was a genius & that he got his mind from her. Nancy Hanks Lincoln was a woman of a very fine cast of mind, an excellent heart, quick in sympathy – a natural lady – a good neighbor, a firm friend. Good cheer & hilarity

Townsend, who reported that Lincoln “broke out once to Mr. Herndon, as they were returning from court in another county: ‘Billy, all I am or can be I owe to my angel-mother.’” Herndon quoted in George Alfred Townsend’s interview, Springfield correspondence, 25 January, New York Tribune, 15 February 1867. Later that year, he used similar language in another interview: “All I am, under God, I owe to my angel mother – God bless her!” Springfield correspondence by V[olney] H[ickox], July 1867, Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867. Herndon may have told Josiah G. Holland in 1865 that Lincoln said “All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother – blessings on her memory!” J. G. Holland, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Massachusetts: Gurdon Bill, 1866), 23. See also “The Lincoln Mother Controversy,” Lincoln Lore no. 832 (19 March 1945).

²⁰⁷ Gabor S. Boritt and Adam Boritt, “Lincoln and the Marfan Syndrome,” Civil War History 29 (1983): 228.

²⁰⁸ Herndon to Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

²⁰⁹ Herndon to Charles H. Hart, Springfield, 2 March 1867, Hart Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

²¹⁰ Mrs. Robert Fleming, nee Bell Vedder, to [Caroline Hanks Hitchcock?], n.p., 29 January 1895, copied in “Hanks Family Notes,” vol. 1, p. 88, unpublished typescript, Hanks Family Papers, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston. The author of this letter was the daughter of Nicholas Vedder; she recalled her father saying this.

generally accompanied her, & had she been raised at all she must have flourished anywhere, but as it was she was rude & rough, breaking & tearing difficultly through all forms, conditions, customs, habits, etiquette of society. She could not be held to forms & methods of things: & yet she was a fine woman naturally. It is quite probable that a knowledge of her origin made her defiant & desperate: she was very sensitive, sad sometimes – gloomy. Who will tell me the amount & influence of her feelings in this matter – caused by the consciousness of her origin. Let the world forgive her & bless her is my constant prayer. Lincoln often thought of committing suicide. Why? Did the knowledge of his mother's origin or his own, press the thought of suicide upon him? Who will weigh the force of such an idea, as illegitimacy on man & woman, especially when that man or woman is very sensitive, such as Lincoln was."²¹¹ Some scholars doubt Herndon's buggy-ride tale, but it is almost certain that Nancy Hanks was illegitimate and that her son knew it.²¹²

²¹¹ Herndon to Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Herndon, "Nancy Hanks," notes written in Greencastle, Indiana, ca. 20 August 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹² Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher maintained that "Such a revelation, even to his partner, is not consistent . . . with Herndon's repeated assertion that Lincoln was the most reticent and secretive of men. Furthermore, writing in 1889, Herndon declared that Lincoln was 'always mum about his mother,' and that he, Herndon, never dared mention 'Hanks' in Lincoln's presence." Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 241. The Fehrenbachers do not point out that Herndon in his 1889 biography of Lincoln said "On the subject of his ancestry and origin I only remember one time when Mr. Lincoln ever referred to it. It was about 1850, when he and I were driving in his one-horse buggy to the court in Menard county, Illinois. The suit we were going to try was one in which we were likely . . . to touch upon the subject of hereditary traits. [The case was probably Hannah Miller vs. Mary E. Miller, et al.] During the ride he spoke, for the first time in my hearing, of his mother, dwelling on her characteristics, and mentioning or enumerating what qualities he inherited from her. He said, among other things, that she was the illegitimate daughter of Lucey Hanks and a well-bred Virginia farmer of planter; and he argued that from this last source came his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity, his ambition, and all the qualities that distinguished him from the other members and descendants of the Hanks family. His theory in discussing the matter of hereditary traits had been, that, for certain reasons, illegitimate children are oftentimes sturdier and brighter than those born in wedlock; and in his case, he believed that his better nature and finer qualities came from this broad-minded, unknown Virginian. The revelation – painful as it was – called up the recollection of his mother, and, as the buggy jolted over the road, he added ruefully, 'God bless my mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her,' and immediately lapsed into silence. Our interchange of ideas ceased, and we rode on for some time without exchanging a word. He was sad and absorbed. Burying himself in thought, and musing no doubt over the disclosure he had just made, he drew round him a barrier which I feared to penetrate. His words and melancholy tone made a deep impression on me. It was an

In 1860, John Locke Scripps, a campaign biographer, reported that "Lincoln communicated some facts to me concerning his ancestry which he did not wish to have published."²¹³ Scripps was probably alluding to Lincoln's awareness of his mother's illegitimacy. In the 1890s, eleven Hoosiers who knew Lincoln and several children of other Indiana acquaintances of Lincoln told J. Edward Murr that Nancy Hanks was born out of wedlock.²¹⁴ Her niece Sophie said that Nancy "was an illegitimate child."²¹⁵

In light of all this evidence, it is hard to disagree with Walter B. Beals, who in 1925 wrote: "Mr. Lincoln must have known . . . who his grandfather was. All the authorities agree that

experience I can never forget." Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 16-17. (emphasis added). Herndon usually did not travel the Eighth Circuit, but when Menard County was removed from that circuit, he took over most of the firm's business there.

²¹³ Scripps to Herndon, Chicago, 24 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 57.

²¹⁴ Murr reported that in "every case when Lincoln's pioneer neighbors were asked as to the obscure origin of Nancy Hanks, the reply was invariably the same – that she was the daughter of Lucey Hanks, and a Virginian.

"On one occasion after the writer had delivered a lecture on Lincoln in the region where the President had lived as a boy, and having some of Lincoln's old friends in the audience, he was approached by a rather elderly lady who requested an interview on the following day. This was gladly granted. After some questions as to what 'the books said concerning the origin of Nancy Hanks,' the following statement was made:

"I am the daughter of a woman who was about the same age as Lincoln and lived neighbors to the Lincolns both in Kentucky and in Indiana. My grandmother and Nancy Hanks were girl friends, and my grandmother often told me that she was present at the birth of President Lincoln. I've heard both my mother and grandmother tell many incidents concerning Nancy Hanks and the Lincolns and Abraham in particular. As to Nancy Hanks' origin I've heard my grandmother say again and again that Lincoln's mother was a fine lady and wasn't to be blamed for some things; that she was the daughter of Lucey Hanks and some unknown man in Virginia. My mother said that was what the older people told her, and no one ever said anything to the contrary.'

"Inquiry was made as to the reliability of the testimony offered, and it not only appeared abundantly trustworthy, but was corroborated by the statement of others. In no case among the pioneers was there a disposition to accept any other story relative to the origin of Lincoln's mother. . . .

"It is passing strange that these pioneers should all be of one mind concerning the obscure origin of Nancy Hanks if there was no foundation for such belief.

'However reliable may be the statements of discoveries made by Mrs. [Caroline Hanks] Hitchcock, a descendant of the Hanks family, relative to the origin of the President's mother [Mrs. Hitchcock maintained that Nancy Hanks was legitimate], there never was, and is not now, just ground for any accusation against these pioneer neighbors of the Lincolns for entertaining and freely expressing the belief, since it was indisputably credited by her illustrious son, and by the elder Hankses and others whose testimony is a matter of record.'" Murr, "Lincoln in Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 13 (1917): 333-35. The woman quoted was Laurinda Mason Lanman. See Murr to Albert J. Beveridge, [New Albany, Indiana, 21 November 1924], Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹⁵ Morgan, "New Light on Lincoln's Boyhood," 218. She told this to her son, who in turn told an interviewer, "I have always understood this from what my mother said about it." Ibid.

the traditions of the Lincoln family were often talked over in his presence during his boyhood, and he must have asked about his mother's family. Matters of illegitimacy were not, in those days, looked upon exactly as they are now. It is difficult for me to believe that growing up in the neighborhood in which he did grow up, surrounded by the people with whom he was surrounded, Lincoln did not know the true story of his mother's birth."²¹⁶

Lincoln may have harbored negative feelings about his mother. At the age of twenty-nine, he made one of the few surviving allusions to her; it was not positive. Describing a woman whom he had courted, he said that after a long separation "when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features, for her skin was too full of fat, to permit its contracting in to wrinkles; but from her want of teeth, [and] weather-beaten appearance in general."²¹⁷ Lincoln failed to mark his mother's grave with a stone. In 1844, while campaigning in Indiana, he told Redmond Grigsby that "he would return soon & wanted him to help fix up grave of his mother," but, Grigsby said, he "got absorbed in politics & was never able to get away."²¹⁸ In 1860, Lincoln informed Nathaniel Grigsby of "his intention to return to Spencer county . . . to erect a suitable monument at his mother's grave, feeling this last to be a sacred duty."²¹⁹ Four years later, a resident of Spencer County offered to do so if Lincoln would authorize it. A few weeks before his death, Lincoln allegedly wrote a friend in Gentryville saying

²¹⁶ Beals to Ida M. Tarbell, [Seattle, Washington], 7 July 1925, copy, William E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

²¹⁷ Lincoln to Mrs. Orville H. Browning, Springfield, 1 April 1838, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:118.

²¹⁸ "Conversation with Redmond Grigsby, Sr., July 17, 1904," in Charles F. Brown's notebook, copy, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University. Cf. John W. Wartmann to Herndon, Rockport, Indiana, 21 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 80. According to Charles T. Baker, an Indiana tradition maintained "that while returning from Washington in 1853 (or about that time [1849]), Abe Lincoln called on the Grigsby's and arranged with Nattie and Jim to build a fence around the grave of his mother to keep the stock off, as all stock had free range upon unfenced land." Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 22 February 1934.

