

COLUMBUS, GA. Feb. 6th 1896

Miss Ida M. Tarbell

Dear Miss: I have been greatly interested in reading
your Abraham Lincoln in McClures magazine, and the Life at
New Salem 1832 to 1836. reviving many recollections of the past.
I am the son of Samuel Hill referred to in your article. I was
born at New Salem Ills. - Sep. 6. 1839, and so far as I
know am the only living person born at that now historic
spot - I left Ills. and came to Ga. in 1872, left to 1868 from 1840
I lived at Petersburg, except seven years spent at College. I never
personally knew, or had often heard of every local name mentioned
in your article, both Jan'y & Feb'y. now - From my earliest youth
I took lively interest in affairs in Menard Co., and up to 1864
from 1858 was active in politics - Was personally well ac-
quainted with Mr. Lincoln, when my father, Saml Hill,
died in 1858. I conversed with Lincoln & Herndon as to
the estate. Of course, I heard in all the years of youth
and early manhood a great deal as to New Salem and the
events and character there - Mr. Colman Frost,
Russell Godby, James Short, and others were very inti-
mate personal friends of mine, although much older than
myself. Hundreds of times from all the various men
of my acquaintance have heard New Salem incidents.

and as Mr Lincoln lived there during the days of its greatest prosperity, and was a prominent character in many of the local doings, I presume at one time or another, I heard about every thing of any consequence that transpired there - As my memory now serves me, you have accumulated the greater part of the facts, and have them about as perfect, as a stranger and inquirer could get them locally. In some instances there has been considerable painting up by some of the old citizens to give importance to themselves - This, of course, is natural - Take, for instance, Minter Graham the School teacher, whom every body knew. His tongue was wound up like an alarm clock, incessantly talking, the dread of all who did not want time destroyed. One cowed, walk across the street to avoid meeting him on that account. With practically no education, little natural ability, it is quite natural that history should have caught from interviews with him a good deal of romance. As School Commissioner of Duwamish Co., about 1863 or 1864, I examined Minter Graham under the law, in order to give him Certificate to teach, (which he could not) and had to refuse to give him Certificate of qualification, except 4th grade which was for a special school under local permit, and branches below fractions in arithmetic - James Short was a first class man. When he moved

to California 1849-50 - my father adopted his daughter
as a member of our family - She married & lives 8 miles
from Springfield now - When Mr Lincoln was elected
Pres. he went to Washington in person & applied for
an office - & finally secured the Indian Agency you
refer to. Mr Short after talking to me as to his pro-
spect of getting the ^{an} office, & was happy when he had
the Commission - There is, of course, a little extra
coloring in your relation of the facts - It was not
the surprise ~~as~~ you mention -

Was very intimate with Coleman Smoot, who as
a fact was one of the most sterling men of that
Section - He always lived some 7 or 8 miles from New
Salmon - The story you tell as to the meeting of Mr
Lincoln & Coleman Smoot was told me by
Mr Lincoln himself very humorously. ^{about} I was
entering the Chenery House Springfield ~~the~~ 1859
I saw Mr Lincoln sitting with his feet away up
on a locust tree, & he spoke to me and said "John
Come & sit down as soon as you get rid of your ^{bag} bag"
I did so, & he asked me about every old citizen of
men and to whom he knew at New Salmon & one
of the first he inquired about was Coleman
Smoot. He then told me the incident of their
meeting. But it was much more ludicrous, as
he related it than as you have it - You

Say "I had expected to see a good looking man when I saw you. Mr Lincoln said that & then continually added as the remarks of Mr Smoot. "Why you are the ugliest man I ever saw" & laughed most heartily - I always thought Mr Lincoln rather proud himself on being of homely appearance -

I sent Feb 10 of McClure to my mother at Petersburg Ills. In a letter today my mother has this paragraph - "I thank you for the magazine - I am sure the date is wrong about the year McNeil (John McClure) sailed out to your father and went East - He had just gone when we arrived here late in Oct 1832. (This means ^{the whole family} from Kentucky as emigrants) He came back after I went to house keeping in 1835 - Late in the fall. He unloaded his furniture at Dr. Allen's just across the street from us, and one headstead stood against the house for days, before it was taken in. He had written to Dr Allen that his name was McClure. "I always thought Aunt ~~Anna~~ would have married him, if she had lived. He had overstaid his appointed time. Aunt got a letter from him just before she took sick. Saying, be ready - he would buy furniture in Cincinnati and wanted to be married as soon as he got here, and go to house keeping. "I do not think I am mistaken in these dates." The conclusion is in mother's letter to me.

