

In the Footsteps of Abraham Lincoln

CHAPTER I

His Great-great-great-great-grandfather Arrives in America

The story of Abraham Lincoln really begins in Hingham, Mass., in the year 1637, when the first of his family line came to the Puritan colony of Boston Bay. The history of his forebears as generation after generation they followed and continued the developement of America in State after State, is like that of many a family. It typifies the extent of the growth of our country.

We cannot account for Abraham Lincoln without know the story of his vigorous ancestors. He was not an accident. I have found it an enlightening and inspiring thing to follow the Lincolns, beginning at Hingham, to visit all the places in which they lived, to travel the roads that they traveled, and to go through at first hand the records of their activities. The whole history of the United States seemed to roll out before me in the wanderings and the doings of this family. In this narrative a million readers will find a parallel to their own family history. This man and America was founded and grew from such families.

The Lincolns were necessary and important before the

miracle of Abraham Lincoln happened. It could not have been without such vigorous, independent, pioneering ancestors.

It is now 285 years since a boy, Samuel Lincoln, a lad of seventeen or eighteen, such a boy as we now send to high school or college, landed in America. This boy was the Great-great-great-great-grandfather of Abraham Lincoln.

Young as he was, he was not without some experience of life. He had sat on a backless bench in a seventeenth century school room in Hingham, England, and received his share of its narrow but severe teaching. And, because he was to earn his living, and weaving was the natural trade for a boy in Norfolk County, England, at that time, he had been apprenticed - apprenticed to a man by the name of Francis Lawes, living in Norwich, not many miles from Hingham.

When you were apprenticed in those days, you left your family and became a member of your master's family. You had more to do than to learn to weave. In fact, you were what was called an indentured servant. Mr. Lawes was under contract to teach Samuel the trade and to give him his keep and a small - probably a very small - weekly or monthly sum. Samuel in turn was obliged to obey Mr. Lawes and that meant not only that he must learn to weave but he must wait on the family. If the family was ungenerous and domineering, it is easy to see that the apprentices had a bad time. Indeed they had so bad a time that only a few years after Samuel left England there was what was called the "Apprentices' Revolt" -

strike, we should probably say today. It produced the state of things which led Daniel Defoe to complain that while once apprentices cleaned their master's shoes and brought in water and waited at the table, now their masters were obliged to keep porters or "fetch men" as he calls them, to wait upon the apprentices.

Samuel did not profit by the apprentices' strike, for in 1637, Francis Lawes decided to go to America and to take him along. It was in April that they "passed into foreign parts" as the record has it - a long voyage, over two months, and in June arrived in Salem. Samuel did not stay in Salem. Before many weeks he took ship for a town twenty miles or thereabouts to the south, called Hingham, or New Hingham, after his old home in Norfolk County, England.

I say "took ship" and that is sure, for in those days he could not have gone overland. Safe trails had not yet been established, and there was no way to cross so wide a river as the Charles; but of fishing and trading boats there were already not a few plying along the coast. And it was in one of those that Samuel sailed out one day from Salem harbor.

What a sail - that from Salem into Hingham Bay - to take before man had slashed the great timber that came down to the very water's edge of many a promontory and island - before he had

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seized the rocks and bluffs of Boston Harbor for his lights and marks, his guns and forts, his factories and chimneys.

The bay into which Samuel came is one of rare interest and beauty. You make it coming from the north by turning around the tip of that curved finger of land we know as Hull. Across its water to the south lies a cove, Bare Cove, the first settlers called it; and it was into this that the vessel on which Samuel was a passenger, made its way.

Bare Cove ran up between two high bluffs in those days, a snug and sheltered spot, where now are asphalted streets, railroad tracks, rows of houses and shops. Indeed, one of the most puzzling things for a sightseer in Hingham today is to read on a tablet, high and dry, above a street along which automobiles run, and blocks away from the present wharf, the fact that Peter Hobart, about whom we are to hear later, debarked on that spot in September, 1635.

Samuel hardly stopped, however, to look about him in his first moment. It had been months now since he left Old Hingham, and in that time he had seen few old friends; but here, awaiting him on the wharf, were many - among them two of his brothers, Thomas, the oldest of the family, a weaver; his brother Daniel, only two or three years older than himself, and with them a cousin Nicholas Jacob. All three of these men had been in the Massachusetts Colony nearly four years, and already were householders and landholders in New Hingham.

Why were they here - these brothers of his - this cousin?

Why was this tiny New Hingham made up of people from Old Hingham? We have been taught to say that it was because they sought a place in which they could worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. It is an incomplete explanation.

True, these people that Samuel had joined and their forebears for generations had been struggling in England to escape the tyranny of priests and prelates, to secure the right to own and read the Bible, to interpret it in their own way, to make and say their won prayers, and to do away with the complicated ceremonial that, in their judgment, the Church had substituted for righteousness of heart.

