

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

"I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Ky. 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 of 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 Three¹. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.

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

"I was raised to farm-work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, 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 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 Whig 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

Mission

Connect people who care with causes that matter, so their philanthropy makes a difference now and forever.

Year Founded

1994

Grants & Scholarships Awarded

\$1.5-\$2 million annually

**Types of Endowed Charitable Funds
Held in Trust by the Community Foundation**

Grant Fund for Chester County
Family Donor Advised Funds
Field of Interest Funds
Scholarship Funds
Memorial Funds
Nonprofit Organization Endowed Funds

Office Location

Due to the generosity of our donors, the Community Foundation is the proud steward of
The Historic Lincoln Biography Building
28 West Market Street
West Chester, PA 19382
(610) 696-8211

www.chescocf.org info@chescocf.org

- ¹ The old name for that process in arithmetic known as proportion.
- ² When Lincoln came to Springfield, it was a frontier town. He was 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. Early in 1837, he put himself on written record as opposed to slavery in the March 3 Illinois State Journal.
- ³ With Clay's death in 1852, the Whig party dissolved, to be eventually succeeded by the Republican party.
- ⁴ In 1854, U.S. Senator Stephen Douglas brought about the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, thus reopening the question of slavery in newly acquired territory—newly admitted states north of 36°30'. This roused all the North to instant protest, including Squire William Everhart who was a member of the 33rd Congress. Lincoln debated Douglas on the slavery issue when they ran for the Senate in 1858. While Lincoln won the debates, he lost the Senate election. Lincoln triumphed over Douglas to win the presidency two years later.

Lincoln Biography text per the archival print owned by David Kirby, on display at the Community Foundation.
Lincoln Building cover artwork by Jesse Hulse & Timlyn Vaughan.
Brochure designed by The Merz Group.

Chester County
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



The
Lincoln Building

home of

Chester County
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



The Lincoln Building



The Federal-style building at 28 West Market Street, West Chester, PA is known as the Lincoln Building.

Designed by William Strickland and built in 1833 by William Everhart (1785-1868), a Congressman, philanthropist and prominent borough resident, the

building was initially numbered 14 West Market and was first referred to as the Everhart Building.

Squire Everhart was born in West Vincent Township, the son of a Revolutionary War soldier. Everhart was a successful merchant for 60 years until he retired in 1867. He was the father of eight children. From his home on Gay Street, he served as chief burgess and justice of the peace in West Chester.

In 1829, Everhart purchased the 99-acre Wollerton farm, which is today the southeastern part of the heart of West Chester. His wife's grandfather, "old" Isaiah Matlack, owned most of the northern part of the borough. Everhart laid out four streets named for his friends, all former Congressmen: Isaac Wayne, General Isaac Barnard, Charles Miner, and Dr. William Darlington.

Everhart constructed more than 100 brick buildings. The Everhart Building was West Chester's first office building, designed specifically to be rented to various businesses. Since 1833, it has never been a private home; it has always housed offices.

In 1860 the Chester County Times, an early weekly republican newspaper, was located in the building. The Times was owned by Samuel Downing, printer and publisher, and edited by E.W. Capron. Also leasing an office was Joseph J. Lewis, Esq., an attorney well known for his opposition to slavery.

Early in 1860, Downing and Lewis were provided with a three-page, handwritten biographical sketch from Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had written this at the urging of his friend, Jesse Fell.



Photo by Josh Barker

order to favorably position him with Pennsylvania's large number of electoral delegates. At first Lincoln refused, but Fell persisted.

Lincoln's short, humble sketch constituted all that was written of Lincoln's life at that point. Of it, Lincoln said, "There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me."

The sketch ran in the Times on February 11, 1860. It was soon republished in some of the leading newspapers on the East coast and countrywide. That simple account of his life was, according to Lincoln, instrumental in securing his nomination for the presidency on May 16, and his eventual election on November 7, 1860.

Joseph Lewis was subsequently rewarded by President Lincoln by being named Director of the Internal Revenue during his administration.

The building remained in the Everhart family until 1905. Over the years, it was occupied by prominent borough residents including Norris Smith, printer; Downing and Pinkerton, editors and publishers; M.S. Way and Son, real estate and insurance; and Wayne McVeagh, Esq., attorney general in President Garfield's cabinet. True to its political past, the building often served as campaign headquarters for various political aspirants. For a while it was called the Highly Building.

A promoter of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Jesse Fell was a native of Toughkenamon, New Garden Township. Fell and Lewis' brother Edward, also a newspaper publisher in Illinois, had realized Lincoln's need for publicity in the East to introduce him as a prospective presidential candidate. They urged Lincoln to prepare and submit his sketch to the Times in

In 1947, the structure became commonly known as the Lincoln Building when the Chester County Historical Society attached a marker noting "The First Biography of Abraham Lincoln." The PA Historical & Museum Commission further dedicated a street marker simply titled "Lincoln Biography" on September 17, 1952.

The Lincoln Building was attached by a few small shops to the famous Mansion House Hotel on the corner of Market and Church, also built by Everhart. The Mansion House was known far and wide for its caged collection of wild monkeys in the lobby, which entertained tourists, locals, and sequestered jury members.

In 1977, the Lincoln Building was purchased by businessman David Kirby to save it from proposed demolition along with the Mansion House. The demolition left 28 West Market Street as a stand-alone structure. Kirby undertook a meticulous restoration of the building and successfully petitioned for it to be added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

In 1997, Kirby sold the Lincoln Building to the Chester County Community Foundation, which sought a legacy building for its charitable nonprofit headquarters.

Annually, thousands of visitors tour the Lincoln Building, learning lessons from the past to apply to the future.



Artwork by Kathryn Deaville

"West Chester Dream" by John Hannafin