²¹⁹ In 1923, Ida D. Armstrong claimed that she learned this from her father, Joseph Davis Armstrong, who had interviewed Lincoln's Indiana friends and neighbors. Thomas James de la Hunt, "The Pocket Periscope," undated clipping from the Evansville Courier and Journal, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

“that in the coming summer, he intended to visit the locality and make provision for procuring a testimonial of his affection for his mother.”²²⁰ Nothing came of those good intentions.

Little is known about Nancy Hanks Lincoln's treatment of her son. Like other frontier mothers, she evidently dealt out corporal punishment, for one summer day when young Abe fell into Knob Creek, he anticipated maternal wrath. According to his playmate Austin Gollaher, who saved him from drowning, “if Abe’s mother found out she would whip him.” To escape punishment, he dried his wet garments in the sun.²²¹ But even so, Lincoln feared “that his mother would know just as soon as she saw them that they had been wet, and that no amount of reasoning could prevent her from giving him a good thrashing.”²²²

Nancy Hanks Lincoln, like many of her neighbors, seems to have been an indifferent housekeeper. Commenting on an unusually squalid cabin, a woman settler in frontier Illinois ascribed its condition to “the incapacity of the mistress of this family to appreciate a better condition, or help to create one. I afterwards saw many cases of a like mode of living, and am bound, in fairness, to say, that the credit was due in nearly every one to the females.”²²³ An English traveler deemed the typical Indiana frontier cabin a “miserable little log-hole.”²²⁴ The

²²⁰ Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Post, 8 July 1865.

²²¹ Howard Burba, “A Story of Lincoln’s Boyhood,” The American Boy, vol. 6, no. 4 (February 1905). A journalist in 1905 quoted Gollaher saying: “Our clothing was drenched and would furnish our mothers with the evidence that would justify a sound drubbing. We were wise from experience and made up our minds to escape the impending danger.” Edgar K. Webb, “Lincoln’s Birthplace to Be Made a National Park,” unidentified clipping, 1905, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Romance” folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 44, 46.

²²² Interview with Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895.

²²³ Eliza W. Farnham, Life in Prairie Land (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846), 65-66.

²²⁴ Quoted in William E. Wilson, “There I Grew Up,” American Heritage 17 (October 1966): 102. Another traveler observed that many cabins on the Midwestern frontier were “open to every breath of the winds without and swarming within with fleas, bugs, and other vermin.” Adlard Welby, A Visit to North America and the English Settlements in Illinois (London: J. Drury, 1821), Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels, 1748-1846: A Series of Annotated Reprints of Some of the Best and Rarest Contemporary Volumes of Travel: Descriptive of the

Lincolns' Sinking Spring cabin fit this description: it had "no floor or Door . . . no furniture of any Kind, no Beds or Bedding or scarcely any." The family "used rough stools for chairs," and had "a Table Made by putt[ing] 4 Legs in a Hewed puncheon." The only beds were fashioned "by Boring holes in the wall & then resting a post at one corner inserting in them poles & on these poles were Boards." The Lincolns "had no Dishes except a few Pewter & Tin ones. no cooking utensils except a Dut[ch] oven & Lid & 1 skellet & Lid." Only when Thomas Lincoln's second wife, Sarah Bush Johnston, arrived in 1819 with a bureau, bed, knives, forks, cooking utensils, and other amenities did life become less crude. Sarah Johnston brought with her not only these household goods, but also a determination see that a floor was laid, that windows were cut in the walls and covered with greased paper, that the ceiling was painted, and that other improvements were made. If she could persuade Thomas Lincoln to spruce up their abode, it is noteworthy that Nancy failed to do so.²²⁵

Nancy Hanks Lincoln was content to live in the primitive manner that Thomas favored. Augustus H. Chapman asserted that she "never opposed her Husband in any thing, was satisfied with what suited him."²²⁶ She catered to his simple taste in food, walking "five miles to mill to have her corn ground, or to buy a side of bacon, which, with cornmeal mush or johnnycake, comprised their bill of fare the greater part of the time."²²⁷

Nancy may also have been casual in her approach to childrearing. A Kentuckian who grew up near Lincoln recalled that in pioneer days "boys were men; their mothers turned them out to go

Aborigines and Social and Economic Conditions in the Middle and Far West, during the Period of Early American Settlement (32 vols.; Cleveland, Ohio: A.H. Clark Co., 1904-1907), 12:233.

²²⁵ Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 Sept. 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 99.

²²⁶ Ibid., 97. See also John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], ibid., 454.

²²⁷ Rosanne Hall, a niece of Nancy Hanks, paraphrased by her niece, Helene Hall Moore, "In Lincoln's Birthplace," clipping from the Boston Globe, [1903], Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, vol. 8, pp. 1886-87, Library of Congress.

when they got their diapers off and they had to 'root hog or die,' and they got so they could take care of themselves pretty soon. A boy that could not plow when he was eight, was not much of a boy, and all of them had to do it, and they did not whine about it. When they got orders they obeyed them very promptly, and they did not do much talking."²²⁸ Lincoln might have felt neglected, even abandoned, if his mother raised him in this laissez faire manner. He almost certainly felt abandoned when she died in 1818, leaving nine-year-old Abe with his sister and his unsympathetic father. He may have concluded that his mother did not love him. William Herndon and Jesse Weik, without citing a source, maintained that after Nancy's death and the remarriage of Thomas to Sarah Bush Johnston, "her newly adopted children for the first time, perhaps, realized the benign influence of a mother's love."²²⁹

FRONTIER POVERTY

Lincoln was ashamed not only of his family background but also of the poverty in which he grew up. When John Locke Scripps interviewed him in 1860, Lincoln expressed reluctance "to communicate the homely facts and incidents of his early life." The presidential candidate "seemed to be painfully impressed with the extreme poverty of his early surroundings – the utter absence of all romantic and heroic elements," and "thought poorly of the idea" of having a biography written. "Why Scripps," said Lincoln, "it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elogy:

'The short and simple annals of the poor.'

²²⁸ Interview with Jack Peck (b. 1800), 1888, in Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 170-71.

²²⁹ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Life of Lincoln, 33.

That's my life, and that's all you or any one else can make of it."²³⁰ Lincoln described to a friend the "stinted living" he had experienced in Kentucky and the "pretty pinching times" in Indiana.²³¹ In 1846, he referred to the "very poor neighbourhood" where he had grown up in Indiana.²³² Fourteen years later, he was asked to speak to some homeless and friendless boys in New York. In recounting this event, he recalled his own boyhood: "I thought of the time when I had been pinched by terrible poverty. And so I told them that I had been poor; that I remembered when my toes stuck out through my broken shoes in winter; when my arms were out at the elbows; when I shivered with the cold."²³³

Lincoln did not exaggerate the deprivation he had known as a child.²³⁴ In Kentucky, his family's neighbors regarded them as "quite poor," in fact among "the very poorest people."²³⁵

²³⁰ John L. Scripps to Herndon, Chicago, 24 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 57.

²³¹ Leonard Swett in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 457.

²³² Lincoln to Andrew Johnston, Springfield, 6 September 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:384.

²³³ After returning to Springfield following his travels in the East during the late winter of 1860, Lincoln told this to a friend named Jim (probably James Matheny), who in turn related it to Edward Eggleston. Browne, Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln, 322-23.

²³⁴ Some scholars have maintained that the Lincolns were not poor by the standards of the frontier. R. Gerald McMurtry called Thomas Lincoln "a pioneer of intelligence, good standing and excellent morals." Surviving tax books for Hardin County, McMurtry alleged, show "that only fifteen persons out of ninety-eight listed had a greater property value than that of Thomas Lincoln." McMurtry, "Thomas Lincoln, 1776-1851," in McMurtry, A Series of Monographs Concerning the Lincolns and Hardin County, Kentucky (Elizabethtown, Kentucky: Enterprise Press, 1938), 4. Edward Pessen cited this statistic in The Log Cabin Myth: The Social Backgrounds of American Presidents (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 25. See also Louis A. Warren, "The Poverty Myth," Lincoln Kinsman no. 34 (April 1941). Warren's contention that the "Lincoln family was never referred to in Indiana as a poverty-stricken group" (p. 3) is belied by the testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Crawford and several others. Thomas L. Purvis argued that Lincoln exaggerated his poverty for political effect. Purvis, "Lincoln's Family Background," 157-60. Purvis simply asserts, without examining the evidence, that Lincoln's parents belonged to the middle class. The testimony of innumerable neighbors and acquaintances about the poverty of Thomas Lincoln is ignored. Purvis pays no attention to the Hanks family and Lincoln's feelings about them. M. L. Houser also maintained that Lincoln deliberately exaggerated his poverty for political effect. Houser, Lincoln's Education and Other Essays (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), 48-50. While it is true that Thomas Lincoln did own as many as four horses at one time, many relatively poor residents of Hardin County possessed horses. In the Lincolns' tax district, the average taxpayer had 4.6 horses. More than most pioneers, Lincoln and his family experienced "the terrible hardships, the stark crudeness and even abject squalor that prevailed on the fringe of the settlements." Otis M. Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, Hodgenville, 25 June 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress; George R. Poage to Albert J. Beveridge, Jacksonville, Illinois, 22 November 1924, ibid.; Otis M. Mather, "Thomas Lincoln and His Neighbors, 1808-1811," essay dated 11 September 1934, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

One of those neighbors, Austin Gollaher, remembered the Lincoln family living "in abject poverty." He characterized Thomas Lincoln as "the poorest man that ever kept house" and maintained that Nancy Hanks Lincoln "was a good woman, whose only fault was that she was very poor."²³⁶ She "worked hard to make both ends meet," walking miles to do laundry at the homes of her more prosperous Kentucky neighbors.²³⁷ At the time of Lincoln's birth in 1809, the family lived in "dire poverty," a neighbor recorded.²³⁸ Dennis Hanks, who observed the Lincolns in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, described Thomas as "a Very pore man."²³⁹ Hanks's obituarist said of Hardin County in the early nineteenth century: "It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the rudeness of the society of that time and locality or the primitive character of the people, and there

²³⁵ E. R. Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 31 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 240; Usher F. Linder, speech before the Chicago Bar Association, 17 April 1865, Washington Sunday Chronicle, 23 April 1865. Burba reported the views of "the old settlers."