I doubt very much the Bishop's gun smith shop story as to its identity as Lincoln & Berrey's Grocery. Was very intimate with Robt. Bishop Sr. & away back when I was ten years to 12 years old remember the shop in his family yard & when he moved it to the present lot. I've heard him say, as I remember, that it was Lincoln's Grocery, the two story building next to it (on the corner) was my Father's Store, which he did move from New Salem to Petersburg 1839-40 in part & enlarged in the re-erection - My Father, also, moved, I think, his home - next to his New Salem Store - This home at New Salem was the 2nd door from Lincoln & Berrey's & was my birth place.

I have always heard, & I think it true, that Petersburg was originally surveyed into blocks lots &c by Mr Lincoln - After Mr Lincoln became prominent, I remember a party once offered me Mr Lincoln's Compass, which you illustrate, for \$7⁰⁰ and urged me to take it, but I declined - He said that the Compass originally surveyed Petersburg - You can find in Springfield Circuit Court & Recorder's records no doubt record of this survey -

In 1860 I was enroute from Petersburg to Springfield & had put my horses lodged in Springfield.

and had my valise in hand, when I met Mr Lincoln
He spoke cordially "How do you do John? Where
are you going?" I said "I am on the road
to the Charleston Convention" Lincoln
replied, "You are, I am glad I met you,
I am a Candidate for Vice President on
the Sevard ticket, Charleston is too
hot for any of my party to be there and
I guess you are the best friend I will have
down there. When any body is nominated
for President, I wish you would telegraph
it to me" I replied "I will take pleas-
ure in doing so Mr Lincoln"

No nomination could be made, and after many
days struggle, the Douglas delegation resolved to
adjourn next morning to meet in Baltimore
later - Early next morning I telegraphed to
Mr Lincoln as follows: "Douglas on
"nobody, the Convention will adjourn to day
"to meet at Baltimore a month hence"

I afterwards met Mr Lincoln in Springfield
& he thanked me for the telegram and said "he
"could not exactly understand what it meant
"until he saw the telegrams in the papers the
"next day, that he knew a big fight was going
"on in Charleston"

I have never seen in print the real reason why Mr Lincoln was first elected to the legislature at Vandalia - along with the "long nine" from Sangamon Co. Parties well divided & politics run high - The portion of ^{the} Sangamon Co. now known as Menard Co. wanted to be divided off from Sangamon Co., and all in that section of the County favored it - I have often heard my father say. (He was a democrat) that he & many others united whig & democrat & got Mr Lincoln nominated & elected on the County dividing question - there being a pretty unanimous vote for him about New Salem while he carried the whig vote in the balance of the County - The County was then very large - The County dunces were then made & Capital removed to Springfield largely through work of the "long nine"

One of the most touching incidents in Lincoln's private life you should be sure to get - Quite likely you may find it in Herndon's life of Lincoln - It is the Defence of the Son of Armstrong, for Murder, by a plea by Mr Lincoln from friendship & I remember it well & the boys old mother's going to Springfield to ask Lincoln to defend her

Son - & the grand way in which he did say
& had him "Cleared" of a very unpromised
murder at a Camp Meeting.

Often have heard Father tell of his having
to lock Mr. Lincoln up in a room to pre-
vent suicide after Ann Rutledge's death -
Every effort was made to direct his mind -
As a fact for a short time his mind wandered.

Mr. Lincoln was not a Christian until
the death of "Jad" in Washington. He was directly
the reverse of a Christian. Mr. Herndon his
law partner was the same, & when he published
as to Mr. Lincoln's belief, he was telling the
truth, as old settlers & friends knew, but it was
a truth better unsaid than published - If
you search for his religious belief before he
was Pres. that is what you will find. But
it is better for him & history that this be
left to fade away.

When Mr. Lincoln was in Father's store he "wrote
a book" on religion. My father tried to
get him not to publish, but Lincoln persisted
in saying he would. Father finally got pos-
sion of it & burned it up. I think Mr.
Herndon has published this - So do
not try to find "evidence of Christianity"

in Mr Lincoln before 1861, for it was not
there -

You mention names of persons living who knew
Lincoln at New Salem - I think the names cor-
rect - & about all that remain - I think
my mother is probably the only person liv-
ing that actually lived in New Salem as
a residence, while he was there - the others
lived in Country - So far as I know she
& myself are the last of the Citizens of
New Salem as it was - One by one they
drop away

Yours truly
John Hill