

Miss Tarbell: Have this extra copy
of a paper I wrote on Lincoln in
Indiana. Perhaps you will be interested
in it. Do not return it. B. E.

LINCOLN'S INDIANA NEIGHBORS

By Bess Ehrmann.

Many writers have written books about Abraham Lincoln, his ancestry, childhood, manhood and political career, but little thought has been given to the environment of his youth or to those neighbors and boyhood friends of his in Indiana and the influence they undoubtedly had on his life and character.

Almost eight years ago Mr. John Iglehart of Evansville, Indiana, founded the Southwestern Indiana Historical Society and started the "Lincoln Inquiry" which aroused the state to the realization that neither the site of the Lincoln home nor the grave of Lincoln's mother had been properly marked. Also there was the fact of over two thousand histories written about Lincoln, yet none on the fourteen years of his life spent in Indiana. Historians had passed over that period as if it counted for little in the making of the man, yet they were the formative years from seven to twenty-one years.

Several years ago I wrote a paper on "The Lincoln Inquiry" and mentioned a list of pioneer families whose descendants are still living in Spencer County and made the statement that Lincoln could have known and been influenced by any of these early settlers as all of them were upright, honorable men, some of them highly educated and of aristocratic lineage, many of them holding public office. It is of those pioneer neighbors that I wish to write to portray the type of the early settler in southwestern Indiana where Lincoln lived from the age of seven to twenty-one. I hope to prove that the environments of Lincoln were such as to inspire him and cause him to yearn for better

things in life, and to give him opportunities of social and intellectual life generally among a good class of people.

Historians have given southern Indiana a black eye, claiming that there was great illiteracy and unusually low standards of life and few desirable people in Spencer County at that early date. This has resulted from an absence of historical data available to persons out of the state and to historians generally and the resulting fact that no history of the people and institutions of southwestern Indiana has been attempted outside of local histories until the Southwestern Indiana Historical Society was organized among the descendants of pioneers themselves and carried on under Mr. Iglehart's direction and untiring efforts. In the short time we have been working, a field so "rich" in Lincoln data relating to the character of these people in Lincoln's time has been developed by us that investigators like Ida Tarbell freely recognize a revolution which supersedes the view taken by many historians, some of them recent, who still insist on the Kentucky and Illinois view of Lincoln's history.

To live in a community one's entire life and to have heard of the early people from those who have lived there before you causes you to know such a community and their many families well. You know their social and economic status and those of their ancestors far better than an outsider. We, who have spent most of our lives in Spencer County and know those early families, claim that those pioneer men and women were in many cases the most highly educated (for that time) and aristocratic people ever living in southern Indiana. To stamp out the blot of this supposed illiteracy of southern Indiana's early settlers and to

describe fairly the better class of people whom the early travelers seldom saw and did not know is the desire of many people living in Indiana. People who have lived here and their ancestors before them for several generations know such statements to be false.

In a late and splendid history of the literature of the middle western frontier previous to 1840 by Dr. Ralph Leslie Rusk of the history department of Columbia University, which applies the Turner doctrine of the frontier in American history in its political and social phases to the creation of new literature west of the mountains, a book that will be used for several generations as a reference book, this assertion, and for the reasons I have stated, is again made.

How impossible it is to always judge people's ancestry, breeding and mental qualities by mere physical appearance or manner of dress, and so it is small wonder that people from a distance coming to a small country town and seeing its inhabitants for a few hours more or less are unable to speak correctly of the people.

Abraham Lincoln's boyhood and young manhood was spent in what is now the little village of Lincoln City, a part of Spencer County, where the land is not the best for agricultural wealth. This being true during the days of Lincoln's living there, as well as now, the people were plain, hard-working men and women but some of them with the best blood of our country in their veins.

I remember reading one of Elbert Hubbard's "Little Journeys" to Lincoln City to visit the grave of Lincoln's mother, and he spoke of the drab, washed out and hopeless looking people who came to the train to meet them and of his thinking that Lincoln could have found no inspiration either from the country

or people when he lived there. Sometimes one fails to judge correctly because I know just such looking people in our county today who, if known well, with their background of ancestry and tradition compare favorably with people of a higher education and culture. The lifelong struggle with the soil often takes all the pride, vanity and affectation from people's character, leaving them plain and simple in manner, looks and speech.

I have in mind one Spencer County man, a wealthy farmer of today, who to a stranger might seem crude, almost illiterate on a mere acquaintance, and yet the bluest blood flows in this man's veins. He is well educated and his family tree goes back to royalty and his grandfather and father were among Spencer County's early men, educated and cultured, the grandfather a man whom Lincoln undoubtedly knew when he lived here. This is just one illustration of how one can only judge men by having lived long enough among them.

