

LINCOLN BIOGRAPHY

In early 1860, at the request of Chester County attorney Jesse Fell, Abraham Lincoln, 51, wrote the following sketch of his life.

"I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were born in Virginia, of undistinguished families -- second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some whom now reside in Adams and others in Macon Counties, Ill.

"My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Va., to Kentucky, about 1781 or '82, where, a year or two later, he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pa.. An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham and the like.

"My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Ind., in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin' and cipherin'" to the Rule of Three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.

"Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the Rule of Three¹, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

"I was raised to farm-work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, and passed the first year in Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard, County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk War, and I was elected a captain of volunteers -- a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went through the campaign, ran for the Legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten -- the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the Legislature. I was not a candidate afterwards. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield² to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the Lower House of Congress, but was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849-1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig³ in politics, and generally on the White electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise⁴ aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

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

Yours very truly,
A. Lincoln

- The old name for that process in arithmetic known as proportion
- When Lincoln came to Springfield it was hardly more than a frontier town. He was just beginning to be known as a lawyer; his reputation was greater as an excellent talker, a story-teller of the first order, a good-natured, friendly fellow, liked and trusted by all. As early as 1837 he put himself on written record (Illinois State Journal, March 3) as opposed to slavery.
- With Henry Clay's death in 1852 the Whig party dissolved, to be succeeded in 1858 by the Republican party.
- In 1854 U. S. Senator Stephen Douglas brought about the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, thus reopening the questions of slavery in newly acquired territory, or newly admitted states, north of 36° 30'. This roused all the North to instant protest., including Squire William Everhart, who was then serving as a member of the 33rd Congress. Lincoln later debated Douglas on the slavery issue when he ran against him for the Senate in 1858. While he won the debates, Lincoln lost that election, only to subsequently defeat Douglas for the presidency two years later.

Text of Lincoln's notes provided to the Chester County Community Foundation by Baldwin's Books, West Chester and confirmed by the archives of David Kirby.

Read: [Launching Lincoln](#), by Malcolm Johnstone (*need Launching Lincoln pdf from client*)