²³⁶ Louisville Courier-Journal, 11 September 1895; interview with Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March 1895, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895; Gollaher paraphrased in J. M. Atherton to Otis M. Mather, 20 June 1924, copy, enclosed in Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 24 July 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Atherton, perhaps relying on Gollaher's testimony, also said that Lincoln's "parents were poor obscure people, subjected to severe trials." Atherton to Marshall Bullitt, Louisville, 23 June 1925 and Atherton to Bullitt, Louisville, 7 July 1925, copy, ibid. Mather called Atherton, who was born in 1841, "one of the most intelligent and successful men in Ky." Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 24 July 1924, ibid.

²³⁷ Robert Mitchell Thompson, interviewed by a reporter for the Louisville Times, clipping, ca. June 1891, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington; Otis M. Mather, "Nancy Hanks Lincoln," talk given 13 July 1930 in Lincoln City, Indiana, pp. 6-7, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky. Mather's source was a grandson of the preacher Alexander McDougal, who lived a few miles from both the Sinking Spring and the Knob Creek farms of Thomas Lincoln. Mather reported that this grandson "repeatedly informed me that it was commonly said among the older members of the McDougal family that Nancy Hanks Lincoln often came to his grandfather's home on foot for the purposes of doing laundry work for the family." McDougal was "a prominent Baptist preacher in the Nolynn Country who in 1805 located on the branch of the Nolynn known as the Little South Fork." Alfred Mackenzie Brown to Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, 17 June 1886, Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago.

²³⁸ A Mrs. Rathbone, paraphrased in the Louisville correspondence of the Enquirer [Cincinnati?], 10 February [1911? or 1912], clipping headlined "Governor Willson To Leave for Hodgenville, Ky.," clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Mrs. Rathbone was the paternal grandmother of Robert Enlow, who represented Larue County in the Kentucky Legislature. She was allegedly called upon to help with the delivery of Abraham and "spent several days at the Lincoln homestead" after the birth. She "related the dire poverty of the Lincolns to the neighbors, who kindly assisted them through the winter until Thomas Lincoln was able to go to work as a carpenter." Enlow heard this story from his maternal grandmother, a Mrs. Kirkpatrick. Ibid.

²³⁹ Dennis Hanks to Herndon, 26 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 176.

is an overabundance of testimony that the two families [the Lincolns and the Hankses] . . . were below rather than above the average. . . . All the testimony indicates that the families were of the class known as ‘poor whites.’”²⁴⁰ It was the same in Indiana, where one of the Lincolns’ sympathetic neighbors, Elizabeth Crawford, told an interviewer that the “Lincolns were very poor folks,” and that they “had little of even the comforts of that time in their home.” A historian who spoke with Mrs. Crawford paraphrased her remarks thus: “Life in the Lincoln home was so hard that she had invited [Lincoln’s sister] Sarah . . . to come and live in the Crawford home and pay for her board by helping with the house work.” She added that Sarah “staid with me about a year before she married. She said there were enough [people] at home.” According to Mrs. Crawford’s interviewer, it “seemed to her ‘very funny,’ as she expressed it, that once when she called at the Lincoln home, they didn’t have anything to offer their guests, as was customary among those very hospitable pioneer people, but they brought out sweet potatoes and scraped them and offered these to their callers.”²⁴¹ To alleviate the Lincolns’ poverty, Mrs. Crawford’s

²⁴⁰ Paris, Illinois, correspondence, 21 October, Roanoke, Illinois, Times, 12 November 1892, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²⁴¹ Thomas Fortune, notes of an 1881 interview with Elizabeth Crawford, Thomas Fortune Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; “Address by William Fortune before the Southwestern Indiana Historical Society, at Princeton, Indiana, on November 12th, 1925,” 12, typescript, Southwestern Indiana Historical Society Papers, Willard Library, Evansville, Indiana. Mrs. Crawford added that Sarah “was a good girl and her and her fellow [Aaron Grigsby] done their sparking [i.e., courting] at our house.” Louis A. Warren doubted that Sarah Lincoln lived in the Crawford’s home, because the Crawfords arrived in Spencer County in 1825 and Sarah was married in 1826. Warren, Lincoln’s Youth, 160. But Redmond Grigsby told Charles F. Brown “Mr. Lincoln’s sister Sallie was married to Mr. Grigsby’s brother Aaron while she worked for Mrs. Crawford at the Crawford Home.” “Conversation with Redmond Grigsby, Sr., 17 July 1904,” in Charles F. Brown’s notebook, copy, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University. Mrs. Crawford told Herndon that “Sarah Lincoln Abe’s Sister worked for me: She was a good, kind, amiable girl, resembling Abe.” Elizabeth Crawford, interview with Herndon, 16 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, Herndon’s Informants, 126. Mrs. Crawford recollected that when she visited the Lincolns, they produced a “plate of potatoes washed and pared verry nicely and handed round it was something new to me for I never had Seen A Raw potato ate before I looked to see how thay made use of them thay took of A potato and ate them like apples.” Elizabeth Crawford to Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 19 April 1866, ibid., 245. Clara Crawford, granddaughter of Josiah Crawford, said that “Abe and his sister, Sarah, worked for Grandfather Crawford. . . . There are a lot of stories about Abe working on the old farm that are not in those books people read. Sarah helped about the house and Abe would grub, shuck corn, split rails and the like. When around the house he was always reading.” Fred L. Holmes, Abraham Lincoln Traveled This Way (Boston: L. C. Page, 1930), 25.

husband Josiah hired Thomas Lincoln and young Abe, even though they "were poor help." Crawford did so because "he knew they needed the work and he would give them work for he felt sorry for them."²⁴²

Other Hoosiers, including Judge John Pitcher, had similar memories of the Lincolns' poverty.²⁴³ In 1865, Presley Haycraft said, "I now know individuals who were acquainted with the family in Indiana who say they passed for honest people there but very poor."²⁴⁴ Lincoln was not invited to Elizabeth Ray Grigsby's wedding feast because, unlike other neighbors, he "didn't have proper clothes."²⁴⁵ At the age of twenty, when he tried to buy ready-made shoes on credit, he was mortified when told to come back when he could pay for them.²⁴⁶ James Grigsby, Sarah Lincoln's brother-in-law, often told his daughter "how poor the [Lincoln] family was."²⁴⁷ John W. Wartmann called the Lincoln family "very poor."²⁴⁸ Joseph Blackford of Boonville testified

²⁴² Maude Jennings Cryderman (daughter of Josiah and Elizabeth Crawford) to Mrs. Calder Ehrmann, Tipton, Indiana, 4 March 1928, John E. Iglehart Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. The Crawfords' grandson recorded a similar story: "Abe and his father were employed to help build the first cabin which was soon constructed. They were then employed to clear and fence land and assist in planting and cultivating the crops." Will F. Adams, "The Crawford Family," Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 1 August 1935. Mrs. Crawford told Herndon that "Abe worked for my husband – daubed our Cabin in 1824 or 5 in which we lived." Elizabeth Crawford, interview with Herndon, 16 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 125. See also Francis Marion Van Natter, Lincoln's Boyhood: A Chronicle of His Indiana Years (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1963), 33-36. Despite this abundant evidence, Louis A. Warren doubted that Thomas assisted in such work. Warren, Lincoln's Youth, 160.

²⁴³ John Pitcher, paraphrased in Oliver C. Terry to Jesse W. Weik, Mt. Vernon, Indiana, 14 July 1888, and [?] July 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 658-59, 662-63.

²⁴⁴ Presley Nevil Haycraft to John B. Helm, n.p., 19 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 87.

²⁴⁵ Charles Todd Engoff, grandson of Elizabeth Ray Grigsby, interviewed by Francis Marion Van Natter, 22 November 1935, notes, Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University.

²⁴⁶ Murr, "Wilderness Years of Lincoln," 285. The Rev. Mr. Allen Brooner was Murr's informant.

²⁴⁷ Mrs. Bartley Inco (née Nancy Grigsby), in a talk given 20 June 1916, Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 20 September 1934; Carrie Grigsby, wife of Reuben Grigsby's grandson, in a roundtable discussion in Gentryville, n.d., paraphrased in Arietta F. Bullock, "Jonesboro in 1830," 19, typescript of a paper delivered to the Southwestern Indiana Historical Society, 1938, Bullock Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

²⁴⁸ Wartmann's talk, 20 June 1916, Evansville Courier, n.d., in "Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, Remarks of Hon. Charles Lieb, of Indiana, in the House of Representatives, June 28, 1916," Congressional Record, 64th Congress, 1st Session, vol. 53, part 10, p. 10177.

that “the hardships of the [Lincoln] family were extreme.”²⁴⁹ Several other Indianans who had known Lincoln informed J. Edward Murr that the “poverty of the Lincolns was extreme.” Murr claimed that he “could detail a number of incidents touching upon the poverty, not to say the extreme want, of the Lincolns.”²⁵⁰ Murr cited the “extreme poverty of his parents” as a reason why Lincoln could not be classified “as a Kentuckian in the sense that he stood forth as typical and representative of the citizenship of that great State.”²⁵¹ Similarly, Joseph D. Armstrong, who during the 1860s and 1870s gathered information about the Lincolns in Indiana, concluded that Thomas “was a very poor man” and that Abe’s life “was one of hard labor, and great privation.”²⁵² A neighbor in Indiana recalled that Lincoln’s “folks were awfully poor.”²⁵³ Lincoln commented wryly on the poverty of his family one evening as his father pronounced the customary blessing over dinner, which that day consisted of a small dish of roasted potatoes. Abe called them “vary poor blessings.”²⁵⁴

Given the economic and emotional poverty he endured in his early years, it is no wonder that Lincoln, according to his close friend Joseph Gillespie, “felt very strongly that there was

²⁴⁹ New York Evening Post, 11 February 1911. Blackford, born in 1816, had known the Lincolns in Indiana.

