

# The Youthful Lincoln



Lincoln, the Hoosier Youth  
(In Fort Wayne, Ind.)



Lincoln, the Rail-Splitter  
(In Garfield Park, Chicago)



Lincoln, the Captain in the  
Black Hawk War (In Dixon, Ill.)



Lincoln, the Young Statesman  
(In Louisville, Ky.)



Lincoln, the Candidate  
(In Cincinnati, Ohio)

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



SCORES of cities and villages throughout the United States and in several foreign countries stand statues and other memorials to the great American whose birthday we will celebrate on February 12. Most of them, having been erected to commemorate his services as President during a critical period in the nation's history and his world-wide renown as a great humanitarian, portray him as the bearded man of mature years and benign countenance, the Great Emancipator, the "Man of Sorrows", the martyr.

In recent years, however, there has been a tendency to perpetuate in bronze and stone certain incidents in his earlier life which will memorialize those formative years when the character of the future American immortal was being shaped and molded. So we have the "Rail-Splitter" statue in Garfield park in Chicago, the "Black Hawk War Captain" statue in Dixon, Ill., the "candidate" statue in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the "Young Statesman" statue in Louisville, Ky. The newest of these "youthful Lincoln" statues is the one which was erected last year on the plaza of the Lincoln National Life Insurance company at Fort Wayne, Ind., and which portrays "Lincoln, the Hoosier Youth." It is the work of the famous sculptor, Paul Manship.

The main facts of Lincoln's earlier years are well known to most Americans, thanks to the painstaking labor of such biographers as Rev. William E. Barton, Senator Albert J. Beveridge and Carl Sandburg and others who seem to have brought to light every single fact which was significant in making Lincoln the man that he became. But it is doubtful if anything more interesting has ever been written about that period of Lincoln's life than the report of an "overlooked interview" with Dennis F. Hanks, a cousin and close companion of Lincoln, which was set down by Robert McIntyre, an attorney of Mattoon, Ill., in May, 1892, a copy of which has recently come into the hands of the author of this article. The interview in part follows:

I found him hale and erect, ready to recount for the benefit of a younger generation, the incidents which marked the youth of the martyred President. His name is Dennis F. Hanks, and he is a cousin to Lincoln. Uncle Dennis, as he is called, is a typical Kentuckian, born in Hardin county, 1799. His face is sun-bronzed and plowed with furrows of time; a resolute mouth with firm grip of the jaw; broad forehead above a pair of unwearable eyes. The eyes seem out of place, in the weary, faded face; they glow and flash like two diamond sparks, set in ridges of dull gold. The face is a serious one, but the play of light in the eyes, unquenchable by time, betrays the nature full of sunshine and elate life. A sidewise glance at the profile shows a face strikingly Lincoln-like, prominent cheek bones, temples, nose and chin; but best of all that twinkling drollery in the eye that flashed in the White House during the dark days of the Civil war. To my query he replied cheerily:

"Certainly, certainly, sir, I'll talk to you about Abe. I kin talk, too, bein' as I am the only livin' man that knows all about him."

"How old was Mr. Lincoln when you first met him?"

"About 24 hours, hardly that; I rekolekt I ran all the way, over two miles, to see Nancy Hanks' boy baby. 'Twas common then for connexion to gether in them days to see new babies. Her name was Nancy Hanks before she married Thomas Lincoln. I held the wee one a minnit. I was ten years old, and it tickled me to hold the puppy, red, little Lincoln."

"When did you move to Indiana?"

"When Abe was about nine, Mr. Lincoln moved first, and built a camp of brush in Spencer county. We came out a year later, and he then had a cabin up, and he gave us the shanty. On this spot Abe grew to manhood."

"How far apart were your cabins?"

"About fifteen rods. Abe killed a turkey the day we got there, and he couldn't get thro' tellin' about it. The name was pronounced Linkhorn

by the folks then. We was all uneducated. After a spell we learned better."

"In the 'Life of Lincoln,' published after his nomination, it is stated that you taught him to read."

"Yes, sir, I did. I taught him to spell, read and cipher. He knew his letters pretty wellish; but no more. His mother taught him his letters. If ever there was a good woman on earth she was one, a true Christian of the Baptist church; but she died soon after we arrived, and left him without a teacher; his father couldn't read a word."

"Is it possible he had no schooling?"

"Only about one-quarter; scarcely that. I then set in to help him; I didn't know much, but I did the best I could."

"What books did he read first?"