They had been struggling, too, for a government in which they could have a full representation, for the right to run their own local affairs, to hold meetings, improve their schools, own their land. Their struggle had had its ups and downs, and from the point of view of many of them was at this time almost hopeless. When Samuel left England it had been eight years since there had been a meeting of parliament, Charles I. having shut the doors on its members in 1629.

All these things go into the explanation of their migration, and it was these things, fought over year after year, that had broken down old institutions, destroyed industries, driven out much of the skilled management that heretofore had directed affairs, until finally the whole agricultural and industrial machine, particularly of the Eastern part of England, had been thrown into

such confusion that self-support was almost impossible. The group that Samuel joined in New Hingham left Old Hingham largely because they were no longer able to earn a decent living there.

But there was much more with Samuel, and probably most of the young. There was adventure. What more royal adventure has the world ever offered than this of crossing a mysterious ocean to a continent only a fragment of whose shore line had been charted - a continent inhabited by a strange people - a continent where, so it was believed, there was fabulous wealth for the taking.

At the time of Samuel's coming the Hingham "Plantation," as the settlements were called, numbered perhaps fifty people - there were only about 14000 in all the New England colonies. Every month this number increased, and what was of interest to Samuel was that so many of the people that came, he knew. Most important of all these early arrivals was that of Robert Peck, the minister who had baptized him back in 1622 in England, and who had brought him up in the

sternest Puritan way. Robert Peck had been one of the most uncompromising of his faith, one who could be counted on to boldly disobey any order of a bishop of which he did not approve. He would not preach in a surplice. He would not read the "Book of Sports" which the church authorities thought would be good for the Puritans - a 17th century attempt to introduce the continental Sunday into England. Particularly he would not consent that the communion table be removed from the nave of the church where everybody could reach it, to its former place of honor at the end of the chancel. And when, in 1634, the archbishop thought himself strong enough both politically and ecclesiastically to force the table back into its old place and the order was carried out in the Old Hingham church, Robert Peck rose in holy indignation and called his parishioners together. There is no doubt but that Samuel was in the group, or on its outskirts, that dragged the altar from its new place, stripped it of its gilding and candles, and actually lowered the floor of the chancel several inches below that of the nave.

Robert Peck had to pay the price of his continued revolting. He was stripped of his living - ex-communicated. There was nothing for him to do, so he thought, but to follow the Puritans to the new world.

And this he did in 1638, landing only a few months after 161.

His going had been a dreadful loss to Old Hingham. But what was a tragedy to Old Hingham was a blessing to New, for Robert

Peck became their first teacher, and to see him going in and out among the little houses of New Hingham must have done much to make life more natural for young Samuel.

Another early arrival that meant much to Samuel was that of Daniel Cushing, a young man near his own age, with whom he had no doubt gone to school and to church and played whatever proper games Robert Peck had tolerated in Old Hingham. He was a young man of ambition, energy - a very human person, too. He ran a general store, became town clerk, grew prosperous and influential in New Hingham. The most satisfactory record of what went on in Hingham that we have is Daniel Cushing's account book. In which he not only set down his daily transactions but many of the doings of his neighbors - the time that Israel Leavett abused Mr. Norton and his wife with "base speeches" - the time his boy got drunk at Enoch Hobart's - the case set down in a numerical alphabet he sometimes used of a hasty marriage, a premature birth - the kind of thing that proves to us that the Puritans, with all their severity, never succeeded in suppressing drunkenness or immorality - make us suspicious, indeed, that that very severity may have stimulated what they sought to root out.

It humanizes one's ideas of Hingham no little to know that there were men of Daniel Cushing's journalistic bent in the community. Samuel Lincoln and he must have talked over things in the town many a day, much in the fashion, I fancy, that a couple

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of hundred years later, a great-great-great-great-grandson of Samuel's was to gossip and discuss in a country store of southwestern Indiana, a country store over which he presided in New Salem, Ill., and later still, in a drug store on the square in Springfield, Ill. Daniel Cushing was just about the same kind of a man to talk with that Abraham Lincoln found in all of these towns.

When Samuel Lincoln arrived in Hingham it was little more than a collection of log houses, strung along a brook which flowed into the head of Bare Cove - one of those clear, musical, New England brooks, bounding down over the rocks, through narrow meadows of high lush grass - a brook which today unhappily one

would not know was in existence, so thoroughly has it been boxed in for the convenience of the town.

The valley in which the little settlement lay was narrow, steep hills rising on each side, clothed with timber - primeval timber - oak, hemlock, walnut, shagbark, ash, beech, cedar, elm - wonderful woods to work with. Across from the main group of houses, to the south of the brook, "on an eminence" stood the church - of logs, thatched, and, soon after Samuel's arrival to be surrounded by a palisade.