²⁵⁰ Murr, “He Knew Lincoln’s Neighbors,” Ehrmann, Missing Chapter, 92-93.

²⁵¹ Murr, “Lincoln in Indiana,” Indiana Magazine of History 14 (1918): 13. Murr said “Lincoln’s poverty . . . was exceedingly great.” Ibid., 22. Elsewhere he maintained that they were “exceedingly poor.” Murr, “Wilderness Years of Lincoln,” 26.

²⁵² Joseph D. Armstrong, “History of Spencer County,” in An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Spencer County, Indiana (Philadelphia: D. J. Lake, 1879), 13. In 1857, the twenty-year-old Armstrong, at the suggestion of Lincoln’s benefactor and employer William Jones, settled in Gentryville, where he worked for a merchant. Eventually he became superintendent of the Spencer County public schools and the county auditor. Between 1858 and 1879 he interviewed people who knew the Lincolns. A Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men of the State of Indiana (Cincinnati: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1880), 1:2; Oakland City, Indiana, Enterprise, 16 November 1899, copy, Francis Marion Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University; Rockport, Indiana, Democrat, 18 May 1906; Rockport, Indiana, Journal, 25 May 1906.

²⁵³ Reminiscences of Mrs. Annie Heibach, daughter of James L. Grant, San Francisco Call, 16 February 1896.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Lincoln told this story to Dennis Hanks’s daughter. Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 12 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 512-13.

more of discomfort than real happiness in human existence under the most favorable circumstances.”²⁵⁵ To an Illinois neighbor, Lincoln often confided: "I have seen a good deal of the back side of this world."²⁵⁶

OLD KENTUCKY HOMES

Cut off by a 75-mile-long escarpment misleadingly named Muldraugh Hill, the isolated area of Kentucky’s Pennyroyal region where Lincoln spent his first seven years was exceedingly provincial, with few towns, only primitive churches, and virtually no schools.²⁵⁷ The area got its name because its soil was so poor that “nothing but that noxious weed, pennyroyal, could flourish” there.²⁵⁸ In these backwoods, social life was crude. Travelers reported that “Excessive drinking seems the all-pervading, easily besetting sin of this wild hunting country;” that a “canine mode of fighting” was common, “characterized by the most savage ferocity,” with eye gouging, kicking, and biting widely employed; and that “the passion for gaming and spirituous

²⁵⁵ Joseph Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 185.

²⁵⁶ The Reverend Mr. Noyes M. Miner, “Personal Reminiscences of Lincoln,” manuscript, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Miner, who settled in Springfield in 1855 and served as the pastor of the First Baptist Church for fifteen years, lived across the street from the Lincolns. In 1882 he delivered this paper as a lecture in New York. Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 23 February 1882, p. 2. In 1853, Lincoln allegedly told Leonard Swett that he had enjoyed a happy childhood. Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 457; New York correspondence by “Jerome,” 6 February 1879, Indianapolis Indiana Journal, 10 February 1879. But Swett’s report of that conversation clashes with the testimony of Lincoln’s own writings and his conversations with friends like Henry C. Whitney, Joseph Gillespie, John Locke Scripps, and Noyes Miner, and with the testimony of innumerable neighbors and of relatives like John Hanks, John J. Hall, Sophie Hanks, and Dennis Hanks. Moreover, in another version of that 1853 conversation, Swett does not mention Lincoln’s assertion that he enjoyed a happy childhood. Undated manuscript marked “Draft of Swett’s Mr. Lincoln’s story of his own life in A. T. Rice’s Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln (N.Y. 1888),” Swett Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In addition, Swett’s account in Rice’s volume contains many factual errors that cast doubt on the accuracy of his memory of that 1853 conversation. On Swett’s relations with Lincoln, see Robert S. Eckley, “Lincoln’s Intimate Friend: Leonard Swett,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 92 (1999): 274-87.

²⁵⁷ Clark, “Kentucky Influence on the Life of Lincoln,” 3; Otis M. Mather, “Explorers and Early Settlers South of Muldraugh Hill,” Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society 22 (1924): 21-39; Mather, “Sketch of Old Hardin County,” talk given in 1926 and revised in 1931, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁵⁸ Letter from “A Kentuckian,” Far Rockaway, N.Y., 13 February, New York Times, 17 February 1901. The pennyroyal plant is a variety of mint.

liquors” was “carried to excess, which frequently terminates in quarrels degrading to human nature.”²⁵⁹ Kentuckians fought “for the most trifling provocations, or even sometimes without any, but merely to try each other’s prowess, which they are fond of vaunting of. Their hands, teeth, knees, head and feet are their weapons, not only boxing with their fists, . . . but also tearing, kicking, scratching, biting, gouging each others eyes out by a dexterous use of a thumb and finger, and doing their utmost to kill each other.”²⁶⁰ Duels were instituted to replace such brawling.²⁶¹

Of the homestead where Lincoln was born in 1809, a leading historian of Kentucky, Thomas D. Clark, observed that no knowledgeable judge of land “would have given the Sinking Creek farm much praise; as a matter of fact, few backwoodsmen could have seen in that farm any promise at all,” for there was no “fertile patch of bottom land to make up for the unproductive ridges about the newly constructed Lincoln cabin.” The rolling landscape made the site “a place for a poet” but not for “a practical farmer who had to grub a living for a growing family from the soil.”²⁶² A journalist in 1905 wrote “it was then and is now a sterile tract of land, almost destitute of timber and covered with a growth of weeds and low growing bushes. It was not a first land farming country, and Lincoln’s farm was the poorest in the neighborhood.”²⁶³ In 1866, the owner

²⁵⁹ William Faux, Memorable Days in America: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1823), reprinted in Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels, 11:213; letter of 9 December 1818, in James Flint, Letters from America (Edinburgh: W. & C. Tait, 1822), reprinted *ibid.*, 9:138; Francois Andre Michaux, Travels West of the Alleghany Mountains (London: B. Crosby, 1805), reprinted *ibid.*, 3:247.

²⁶⁰ F. Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country through the States of Ohio and Kentucky (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear & Hitchbaum, 1810), reprinted in Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels, 4:137.

²⁶¹ J. Winston Coleman, Jr., Famous Kentucky Duels (Lexington: Henry Clay Press, 1969), 3.

²⁶² Clark, “Kentucky Influence on the Life of Lincoln,” 4. On Clark, see John E. Kleber, ed., Thomas D. Clark of Kentucky: An Uncommon Life in the Commonwealth (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2003; Frank Steely and H. Lew Wallace, “Thomas D. Clark: A Biographical Sketch,” Filson Club History Quarterly 60 (1986): 293-318.

²⁶³ Edgar K. Webb, “Lincoln’s Birthplace to Be Made a National Park,” unidentified clipping, 1905, Abraham Lincoln Association reference files, “Romance” folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

of the Sinking Spring farm described it as “broken barren land.”²⁶⁴ The neighborhood was thinly settled; in the 36-square-mile tax district where the Lincoln farm was located, there lived only 85 taxpayers, 44 slaves, and 392 horses.²⁶⁵

When Abe was two, his family moved a few miles northeast to a valley which penetrated Muldraugh’s Hill. The Lincolns’ farm there on Knob Creek was “knotty – knobby as a piece of land could be – with deep hollows – ravines – cedar trees Covering the parts – knobs – knobs as thick as trees could grow.”²⁶⁶ (“Knobs” are steep, conical hills.) Thomas D. Clark judged that the Knob Creek farm, for all its “rugged physical beauty,” held “little or no economic promise for the farmer;” it “was the kind of place which ground men and women down into deeply-lined and exhausted physical beings before the passage of four-score years.”²⁶⁷ Remote, small, and subject to flooding, it was much less desirable than the farm they were leaving.²⁶⁸ Thomas may have been drawn to Knob Creek by its proximity to a ferry and inn, which lent it more appeal than the lonely barrens along Nolin Creek.²⁶⁹ Perhaps he prized the relative abundance of timber growing along Knob Creek. In any event, the move was uncomplicated, for Thomas had two horses and only a few possessions to haul.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ Richard A. Creal to Herndon, Larue County, Kentucky, 12 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 228.

²⁶⁵ Otis M. Mather, “Thomas Lincoln and His Neighbors, 1808-1811,” essay dated 11 September 1934, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁶⁶ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 38. On this region, see Wilbur Greeley Burroughs, The Geography of the Kentucky Knobs: A Study of the Influence of Geology and Physiography upon the Industry, Commerce and Life of the People (Frankfort: Kentucky Geological Survey, 1926).

²⁶⁷ Clark, “Kentucky Influence on the Life of Lincoln,” 4.

²⁶⁸ Brown, “Title of Thomas Lincoln,” 32-33.