The Lincolns did not come to a county of illiterates when they came to Spencer County but settled within a few miles of some of the most brilliant minds that Indiana ever produced. No doubt there was at that time among many of the backwoodsmen of the Alleghenies men who could not read and write well, some not at all, as Roosevelt describes them in his *Winning of the West*, but Roosevelt fairly, impartially and sympathetically described this class of people as a different class from those referred to by some travelers and a few well-known novelists who from ignorance, bias or some special reason have pictured the lowest class of low life (found everywhere), leaving the impression that these were all of the people here to be found.

Being the third generation of my family on my grandfather's side and the fourth on my grandmother's to live in Spencer County, I have known these old families here most intimately. Some of my grandfather's and grandmother's friends of that early day I knew also, as a goodly number of them lived to a ripe old age.

Among this number was Mrs. Margaret Wright, granddaughter of Daniel Grass (the first white settler in Spencer County). Mrs. Wright talked to me many times of those early days and early people, as did my grandmother and mother, and you had only to know Mrs. Wright and talk to her to realize that Daniel Grass and his people were ones of culture and refinement. Indians had killed the parents of Daniel Grass and he was reared by the family of Colonel Andrew Hynes of Elizabethtown, Kentucky. William P. Duval married a daughter of Colonel Andrew Hynes and these men were not only friends of Daniel Grass but they financed his land operations in the Indiana Territory around Rockport, in Spencer County.

Daniel Grass was such a prominent man in Spencer County, being Lay Judge in the early courts, elected by the people of the county, and county agent from 1818 to some years later, that the Lincolns undoubtedly knew him. Judge Grass was also in the Constitutional Convention of 1816, and then in the legislature, and known far and wide. On his way to attend the legislature at Corydon, he would pass through the little village of Jonesboro, afterwards known as Gentryville although one-half mile from the present site of Gentryville. Travelers often spent the night with the Gentrys and

the Joneses. Lincoln had the opportunity to see and know such persons as they traveled back and forth.

Judge Kiper of Boonville in a short history of Lincoln expresses the opinion that Daniel Grass no doubt had a great influence on the young Lincoln.

Then there was General Joseph Lane who lived but a few miles from the home of the Lincolns. He served in the State Legislature as a representative or senator from 1822 to 1846 and in order to reach the state capitol at Corydon he traveled the road which passed the Jones' store where Lincoln worked.

Ratliff Boone lived near the Lincolns and was an unusual man in many ways, intelligent and with a wonderful personality, eight times elected to Congress and twice elected Lieutenant Governor.

John Morgan, who was the first clerk of Spencer County from 1818 to 1825, was an educated man who came from Pennsylvania about 1816. He was well educated, although a self made man,, and his county records have seldom been equalled for neatness and accuracy. He was also the first postmaster in Rockport from June 6th, 1818, to May 9th, 1823. At the time Morgan became postmaster, Rockport was known as Mt. Duvall, having been named in honor of Honorable William Duvall, friend of Daniel Grass. Duvall lived at Beardstown and so did W. R. Hynes and Daniel Grass. These men were promoting their land investments and brought to the attention of their Kentucky neighbors the wonderful county in Indiana. Duval was born in Virginia in 1784 and received much of his education there. He was a lawyer and studied law under Judge Brodnax, one of the early judges around Hartford, Kentucky.

The Lincolns could have known Duval and W. R. Hynes and Grass in Kentucky and been influenced by them to come to the new county in Indiana. When Edwin Moore, the second postmaster, took office May 9th, 1823, the name had been changed from Mt. Duval to Rockport. I have in my Spencer County historical archives a letter written to John Morgan while he was postmaster and addressed to him at Mt. Duval or Rockport. The letter was written January 22nd, 1821, by his brother, William. This letter is now one hundred six years old.

I have known many of John Morgan's descendants, all of whom show their good blood and breeding, several in this family being unusually gifted in an intellectual way. I have seen their heirlooms of furniture, linen, silver and pictures which tend to prove their ancestry. The Lincolns were almost sure to have known John Morgan.

Knowing that Abe Lincoln was of an inquiring mind and having his own words addressed to Leonard Swett that he (Lincoln) had read through every book he had ever heard of in that country for a radius of fifty miles from the farm upon which he lived, he must have availed himself of every opportunity to talk to people as well as read their books. Rockport is a little over seventeen miles from where Lincoln lived and Boonville almost as near, so Lincoln did not have far to go to come in contact with some of those well known public men.

Stephen P. Cissna was the first doctor in Rockport and perhaps visited the Lincolns in a professional way as he rode horseback for miles over the county. I knew some of his descendants and they were good, intelligent people, and some of them are still living in Spencer, County today.