"Webster's speller. When I got him through that, I only had a copy of Indiana statutes. Then he got hold of a book; I can't rikkolect the name; maybe you kin if I tell you somethin' et was in it. It told a yarn about a feller, a nigger or suthin', that sailed a fatboat up to a rock, and the rock was magnetized and drewed the nails out of his boat, and he got a duckin', or drowned, or suthin', I forgot now."

"That is the story of Sinbad, in the 'Arabian Nights'."

"That's it; that's the book. Abe would lay on the floor with a chair under his head and laugh over them Arabian Nights by the hour. I told him it was likely lies from end to end, but he learned to read right well in it."

"Had he any other books?"

"Yes, I borrowed for him the 'Life of Washington' and the 'Speeches of Henry Clay.' They had a powerful influence on him. He told me afterwards, in the White House, he wanted to live like Washington. His speeches show that; but the other book did the most amazing work. He was a Democrat, like his father and all of us, when he began to read it. When he closed it he was a Whig, heart and soul, and he went step by step till he became leader of the Republicans."

"Will you describe him when a boy?"

"Well, he was at this time not grown, only 6 feet 2 inches high. He was 6 feet 4 1/2 when grown—tall, lathy and gangling—not much appearance, not handsome, not ugly, but peculiar. This kind of a feller: 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' his head; then he'd go and throw at snowbirds or suthin', but ponderin' all the while."

"Was he active and strong?"

"He was that. I was ten years older, but I couldn't rattle him down. His legs was too long for me to throw him. He would fling one foot

upon my shoulder and make me swing corners swift, and his arms so long and strong! My! how he could chop! His ax would flash and bite into a sugar tree or sycamore, and down it would come. If you heard him fallin' trees in a clearin' you would say there was three men at work by the way trees fell. But he never was sassy or quarrelsome. I've seen him walk into a crowd of sawin' rowdies, and tell some drole yarn, and bust them all up. It was the same when he was a lawyer; all eyes, whenever he riz were on him; there was a suthin' peculiar about him."

"What did you teach him to write with?"

"Sometimes he would write with a piece of charcoal or the pint of a burnt stick on the fence or floor. We got a little paper at the country town, and I made ink out of black-bury briar-root and a little copperas in it. It was black; but the copperas would eat the paper after awhile. I made his first pen out of a turkey buzzard feather; them's good for pens. We had no geese them days. After he learned to write he was scrawlin' his name everywhere; sometimes he would write it in the white sand down on the crick bank, and leave it till the freshet would blot it out."

"Did you have any idea of his future greatness?"

"No; it was a new country, and he was a raw boy; rather a bright an' likely lad, but the big world seemed far ahead of him. We were slow goun' folks, but he had it in him, though we never suspected it."

"Did he take to books eagerly?"

"No, we had to hire him at first. But when he got a taste, it was the old story—we had to pull the sow's ears to git her to the trough, and pull her tail to git her away. He read a great deal and had a wonderful memory, wonderful. Never forgot anything."

"How did the lad fare for food and clothing?"

"Plenty, such as it was—corn dodger, bacon, and game, some fish, and wild fruits. I've often seen him take a dodger to the field and gnaw at it when plowing. We had very little wheat flour. The nearest mill was 18 miles; a boss mill it was, with a plug pullin' a sweep around; and Abe used to say his hound could stand and eat the flour all day as fast as it was made, and then be ready for his supper. For clothing he had jeans; he was grown before he wore all-wool pants."

"Did you move with him to Illinois?"

"Yes; I bought a little improvement near him, six miles from Decatur. Here the famous rails were split that were carried around in the campaign. They were called his rails; but nobody can tell about that. I split some of 'em, and we had a rail frolic and folks came and helped us split. He was a master-hand maulin' rails. I heard him say in a speech one day about these rails—"If I didn't make these, I have made many just as good. Then the crowd yelled."

One more question: "Did he get his rare sense and sterling principles from one parent or both?"

"Both; his strong will from his father. I'll tell you an incident: His father used to swear a little, and one day his baby girl picked up a foul oath and was bruisin' the bitter morsel in her sweet mouth, when Nancy called 'Thomas!' and said: 'Listen, husband. He stopped that habit thar; never swore again. But Abe's kindness, humor, love of humanity, hatred of slavery, all came from her. I am free to say Abe was a mother's boy."

So I hade the old man good-by, pressing once more the palsied hand that guided the pen that wrote the Emancipation Proclamation.

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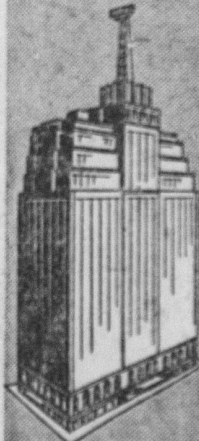
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