²⁶⁹ Otis M. Mather, “The Lincoln Family on Knob Creek,” talk given in 1942, pp. 2-3, Mather Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁷⁰ Otis M. Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, Hodgenville, 15 July 1926, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

Because Lincoln was only seven when the family moved to Indiana, little is known of his Kentucky years. One of his earliest memories was of the Knob Creek farm. In 1864, he reminisced about that site: "Our farm was composed of three (3) fields. It lay in the valley surrounded by high hills and deep gorges. Sometimes when there came a big rain in the hills the water would come down through the gorges and spread all over the farm. The last thing that I remember of doing there was one Saturday afternoon, the other boys planted the corn in what we called the big field; it contained seven (7) acres, and I dropped the pumpkin seeds. I dropped two seeds every other hill and every other row. The next Sunday morning there came a big rain in the hills, it did not rain a drop in the valley, but the water coming down through the gorges washed ground, corn, pumpkin seeds and all clear off the field."²⁷¹ This episode may have proved memorable to Lincoln because it represented in miniature the futile farming career of his father, whose efforts to cultivate the soil usually came to naught. Lincoln's only other recorded reminiscence of an episode in his Kentucky youth dates from the War of 1812: "I had been fishing one day and caught a little fish which I was taking home. I met a soldier in the road, and having always been told at home that we must be good to soldiers, I gave him my fish."²⁷²

ABE'S FIRST SEVEN YEARS

²⁷¹ J. J. Wright recalled that "[i]n June, 1864, Jacob T. Wright then chairman of the Republican State Central Committee of Indiana with his brother Dr. J. J. Wright on their way from Indianapolis to attend the Republican National Convention at Baltimore, arrived in Washington City the Saturday preceding the Convention. On the following Sunday morning at 9 o'clock by previous arrangement, the Wright brothers together with John D. Defrees, Government printer, and who was personally acquainted with President Lincoln, called at the Executive Mansion. The party was immediately ushered into the library in a very informal manner, where the President greeted each one very cordially. During the 30 minutes conversation which ensued Mr. Defrees said among other things: 'Mr. President how would you like when the war is over to visit your old home in Kentucky.' Mr. Lincoln replied in these exact words. 'Mr. Defrees, I would like it very much. I remember that old home very well.'" J. J. Wright, M.D., to Ida Tarbell, Emporia, Kansas, 18 April 1896, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁷² John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 1:27. Companies of volunteers passed by the Lincoln cabin on their way home after the war. Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 36.

Abe had a reputation as a “bashful,” “Somewhat dull,” “peacable” and “not brilliant” boy who “always appeared to be very quiet during play time,” “Never Seemed to be rude,” had “a liking for Solitude,” was “rather noted for Keeping his clothes cleaner longer than any others,” was “the one to adjust difficulties between Boys his size,” and “was considered brave.”

Lincoln’s pastimes were shaped by his rural surroundings. He “had a fondness for fishing and hunting with his dog & Axe.” Whenever “his dog would run a Rabbit in a hollow tree he would chop it out.”²⁷³ Abe used to accompany Dennis Hanks “down the branch to shoot fish in puddles & holes washed by the water.”²⁷⁴ One playmate recalled that he was “the shyest, most reticent, most uncouth and awkward-appearing, homeliest, and worse dressed” boy in the neighborhood.²⁷⁵ He “had a reputation as a wrestler,” though “he would not fight unless compelled to do so.”²⁷⁶ One day while waiting at the mill he “was standing at a huge tree when he was attacked, without either provocation or warning, by a boy larger than himself,” who was accompanied by two friends. Onlookers were astonished when “Lincoln soundly thrashed the first, second and third boy in succession, and then placed his back against the tree, defied the whole crowd and taunted them with cowardice.”²⁷⁷ The future president nearly drowned while crossing Knob Creek over a footlog; he lost his balance, fell in, and had to be rescued by Austin

²⁷³ John Hanks, interview with Herndon [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 454; E. R. Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, 31 March 1866, ibid., 241.

²⁷⁴ Dennis Hanks, interview with Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 8 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 103.

²⁷⁵ Alexander Sympton told this to Henry Clay Whitney. Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 36-37. Born in Green County, Kentucky, in 1807, Sympton migrated to Illinois in 1836 and settled in Carthage eight years later. Lincoln called him a “confidential friend.” Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:43. He frequently visited Sympton. Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 194-95.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Austin Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895.

²⁷⁷ Alexander Sympton told this to Henry Clay Whitney. Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 36-37.

Gollaher.²⁷⁸ Abe and Gollaher “had no settled games” but rather improvised their play. Whatever they did, Lincoln “took a delite in excelling.”²⁷⁹ Lincoln remembered Gollaher and many other Kentuckians fondly. During the Civil War, he asked a Kentuckian “about the Cessnas Brownfields Friends Ashcrafts Kirkpatrick’s & at last sayed where is my old friend and playmate Austin Gollilier.” Lincoln declared, “I would rather see Gollilier than any man living,” and told a scatological story about a prank they had played as boys.²⁸⁰

In Kentucky, Abe briefly attended a school taught by Zachariah Riney, a Roman Catholic and “a man of an excellent character, deep piety, and a fair education” who “was extremely popular with his scholars.”²⁸¹ In later years, Lincoln always spoke of him “in terms of grateful respect” and remembered that Riney “made no proselyting efforts.”²⁸² On the first day of class,

²⁷⁸ Charles Friend to Herndon, Hodgenville, 19 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 235; Gollaher, interviewed by D. J. Thomas, Los Angeles Times, 18 August 1895. Gollaher was three years older than Lincoln. Cf. J. Rogers Gore, The Boyhood of Abraham Lincoln: From the Spoken Narrative of Austin Gollaher (Louisville: Standard Press, 1921), 46. This volume is based on a series of interviews that Gore, editor of The LaRue County Herald, had with Gollaher (1805-98) shortly before his death. Unfortunately Gore “dramatized” the information he received, so the book is nearly valueless for the historian. Gollaher settled with his family along Knob Creek in 1812. Alfred Mackenzie Brown to Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, 17 June 1886, Durrett Personal Papers, University of Chicago. For more on Gollaher, see an interview with him by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March 1895, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895, and Oscar Schisgall, “The Man Who Saved Lincoln’s Life,” This Week, 6 February 1954, 7, 24, 26, based in part on interviews with Gollaher’s descendants.

²⁷⁹ Charles Friend to Herndon, Hodgenville, 19 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 235.

²⁸⁰ Charles Friend to Herndon, Sonora, Kentucky, 20 August 1889, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 676. Dr. Jesse H. Rodman was impressed with Lincoln's detailed knowledge of his boyhood region: “he seemed to know more about the general topography of the County than any person he ever saw.” Lincoln “discribed every house and farm hill Creek and family that lived here when he was a boy.” For a sanitized version of the scatological story, see Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 17-18.

²⁸¹ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 22; “Life Sketch of Zachariah Riney,” typescript enclosed in Lafe S. Pence to Albert J. Beveridge, Lebanon, Kentucky, 31 October 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress; C. W. Hackensmith, “Lincoln's Family and His Teachers,” Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 67 (1969): 325; Roger H. Futrell, “Zachariah Riney: Lincoln’s First Schoolmaster,” Lincoln Herald 74 (1972): 136-42. John Locke Scripps said that Lincoln attended school with Riney when he was six years old. Scripps, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler and Lloyd A. Dunlap (1860; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 27. Austin Gollaher told Francis X. Rapiet that Lincoln attended school “very little.” Barton, Life of Lincoln, 1:79, 82.

²⁸² Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 22; Joseph H. Barrett, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys, 1860), 19. Barrett recorded that Riney’s “peculiarities have not been wholly effaced from the memory of his since so distinguished pupil.” Barrett interviewed Lincoln in the spring and summer of 1860. As he later wrote,

Abe appeared wearing a long, one-piece linsey shirt and, improbably, a sunbonnet. He returned home weeping because his schoolmates teased him. To spare him further humiliation, his mother braided a more masculine straw hat.²⁸³ The windowless, dirt-floored schoolhouse, located about three miles from the Lincolns' cabin, was made of rough logs “so arranged that the ends stuck out and formed little recesses, in which the children played hide-and-seek. These were the favorite hiding places for little ‘Abe.’”²⁸⁴

Later, Abe was a pupil of his neighbor, Caleb Hazel, “a youth with a little smattering of education” who “‘took up’ a school some four or five miles distant.”²⁸⁵ According to William M. Thayer, Hazel was able to read and write, “but beyond this he made a poor figure.”²⁸⁶ A friend said Hazel “could perhaps teach spelling reading & indifferent writing & perhaps could Cipher to the rule of three – but had no other qualifications of a teacher except large size & bodily Strength

during his first visit with Lincoln, shortly after the adjournment of the Republican convention in Chicago in May 1860, the newly-nominated candidate “earnestly and even sadly insisted that there was no adequate material” for the campaign biography that Barrett proposed to write. Yet, Barrett recalled, Lincoln “received me very kindly, and showed no unusual reserve in talking of either his earlier or maturer life. As to both periods, he readily gave such facts as my inquiries invited or suggested; introduced me to friends with whom he had been on intimate terms for more than twenty years; and put me in the way of exploring newspaper files and legislative journals in the Illinois State library for biographic material. . . . My personal intercourse with Lincoln was continued later at Springfield, as well as during part of his journey to Washington the next winter, and in that city thenceforward during the rest of his days.” In 1861, Lincoln appointed Barrett commissioner of pensions in the Interior Department, a post he held for six years. Preface written in November 1903, in Barrett, Abraham Lincoln and His Presidency (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1904), 1:iii-iv.