One of the first things Samuels had to learn was why it was necessary to have a citadel in this little settlement, and why military service was required of everyone that had reached his age and strength. The settlers then - and indeed through all his life, had to keep the Indian constantly in mind. Samuel was not allowed to go a mile from his home without his musket. When he went to church or to a town meeting, he must go armed. There was a compensating convenience, for bullets were legal tender, passing freely for farthings. He took his turn at the guard that was set at sunset. He learned, too, the Indian method of warfare, fighting behind trees. To perfect her militia in this, Hingham early forbade the cutting of the big timber in certain sections in the town, - it was kept for training purposes. One part of the furnishing of Hingham church was a barrel of powder, always kept full. That is,

at the very start of his life in the new world, there was the thrill of danger and the responsibility of doing his part to meet it.

Samuel's first problem was to find work. There was no chance for him at his trade. A man could not be spared at that moment for weaving. The settlers' looms, what there were of them, had been turned over to the women. But if there was no work at his trade, there was plenty of other kinds. It was nip and tuck to raise corn enough for the winter, to catch and salt enough fish, to cut wood for the fire, to build the new houses that the rapidly increasing population demanded. New Hingham was growing, and a strong young man was in demand.

There was work in nearby settlements, too, when the town consented that one go. There was Scituate only about ten miles to the south-east, several years older than Hingham. There was Braintree and Hull, near neighbors. There was Boston, rapidly growing, and demanding timbers, planks, boards. There were young shipyards at various points, ready to take masts. Then, too, a lively exchange of commodities was soon going on with the English settlements to the south in Virginia and the West Indies. We often forget in reckoning the chances that the New England settlers had for trade, the excellent market provided by their own people in the Barbadoes, Bermuda, St. Kitts, Old and New Providence. As a matter of fact, when Samuel Lincoln began his business career in Hingham, there were four times as many English people in the south and the West Indian colonies as in all of New England

itself. The products of the various settlements, too, were so dissimilar that exchange went on continuously and naturally.

All this made business increasingly brisk in the settlement. In 1644 Samuel Lincoln's brother Thomas, a bachelor, died and left everything he had to him. It helped him to buy a five-acre tract of land in one of the best locations along the brook, as one can see, going into Hingham today. As you come in on the train from Boston, you cannot miss, looking out at the right, a glittering white statue of Daniel Webster, standing in a beautifully kept flower garden. These ^{are} ~~were~~ once the fields ¹⁰ owned by Samuel Lincoln, and up the street a little further stands an old house on the site of the one that he built in 1649. Nothing of the original is left except some of the timbers.

Into this house Samuel took a wife. All that we know of her is that her name was Martha. A nice problem for ambitious young genealogists is to solve the family name of the woman that Samuel Lincoln married. She must have been a vigorous woman for she was splendidly equal to the chief duty the settlement of a new country lays on women, the bearing of many healthy children. Her first son was born in 1650 and baptized Samuel. In 23 years Martha brought into the world eleven children. Advocates of birth control may raise their hands in horror and expect to find records of death accompanying those of birth. Three of Martha's children did not grow up, but eight lived for seventy years or thereabouts. And as for Martha herself, she outlived Samuel, dying in 1693.

Though there is nothing but a few old timbers left of the home in which Samuel and Martha reared their family, it is not difficult to reconstruct it. A house of stout timbers, the very heart of which was the great fireplace, with its wide hearth and deep oven, its shelf for dishes and cranes for pots, its curved settees at either side, a candle shelf in the middle of each high back, making cosy ingle nooks for the children and their elders. Before this fireplace food was prepared and eaten. Before it the family gathered to carry on a score of simple industries. Before it they talked, popped their corn, and melted their maple sugar. Before it, too, they knelt morning and night for prayer.

No doubt among the iron and pewter and wooden utensils preserved today so carefully in New England by descendants of the settlers, there are articles that Samuel and Martha used; but, so far as I have been able to find, there are only two in existence which we can say with any certainty were once in their hands. These are a big and a little wooden mortar, with their pestles, the larger one easily taking a peck of corn; the other probably used for pounding pepper and the like, owned, as is proper, by descendants of one of the early Hingham Lincolns. But if we cannot put our hands on the chairs, the tables, the bedsteads and coverlets, the Dutch oven and toasting fork, the wooden porringer, the plates and saucers that Samuel used, we can today with certainty see what they were like, in the town's excellent historical museum.