John Pitcher was the first resident attorney in Rockport and he was one of Indiana's most intellectual men and a wonderful orator. He was a member of the legislature in 1830 representing Spencer and Perry Counties. He had a splendid library and it has been proven that he loaned Lincoln books. Pitcher was postmaster in Rockport from 1827 to 1832. There is no evidence I have seen of any postoffice nearer the Lincoln farm than Rockport. Thomas Lincoln paid his taxes there and probably the farmers generally knew the postmaster at Rockport, and I think Lincoln knew all of the leading men of the village. He is shown to have known Pitcher well and to have been intimate and confidential with him.

John W. Graham was elected Lay Judge in 1825, a man of education and culture. His descendants have all been worthwhile people, showing the inheritance of mental gifts and good breeding. There is little doubt that he and young Lincoln were acquainted for Graham was a candidate for Lay Judge to succeed himself and continued Judge till long after Lincoln left Indiana, and Lincoln is known to have frequented the courthouse at Rockport where he must have seen Judge Graham frequently on the bench and in and about the courthouse.

The Crooks family were people of splendid education and were leaders in public affairs during the later years of Lincoln's residence here.

Thomas and Alexander Britton were brothers and came from Virginia to Indiana in 1827. They were both men of culture and education. Alexander Britton's home was the center of church and social activities in those early days, and before any church was built in Rockport services were held in Alexander Britton's

house.

Thomas P. Britton was my grandfather. He spoke several languages and his handwriting in the county record books is so beautiful that the county officers of today delight in showing it to visitors. I have often heard my mother and aunt tell how many foreigners were brought to their home on their arrival in Spencer County because my grandfather could speak their language. Often at night there would be so many guests that my grandmother had to make beds on the floor. Many of the older people in Rockport have told me that they spent their first night in Rockport in my grandfather's home. Being clerk and recorder of the county for a number of years, he helped the foreigners to get settled and looked after their land. My mother told me much concerning the social affairs of that early day, the schools and their teachers, and she said my grandfather was often so depressed over the fact that his children could not have the education he wished for them because they only had school at intervals when a teacher could be secured. My grandfather had the first frame residence built in Rockport and the first brick residence, both of which are still standing and in excellent condition. He owned much land in and around Rockport.

Azel Dorsey was one of the first school teachers in the county and a man who played rather an important part in affairs of the county. It was in his home west of Rockport a few miles in which the first court was held. He was one of Abraham Lincoln's teachers.

The very earliest newspapers in Spencer County were destroyed by fire, but I have read and reread several volumes of "The Planter", a newspaper published in 1848 by Thomas Langdon.

Thomas Langdon lived here in Lincoln's time and was a lawyer and had practiced at the bar in New York. He had a college education and was a brilliant man. His grandson and great grandsons are living in Rockport and in newspaper work today.

These early newspapers that are filed in our library tell much of the social, literary and business affairs of the county, and although published eighteen years after the Lincolns left Indiana, they show the kind of people (for they were the same) who lived near the Lincolns all those formative years of Abe's life. In these papers are mentioned banquets, balls, dinner parties, musical affairs, etc.

There was a philosophical society with members such as General J. C. Veatch, W. W. Cotton, James DeBruler and many others. They studied astronomy, literature, phrenology, magnetism, mesmerism, etc. All young men who desired to improve their minds were urged to belong.

In the papers were long lists of books that could be ordered by mail and magazines advertised for sale. News from all over the world was printed and a reader of those early papers would have a general fund of information, if they read nothing else. A phonetic alphabet was edited weekly by General J. C. Veatch and John Crawford.

Such was the type of newspapers in Rockport a few years after the Lincolns moved to Illinois, and we have the proof of Abe Lincoln going on Saturdays to Gentryville to read the Louisville Journal, which was taken by William Jones (Colonel Jones) of Gentryville. Judging from what I have read in those early Rockport papers, the Louisville Journal would be

a still greater source of education to a constant reader.

The Gentry family in Spencer County has always been considered one of the most substantial and respected of any family ever in the county, and we know how much time Lincoln spent with the Gentry boys. I have often talked with different members of the family concerning Lincoln working for them. They are people of such standards of honesty, right living and intelligence that they would influence any one who lived with them as Abe did. Their home life and manner of living was such as to attract and hold the attention of a boy like Lincoln. It was with Allen Gentry that Lincoln took his first flatboat trip to New Orleans. James Gentry, the father of Allen, owned property in and near Rockport and in 1827 Allen came to live in the house near the river and a short distance from the boat landing where their produce was loaded on the flatboats for southern markets. Mr. and Mrs. Roby and their two daughters came from Gentryville with Allen to keep house for him and on March 19th, 1828, just two or three weeks before Gentry and Lincoln started on their trip, Allen and Ann Roby were married. Lincoln stayed two weeks at Alfred Grasses, a close neighbor of Allen Gentry, helping to prepare and load the boat for its long trip. The flatboats were made from hewn logs as the trees were chopped down. They were "pegged" together and calked as best they could with the material that they had.