²⁸³ Thomas Lincoln told the story about the sunbonnet and Austin Gollaher described the shirt to J. M. Atherton. Atherton to Otis Mather, Louisville, 20 June 1924, copy, Albert J. Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress; George T. Balch, recalling the words of his father, George B. Balch, paraphrased in Dr. W. H. Doak, Martinsville, Illinois, to his nephew, Dr. W. D. Ewing of Cambridge, Ohio, [1 February 1923], Terre Haute, Indiana, Star, 11 February 1923; reminiscences of George E. Balch, Lerna, Illinois, correspondence, 27 August [1937], Mattoon, Illinois, Daily Journal Gazette, undated clipping, Eleanor Gridley clipping file, in possession of Charles Hand, Paris, Illinois.

²⁸⁴ Mrs. Susie Yeager, daughter of Riney, to James M. Yeager, 1890, New York Tribune, 26 December 1897.

²⁸⁵ Hackensmith, “Lincoln’s Family and Teachers,” 326; Warren, Lincoln’s Parentage, 213-17; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 22-23. John Locke Scripps said that Lincoln attended school with Hazel when he was six years old. Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 29.

²⁸⁶ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 22.

to thrash any boy or youth that came to his School.”²⁸⁷ This last quality was necessary on the frontier, where schoolboys occasionally assaulted their teachers.²⁸⁸ Thrashings were sometimes administered with switches resembling ox gads, five feet long and quite thick.²⁸⁹ One day, Hazel sent Abe to cut a switch to be used on a classmate, an errand he disliked because,” as Gollaher put it, “he never wanted to see anybody punished.”²⁹⁰ Hazel used only a spelling book, and when his “most advanced pupils finished it, he started them once more in words of one syllable.”²⁹¹ Like most other frontier instructors, Hazel taught by subscription, when enough parents were willing to pay enough to make it worthwhile. Lincoln went to Hazel “more as Company for his Sister than with the expectation that he would learn Much.” In Hazel's classroom “he then & there Learned his Letters & to Spell a Little.”²⁹² Gollaher remembered that Abe “got along well in his studies because he worked so hard.”²⁹³

Years later, Lincoln described the frontier educational system he had known: “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

²⁸⁷ Samuel Haycraft to Herndon, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, [June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 67. It is not clear how long Lincoln spent at Hazel's. Augustus H. Chapman said “about 3 Months,” while Dennis Hanks estimated “some 3 or 4 weeks when he was 6 or 7 years old.” Augustus H. Chapman's statement to Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], and Dennis Hanks's interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, ibid., 101, 28. On another occasion Dennis said Lincoln went to Hazel's school “about 3. mo.” Dennis F. Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, ibid., 38.

²⁸⁸ Kunigunde Duncan and D. F. Nickols, Mentor Graham: The Man Who Taught Lincoln (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 207-8.

²⁸⁹ George Cary Eggleston, The First of the Hoosiers: Reminiscences of Edward Eggleston (Philadelphia: A. J. Drexel Biddle, 1903), 38.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895.

²⁹¹ Charles Carleton Coffin, Abraham Lincoln (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 23. Coffin's source was a letter Austin Gollaher wrote to him.

²⁹² Augustus H. Chapman's statement to Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 101.

²⁹³ Interview with Gollaher by J. C. M., Hodgenville correspondence, 23 March 1895, Cincinnati Tribune, 24 March 1895.

to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizzard.”²⁹⁴ (“The rule of three” was the means for solving problems involving proportions, where the student is given three numbers in a proportion and asked to calculate the fourth (34 is to 15 as 7 is to X – what is the value of X?) John Locke Scripps, who interviewed Lincoln about his early life, noted that on the frontier “teachers were, for the most part, ignorant, uncultivated men, rough of speech, uncouth of manners, and rarely competent to teach beyond the simplest rudiments of learning.” Moreover, the “books of study then in vogue, would not now [in 1860] be tolerated in schools of the lowest grade. The school-house, constructed of logs, floorless, windowless, and without inclosure, was in admirable harmony with teacher, text-books, and the mode of imparting instruction.” Bluntly Scripps declared that Lincoln’s “early teachers were men of scarcely any learning.”²⁹⁵ A historian noted that in frontier times, there “were, of course, no public schools in Kentucky and such private ones as there were could boast of little but the name. The teachers were generally Irish, and their principal qualification seemed to be a capacity for consuming ‘moonshine’ in indefinite quantities. The alphabet was commonly learned from characters painted on a shingle and other knowledge was acquired in similar ways. Books were scarce, and, as a consequence, there was much studying together – a state of things resulting in much confusion, inasmuch as everyone studied aloud. The good students were often rewarded by the teacher passing around a bottle of whiskey or a ‘plug’ of tobacco. Unremitting application of the rod was relied upon to remedy all defects physical, mental or moral.”²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Autobiography written for Jesse W. Fell, 20 December 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:511.

²⁹⁵ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 27-28, 34. In the third-person autobiographical sketch he prepared for Scripps, Lincoln laconically noted, “[b]efore leaving Kentucky he and his sister were sent for short periods, to A. B. C. schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney, and the second by Caleb Hazel.” Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:61.

²⁹⁶ Robert Spencer Cotterill, History of Pioneer Kentucky (Cincinnati: Johnson & Hardin, 1917), 248-49.

Even before his meager formal schooling began, Lincoln may have learned the alphabet from his mother, who, he said, “often read the Bible to him.”²⁹⁷ Dennis Hanks remembered that she tutored both of her children: “Their mother first learned their Abc's out of Webster[']s old spelling book Lincoln[']s mother learned him to read the Bible – study it & the stories in it and all that was moraly & affectionate in it, repeating it to Abe & his sister when very young. Lincoln was often & much moved by the stories.”²⁹⁸ She could not write, but she “could read a little.” Hanks “never saw her read in anything except the Bible.”²⁹⁹ Her foster-parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, were probably conscientious about her schooling, for their other foster-child, Dennis Hanks, became the best-educated member of the family, learning to write as well as read.³⁰⁰ If the Sparrows cared enough to make sure that Dennis became literate, it seems likely that they provided Nancy with enough schooling so that she could at least read. According to Lincoln family tradition, she “was considered better educated than most of the girls of that part of Hardin [County].”³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 182; Elizabeth Crawford, interview with Thomas Fortune, fall 1881, Fortune Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

²⁹⁸ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 37. See also Hanks's interview with Robert McIntyre, “Lincoln's Friend,” Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., Paris, Illinois, Gazette, n.d., Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885.

²⁹⁹ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 30; Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 20; Dennis F. Hanks, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886?], Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 598; Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, ibid., 37; Hanks in an interview with D. J. Tate, quoted in an unidentified clipping, dated 12 February 1927, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. On 21 September 1818, as a witness, Nancy Hanks signed the will of Thomas Sparrow with an X. Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, n.d., copied in the Hardin County Enterprise (Kentucky), 16 July 1936. In 1814, she similarly signed a deed in Kentucky. McMurtry, Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek, 30-32.

³⁰⁰ Dennis Hanks's first teacher was a man named Warden, who taught at a church on Nolin Creek. Hanks to Herndon, 2 April 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 242.

³⁰¹ Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 181. Elinor Peck claimed that she taught Nancy Hanks to read. Smith, Lincoln and the Lincolns, 76.

It is not clear how literate Abe was when he left Kentucky. Zachariah Riney's daughter said that he that he "learned to read well at the first session" of her father's school.³⁰² An Indiana playmate and William M. Thayer both alleged that Lincoln could read before he turned eight.³⁰³ John Locke Scripps asserted that Lincoln could also write by that age.³⁰⁴ More modestly, William Dean Howells in his 1860 campaign biography asserted that Lincoln had only "acquired the alphabet and the rudiments of education" while in Kentucky.³⁰⁵ Dennis Hanks stated flatly, "Abe read no books in Ky."³⁰⁶

In backwoods Kentucky the churches and preachers were as primitive as the schools and their teachers. There were three major religious denominations: "very ignorant Baptists, very noisy Methodists, and very dogmatic Presbyterians."³⁰⁷ The two Baptist ministers whom the Lincoln family knew best, William Downs and David Elkin, hardly served as models of Christian decorum. The bibulous, "disorderly, indolent, slovenly, and self-indulgent" Downs was "almost useless to society, and . . . worse than useless to the cause of Christ." He founded the Little Mount church after the Rolling Fork congregation had expelled him. Elkin was "uncultivated, being barely able to read," "extremely poor, as to this world's goods," and "very indolent and slovenly in his dress." His reputation was "somewhat sullied in his latter years,

³⁰² Mrs. Susie Yeager to James M. Yeager, 1890, New York Tribune, 26 December 1897.

³⁰³ Henry Beeler, interview with William Fortune, notes, Fortune Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 63.

³⁰⁴ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 28.

³⁰⁵ Howells, Life of Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 20. Lincoln wrote many corrections in a copy of this biography; he left this description of his education unchanged.

³⁰⁶ Dennis Hanks, interview with Herndon, Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 39.

³⁰⁷ William E. Barton to Robert Todd Lincoln, n.p., 15 March 1919, copy, W. E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago. See John B. Boles, Religion in Antebellum Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995) and J. H. Spencer, A History of Kentucky Baptists from 1769 to 1885 (2 vols.; Cincinnati: J. R. Baumes, 1885).

perhaps from too free a use of strong drink.”³⁰⁸ Elkin’s grandson told an interviewer that “when my grandfather went to preaching he did not know but one letter in the alphabet and that was the letter O, and he knew it because it was round.”³⁰⁹ Nancy and Thomas belonged to Baptist churches in Kentucky and Indiana, and their home library contained a Bible and a catechism.³¹⁰ According to John Locke Scripps, the pioneers “were glad of an opportunity to hear a sermon, whether delivered by one of their own religious faith or not. Thus it was at least with the father and the mother of young Lincoln, who never failed to attend, with their family, upon religious worship.” They “gladly received the word, caring less for the doctrinal tenets of the preacher than for the earnestness and zeal with which he enforced practical godliness.”³¹¹ As an adult, Lincoln would demonstrate intimate familiarity with scripture.

THE MOVE TO INDIANA

In 1816, Thomas Lincoln decided to relocate to Indiana. His brother Josiah, his second cousins Austin and Davis Lincoln, his friend James Carter, the widow and children of Hananiah Lincoln, and Nancy Hanks's uncle, Joseph Hanks, all lived there.³¹² Thomas joined a chain

³⁰⁸ Spencer, Kentucky Baptists, 1:163-64, 336.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Fields Elkin, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, 21 June 1922, conducted by Louis A. Warren, copy, Lincoln files, “David Elkins” folder, Lincoln Museum, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.

³¹⁰ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 22, 58. The only other volume the Lincolns owned, according to Thayer, was Thomas Dilworth, A New Guide to the English Tongue, commonly known as “Dilworth’s Speller.” It was a popular combination of speller, grammar, and reader. Houser, Lincoln’s Education, 57-58.

³¹¹ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 37-38.

³¹² According to J. Edward Murr, “Thomas Lincoln, the father of the President and younger brother of Josiah, came on a visit to this section of the State [Indiana] a short while prior to his own removal from Kentucky to Spencer county, Indiana. The inhabitants of the territory at the time of Thomas Lincoln’s visit were looking forward to its early admission into the Union. It was while visiting his brother that Thomas Lincoln decided to seek a home in the wilderness of Indiana, making choice of a place a few miles farther west.” Murr, “Lincoln in Indiana,” Indiana Magazine of History 13 (1917): 307-8. Murr interviewed several descendants of Josiah Lincoln. Louis A. Warren believed that “the widow and orphan children of Hananiah Lincoln, who were then living in the community which became Spencer County, were more directly responsible for the location of Thomas Lincoln's Indiana home than either the family of Josiah Lincoln or the Hankses.” Warren, Lincoln’s Parentage, 291. “He had built his cabin home in a community which already had several settlers, some of whom he had known in the Kentucky country. It was

migration from the Rolling Fork of the Salt River in Kentucky to Little Pigeon Creek in southwestern Indiana.³¹³ Migrants from all over Kentucky poured into Indiana after the War of 1812, when Indian tribes surrendered claims to the southern half of the territory. (“Kentucky had taken Indiana without firing a shot,” wags quipped.)³¹⁴ The head of the government land office in Vincennes reported that in 1817, the year when Thomas Lincoln entered his claim for 160 acres there, “the applications were so numerous that it was impossible to record them as rapidly as they came in.”³¹⁵

Troubles besetting Thomas in Kentucky strengthened the lure of Indiana. In February 1816, an ejectment suit was filed against him in Kentucky, threatening to force him off the acreage he rented on Knob Creek. Having already lost money on his Mill Creek and Sinking Spring farms because of imperfect titles, Thomas at first retained a lawyer to fight the suit but abruptly

probably the family of Hananiah Lincoln, more than any other influence, that was responsible for his settling in that particular community, as two years before his arrival they had established themselves but a few miles from his claim. In fact, the entire Pigeon Creek community was nothing but a section of Kentucky, moved over into Indiana.” Louis A. Warren, “Lincoln’s Pioneer Father,” New England Historical and Genealogical Register 84 (1930): 397-98. James Carter, who had lived on the Rolling Fork in Nelson County, Kentucky, was one of the original settlers of Hurricane Township, Indiana. While living in Indiana, he allegedly made a trip back to Kentucky and influenced Thomas’s thinking about moving there. Murr, “Wilderness Years of Lincoln,” 100-1. In 1802, Carter married Sarah Castleman, step-daughter of Thomas Turnham. Joseph Hanks, Jr., moved to Crawford County, Indiana, in 1815. I am grateful to Paul H. Verduin for information about Carter and Joseph Hanks, Jr. Elsewhere, Murr asserted that Thomas Carter was “wholly responsible for the coming of the Lincolns to Spencer County.” Murr, “Some Pertinent Observations Concerning “Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,”” 5. In a novel based on information supplied by Lincoln, his friend Theodore Canisius tells of an Indianan named Charles Legrand who inspired Thomas Lincoln to move to that territory. According to the novelist, Nancy Hanks resisted the proposal to leave Kentucky. Canisius, Abraham Lincoln: Historisches Charakterbild (Vienna: Christoph Riesser, 1867), 3, 19-32.

³¹³ Paul H. Verduin has unearthed evidence showing that many Kentucky neighbors of Thomas Lincoln moved to the Little Pigeon Creek area, among them James, William, John, and Thomas Carter; Noah Gordon; John and Amos Richardson; Thomas and William Barrett; John B. and Thomas Turnham; James and John Masterson; Thomas Sparrow; George and Robert Angel; Samuel and David Pickerell; Reuben Grigsby; William Barker; and Josiah Crawford. On the concept of chain migration, see John S. Macdonald and Leatrice D. Macdonald, “Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation, and Social Networks,” Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly 42 (1964): 82-97, and Robert E. Bieder, “Kinship as a Factor in Migration,” Journal of Marriage and the Family 35 (1973): 429-39.

³¹⁴ Andrew R. L. Cayton, Frontier Indiana (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 272.

³¹⁵ John Badollet, quoted in Cayton, Frontier Indiana, 265.

changed his mind.³¹⁶ In May, a court instructed him to ascertain that the road from Muldraugh's Hill through Knob Creek Valley was maintained properly. That order "may have quickened his decision" to leave Kentucky.³¹⁷ Unusually bad weather later in the year might have also influenced Thomas. Winter came early to Hardin County in 1816, with frost appearing as early as July. By September, ice a quarter of an inch thick covered the ground. The temperature did not rise above freezing in October, and November was bitterly cold.³¹⁸

Thomas cobbled together a flatboat, loaded it with his tools and the barrels full of whiskey (his meager capital) he had received in payment for his farm, left Nancy and the children at Knob Creek, and shoved off for the Ohio River. Before reaching it, his raft capsized, pitching whiskey, tools, and sailor into the Rolling Fork. After salvaging some of his cargo with the help of friendly onlookers, Thomas continued his journey, crossing the Ohio at Thompson's Ferry.³¹⁹ Aided by Francis Posey, who hauled his goods for him in an ox-drawn wagon, Thomas hacked his way through the dense Indiana forest, choked with grapevines and underbrush.³²⁰ Dennis Hanks called it "the Brush[i]es[t] C[o]untry that I have Ever Seen" with "all Kinds of undergro[w]th Spice wo[o]ld Wild privy Shewmake Dogwood grape vines matted to Geather So

³¹⁶ Otis M. Mather to Albert J. Beveridge, n.p., 24 July 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Worden Pope was the lawyer whom Thomas hired.

³¹⁷ [Benjamin Wilson Smith], History of Warrick, Spencer, and Perry Counties, Indiana, From the Earliest Time to the Present; Together with Interesting Biographical Sketches, Reminiscences, Notes (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1885), 35-36.

³¹⁸ Mrs. Thomas D. Winstead, Chronicles of Hardin County, Kentucky, 1766-1974 (Elizabethtown: n.p., 1974), 6.

³¹⁹ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 38; Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 75-76. Louis A. Warren denied that Thomas sold the farm, protesting that Thomas could not sell land whose title was being contested in an ejectment suit. Lincoln's Youth, 220n2. In fact, he probably sold his interest in the land to a buyer who may or may not have known of the lawsuit.

³²⁰ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 77-78. Thayer's 1863 account is corroborated by the later testimony of Augustus H. Chapman, who said, "he finally Landed at Thompson Ferry on the Ind Sid of the ohio River at a Mans Named Posey, Storing his property with Posey & Selling him his boat he at once Started back to Ky for his family walking the entire Distance." Augustus H. Chapman's statement for Herndon, [before 8 September 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 98. Posey, the son of the territorial governor Thomas Posey, accepted Thomas's boat as his cartage fee. Thomas De La Hunt, Perry County: A History (Indianapolis: W. K. Stewart, 1916), 31.

that as the old Saying gowes you could Drive a Butcher Knife up to the Handle in it.”³²¹ The journey was “difficult, wearisome, and trying.” With “the resolution of veteran pioneers,” Thomas Lincoln and Posey “toiled, sometimes being able to pick their way for a long distance without chopping, and then coming to a stand-still in consequence of dense forests.” They “were obliged to cut a road so much of the way that several days were employed in going eighteen miles.” Thomas, whose whole life was a struggle, “often said, that he never passed through a harder experience than he did in going from Thompson's Ferry to Spencer County, Indiana.”³²²

Thomas was uncertain just where to stake his claim, though he had decided to locate some distance from the Ohio.³²³ Like other settlers who avoided that river and similar commercial arteries, Thomas probably was more eager to find familiar terrain than he was to secure access to markets.³²⁴ A friendly pioneer, William Wood, recommended the site which Thomas chose for his cabin. Wood promised to guard his possessions while Thomas fetched his

³²¹ Dennis Hanks told Herndon that “the Road had B[e]n Blazed out part of the way By a Man By the [name] of Jesse Hoskins the Ballance of the way Lincoln had to Cut his way and part of the other for 5 Miles So that a Wagon Could pass.” Hanks to Herndon, 7 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 226.