We Spencer County people feel that this first trip of Lincoln had much influence on him in later years because on this trip he saw slaves whipped and sold and vowed to his friend Gentry that if ever he had a chance to hit this evil he would

hit it hard.

The Greathouse family was a notable one and John Greathouse had one of the earliest home libraries in Spencer County. He and his family had good educations for that day and time.

John Proctor was one of the county's brilliant men in that early day. He graduated from Harvard in 1813 and came to Spencer County in 1818. His family then and his descendants who live in Rockport today are some of Spencer County's most cultured and progressive people. I have been told many interesting stories concerning John Proctor, his culture and refinement by his granddaughter, Mrs. Carrie V. Halbruge.

The Rays and Lamars were the very earliest settlers, educated and of fine family. They did much for Spencer County and are today Spencer County's leading families. They show a background of breeding and culture. The Lincoln family could not have lived fourteen years in Spencer County without knowing the Ray and Lamar families and being impressed by their manner of living and their influence in the county.

The Huffmans came in 1812 and their children and grandchildren have carried on in Spencer County and are among its most honored and educated families.

Isaac Veatch was an early settler in Spencer County, coming from Harrison County to Spencer in 1825. He was a Baptist minister and no doubt preached a number of times at Old Pigeon Baptist Church where Thomas Lincoln was a member. He was in the Indiana Legislature in 1827, representing Spencer and Perry Counties.

Isaac Veatch had seven children, the youngest of
12.

whom was James born December 19th, 1819, in Harrison County. He was later to become an outstanding figure in Spencer County and Indiana. He became a major general in the civil war. Although he was a small boy when the Lincolns lived in Spencer County, he was a type of that western frontier life and showed the culture, intellect and training of his ancestors. He studied and taught and was both a botanist and a historian. He has children and grandchildren that I have known all my life.

I cannot mention every separate family in those pioneer days and tell their ancestry and their opportunity for education, but take a few from my original list to prove that Lincoln had within less than one-half of his own mentioned radius of fifty miles, many cultured and educated people whose lives could have inspired him, all of whom lived in the same county with him, and during his long life here there was full opportunity for Lincoln to know them.

It would have been impossible for anyone with average intelligence to have lived where Lincoln did in those early days in Spencer County and not have come in contact with many of the public men of that time. John A. Breckenridge lived in Boonville and he perhaps did more than any other man in attracting Lincoln to the study of law. Lincoln frequently went to Boonville to attend trials and hear the lawyers argue their cases and thereby came in contact with Breckenridge. Breckenridge came from the east and was well educated in an eastern college. He is one of the outstanding men of pioneer days in Indiana.

The DeBruler family who produced such brilliant men was in Jasper. It was a notable one, first in Pike County in 1818, then in Dubois and later in Spencer County. The twin brothers, Lemual Quinoy and James Pressbury DeBruler, were the two who came to Rookport in the 40's. The DeBruler family were such outstanding people in southern Indiana at the time the Lincolns lived here that Abraham must have had knowledge of them. During the civil war, Judge L. Q. DeBruler was sent to Washington to see Lincoln on some business matter. After the conference was over and DeBruler started to leave, Lincoln brought his great hand down on DeBruler's shoulder and said, "Sit down and tell me about the folks back home". This showed the continued interest of Lincoln for his boyhood friends in Spencer County.

The Crawford family, who employed both Abe and his father, loaned Abe books. I know the grandson and great grandchildren of the Crawfords and have heard the grandson tell of the Crawford home life and Lincoln's connection with his grandfather's home, etc.

The Hyland family were early aristocrats in Spencer County, also the Mattinglys and Browns.

The Hackleman family came in 1819 and there have been four generations of them. They were foremost men of the county.

The Roberts, Brooners, Berrys, Cottons, Wilkinsons, Richardsons, Wrights, Huffs, Romines, Medcalfs, and many more families could I name whose genealogies are familiar to me.

Lincoln's social affiliations were not alone in Spencer County, but in Dubois County around the neighborhood of Enlow Hill, as George R. Wilson has described it.

Could any pioneer community be started with more blue blood and education than were those early settlements in southern Indiana, with New Harmony leading them all?

We must not forget that the stepmother of Lincoln, "Sarah Bush Lincoln", did much to mold the character of the boy Lincoln and to arouse his ambitions. She loved the motherless boy and he gave her a son's devotion. Although Sarah Lincoln had little education, she encouraged Abraham in his desire to learn.

Here in this new, free state, the boy Abraham Lincoln grew to young manhood. His neighbors were largely clearminded, unpretending men of common sense, whose patriotism was unquestionable. He was undoubtedly molded by their influence and inspired by their intellect and so became the first true type of American citizen with sterling qualities of heart, humane sympathies, purity of life and the emancipator of a race.