³²² Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 78-79. This passage is quoted without attribution in Henry J. Raymond, The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Derby & Miller, 1865), 19. Louis A. Warren denounced William M. Thayer for concocting a “purely apocryphal story” about Thomas's preliminary trip. Lincoln's Youth, 220n2. In fact, Thayer's account agrees with testimony by Dennis Hanks, Augustus H. Chapman, Charles Friend, and William Wood. Charles Friend to Herndon, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 19 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 234. One or more of them may have been Thayer's informants. Relying on Raymond's biography of Lincoln, Warren unwittingly quoted Thayer's description of Thomas's preliminary journey in his account of the later journey made by the entire Lincoln family. Warren, who mistakenly ascribed Thomas Lincoln's words to Abraham, did not realize that Raymond had lifted his quotation from Thayer.

³²³ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 77.

³²⁴ Cayton, Frontier Indiana, 272.

wife and children.³²⁵ That autumn the Lincoln family packed up their possessions and plunged into the wilderness of southwestern Indiana in search of a new home.³²⁶

In an 1860 autobiographical sketch, Abraham Lincoln declared that his family's "removal was partly on account of slavery; but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles in Ky."³²⁷ (Memories of his family's trouble with land titles may have predisposed Lincoln to become a surveyor and a lawyer. As an attorney, he advised young men aspiring to the bar, "Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this. Who can be more nearly a fiend than he would habitually overhauls the register of deeds in search of defects in titles, whereon to stir up strife, and put money in his pocket?")³²⁸

Some have inferred from Lincoln's remarks that "Thomas Lincoln was an ardent antislavery man," but that seems improbable.³²⁹ To Leonard Swett, Lincoln said that his father

³²⁵ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 79-80. Thayer's informant was probably Wood himself. See William Wood, interview with Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 123.

³²⁶ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 38-39; Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 81. It is not clear just when the Lincoln family departed Kentucky. A Hoosier minister who interviewed several of the Lincolns' Indiana neighbors concluded that they probably left in the autumn. Murr, "Wilderness Years of Lincoln," 8. According to Eli L. Grigsby, his grandfather Reuben Grigsby hired Thomas Lincoln to "take from him trees, which he would split and rive and make into lard tierces, whisky barrels and kegs" to be used by grandfather Grigsby, "who owned and operated a large still, farmed on a large scale, handled large quantities of whisky, meat and lard, and flatboated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers." Gentryville correspondence, 11 February, Evansville Courier and Journal, 12 February 1933. Grigsby claimed that he learned this from his grandfather and from his great uncle, Nathaniel Grigsby. Cf. S. Grant Johnson, "Abraham Lincoln," manuscript, S. Grant Johnson Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 13 February 1930, 11 January 1934; Van Natter, Lincoln's Boyhood, 1. Since none of the informants of Herndon nor any other biographer confirms this story, and in the absence of any corroborating contemporary documents (like a labor contract), this story must be regarded with skepticism. Little evidence corroborates it, though Lincoln allegedly told Mark Delahay that shortly after moving to Indiana, "he had for two years tended a 'short worm' distillery, at eighteen dollars per month." Mark W. Delahay, "Abraham Lincoln," pamphlet (New York: Daniel H. Newhall, 1939), unpaginated.

³²⁷ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:61-62.

³²⁸ Notes for a law lecture, [1 July 1850?] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:81. I am indebted to Professor Mark Steiner for suggesting this point.

³²⁹ Warren, "Lincoln's Pioneer Father," 398. Warren argued that the Baptist sect to which Thomas belonged was opposed to slavery and that the slavery controversy significantly agitated the Baptists in the Knob Creek region. Warren, Lincoln's Parentage, 282-94. But in fact there were few antislavery Baptists in Kentucky at that time. In

moved in order “to better his situation in life.”³³⁰ In 1865, Dennis Hanks scoffed at the notion that it “Mr Lincoln left the State of Ky because and only because Slavery was there. This is untrue. He mov[e]d off to better his Condition – to a place where he could buy land . . . at \$1[.]25 per acre – Slavery did not operate on him. I know too well this whole matter.”³³¹ In 1866, E. R. Burba of Hodgenville reported that “I have never heard that Slavery was any Cause of his leaving KY – and think quite likely it was Not – for there were very few Slaves in the whole Country round here then.”³³² In Kentucky, Thomas Lincoln had served without apparent qualms on a slave patrol, a kind of informal police headed by a captain empowered to whip slaves found away from their owners without a pass.³³³ No surviving contemporary document or credible reminiscence indicates that Thomas harbored abolitionist sentiments.³³⁴ Lincoln's remark – “This

1811, one David Benedict took a survey of Kentucky churches and calculated that only about 300 of the 17,511 Baptists in the Blue Grass State favored emancipation. Boles, Religion in Antebellum Kentucky, 116.

³³⁰ Leonard Swett, draft of “Lincoln’s Story of His Own Life,” Swett Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³³¹ Dennis Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 36. Hanks later said: “we Left Kentucky for the purpose of Hunting a New Cuntry whare we could get Land for 125 cts per acre and have the pick and choys which we did.” Hanks to Herndon, 7 March 1866, ibid., 226.

³³² Burba to Herndon, Hodgenville, 31 March and 25 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 240, 257. The tax lists for 1810, according to one source, indicate that there were 739 blacks in Hardin County that year and 1,736 whites the following year. Bayless E. Hardin, secretary-treasurer of the Kentucky Historical Society, to Harry E. Pratt, Frankfort, Kentucky, 3 August 1953, Harry E. Pratt Papers, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

³³³ William E. Wilson, Indiana: A History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 154; J. Winston Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 96.

³³⁴ A reminiscence describing Thomas Lincoln's purported sympathy for abolitionism was given by the ninety-nine-year old Christopher C. Graham, who said: “Tom Lincoln and Nancy and Sally Bush were just steeped full of Jesse Head's notions about the wrong of slavery and the rights of man as explained by Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.” Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 234. But Graham's assertion seems dubious, for as William E. Barton discovered, Jesse Head owned slaves and was a newspaper editor who “had no scruples against advertising rewards for the arrest of runaway slaves, and their lodgment in jail for return to their masters.” Head admired the proslavery Andrew Jackson more than the antislavery Henry Clay. In sum, Barton concluded, “none of the things that Christopher Columbus Graham tells of him [Head] are true.” Barton, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1925), 1:18. But one of Head’s children alleged that he “was opposed to slavery and never owned one although abundantly able to do so, but he rather helped such as wished to buy their freedom.” Undated memo by E. B. Head, Personal Papers of Reuben T. Durrett, folder 1, box 1, University of Chicago. Cf. D. M. Rodman to Reuben T. Durrett, Linville, Kentucky, 15 May 1886, ibid.; La Fayette Stiles Pence, Life Sketches of Rev. Jesse Head, Who Married President Lincoln’s Parents (Lebanon, Kentucky: n.p., 1921. See also the

removal was partly on account of slavery” – may have been made for political consumption (he was providing notes for a campaign biography) and perhaps referred to Thomas's dislike of a social system that afforded little upward mobility to poor whites like himself. In 1860, John Locke Scripps alleged that Thomas Lincoln “realized in his daily experience and observation how slavery oppresses the poorer classes, making their poverty and social disrepute a permanent condition through the degradation which it affixes to labor.”³³⁵ Many such settlers in Indiana, harboring no moral objections to slavery, actively campaigned to keep free blacks from moving into their state.³³⁶

In deciding to move to Indiana, Thomas may have believed what an emigrants' handbook proclaimed: “It may be doubted whether any state of the United States, all things duly considered, can present more advantages than Indiana. Intersected or bounded in all directions by navigable rivers or lakes, enjoying a temperate climate and an immense variety of soil. Near two-thirds of its territorial surface is yet in the hands of the Indians, a temporary evil, that a short time will remedy.”³³⁷

Before leaving Kentucky, Abe and his mother visited the grave of his brother, Thomas, who had died in infancy around 1812.³³⁸ As he crossed the Ohio with his sister and parents, the

reminiscences of the Rev. Mr. George L. Rogers of Elizabethtown, paraphrased in Stephen G. Burbridge to Abraham Lincoln, Lexington, Kentucky, 8 November 1864, copy, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

³³⁵ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 29.

³³⁶ Eugene H. Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 19-21.

³³⁷ William Darby, The Emigrant's Guide to the Western and South Western States and Territories (New York: Kirk & Mercein, 1818), 207, quoted in Roger Henry Van Bolt, “The Rise of the Republican Party in Indiana, 1840-1856” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1950), 4-5.

³³⁸ Dennis Hanks, interview with Erastus Wright, Chicago, 8 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 27; autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:61; Lincoln Lore, no. 1619 (January 1973). According to Joseph Barrett, “Mr. Lincoln remembers to have visited the now unmarked grave of this little one, along with his mother, before leaving Kentucky.” Barrett, Life of Lincoln, 17.

seven-year-old lad did not seem like a prodigy destined for greatness. Dennis Hanks thought that “Abe Exhibited no special traits in Ky, Except a good kind – somewhat wild nature.”³³⁹ Another Kentuckian remembered him as “the gawkiest, dullest looking boy you ever saw. But there was one thing remarkable about him. He could always remember things better than any other boy in the neighborhood.”³⁴⁰ In that cold autumn, the Lincoln family packed up and plunged into the wilderness of southwestern Indiana, seeking a new beginning in the “wild and desolate” Hurricane Township.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Dennis Hanks, interview with Herndon, Charleston, 8 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, Herndon's Informants, 103-4.

³⁴⁰ Reminiscence by an unidentified native of Kentucky, Springfield, Illinois, correspondence by Henry Villard, 29 November, New York Herald, 4 December 1860.

³⁴¹ Sarah Bush Lincoln, interview with Herndon, Charleston, 8 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 106.