In Hingham, as in all of the Massachusetts colonies

of that day, the minister was the ruling spirit. The character, the intelligence, the tolerance or intolerance of the community depended largely upon him. When a man was a member of the church - for he had no standing in the community if he was not a member, not even being allowed to vote in civil affairs - his thinking and actions were largely shaped by the minister. Luckily for Samuel, and I think for his descendants, the minister under whom he sat was far and away from being the worst of the Puritans. The Rev. Peter Hobart had an independent spirit and a more liberal mind than the men at the head of the government and than many of the ministers of the colonies.

He was devoted to his parish. Much of the little documentary evidence of what went on in the town in Samuel's day comes from Peter Hobart's habit of setting down what happened from day to day. His diary, carefully done up in red morocco, has found a safe place in the files of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

It is a book well worth looking at - bound in wizened leather - a home-made binding. I take it, from the way the leather is folded over the pastboard cover and from the narrow leather thongs that bind it - a wonderful thing to get your hands on if you care for ink and paper and the way they stand up under time. I have seen two manuscript copies of Peter Hobart's diary - the one made perhaps forty, the other some fifty years ago, and in both of them the ink and paper are faded and old, compared to the original, the

first entry of which was made at least 287 years ago, with the introductory remark: "I with my wife and four chyl dren came safely to New England June ye 8: 1635: forever praysed be the god of Heaven my god and king."

On almost every page of the book one finds a Lincoln - born, married, died - a populous, growing line. These were not all kin of Samuel, by any means, for to Hingham there had come just before or after he did, other Lincolns, distantly, if at all, related. Indeed, there were at least eight settlers of the name - sturdy people. Today, as in Samuel's day, the most frequent name in the town records of Hingham - including the telephone book - is Lincoln.

The fact that Samuel Lincoln was and remained a church member throughout his life in proof enough that he walked a straight and narrow path. Life was a serious matter under Peter Hobart - a matter of strictest rules, that the church authorities saw to it that you obeyed or knew the reason why. There was no escape from church going, for every Sunday morning a church officer went from house to house, running in idlers. There was no sleeping in church for at every service a hawk-eyed watchman sat in the rear of the great bare room, knocking the head of any man who dozed with a pole, tickling the ear of any woman with a feather. You must at least appear to listen to Peter Hobart's two-hour sermons on fallen man, an angry God, election, damnation, eternal fire.

Severe and forbidding as it all sounds, life must

have been, in the main, healthy and full of interest. Theological discussions exercise the mind if they do not entertain it. There is a curious kind of pleasure in horrors; and no doubt the orgies of terror in which the early Puritans indulged had their fascination.

Their religion, too, was not of a kind which made man inexpressive, or servile. Under Peter Hobart's leadership, indeed, it was just the opposite. Samuel had been but a few years in Hingham when the town was enlivened by a quarrel with the General Court, a sort of colonial council at Boston, which set them all by the ears: a test - most necessary at the moment - of how far the central authority was to interfere with local liberty.

The trouble arose over the captaincy of Hingham's company of militia. The majority of the town fell out with the man who had held the position for some time and elected a successor. The General Court refused to ratify. Peter Hobart led in a revolt against this decision, and signed a petition asking reconsideration. Governor Winthrop and the magistrates resented this questioning of their authority. There was a trial - a trial which went against Hingham and led to the fining of a number of the citizens, Peter Hobart among them. Hobart was loud in contempt; there was no reason for the fine, he said, except that he had signed a petition, and he hinted that the General

Court was going beyond the powers of its charter, not only in this case but others.

All of this of course only stiffened the backs of the authorities. Hobart was a marked man. On a later occasion, when the ministers of the colony had been summoned to consultation, he was ordered out of the meeting. And again, when a great marriage of a former Hingham resident was to be solemnized at Boston, and Hobart was asked to come and preach, the magistrates sent him home. The reason they gave was that he was a "bold man and would speak his mind."

The quarrel was a long time in subsiding. The minority which backed up the central authorities claimed that the development of Hingham was seriously injured by its spirit of revolt. However, what they may have lost in this was gained in a vigorous spirit which continued unafraid to challenge even ecclesiastical authority if its rights were invaded.

Just as Samuel Lincoln was obliged to consider where local authority should end and central authority begin, so he was early obliged to consider that standing question of the relative rights of rich and poor. Almost immediately the ^{was} disenfranchised settlers - and they made up four-fifths of the people - had lined themselves up against the ruling few. Again and again the struggle shows itself in the records of the doings of the magistrates. A classical case is that of Mrs. *Sherman* ^{had}, who lost a sow.

Runaway animals, particularly pigs, were one of the chief annoyances of the early settlers, and it is not to be wondered at that a stray was often captured and confined by the husbandman prosperous enough to provide himself with pens. Mrs. Sherman had no pen, and she brought suit against a neighbor who, she believed, had captured the animal she had lost. The documents in the case seemed to show that the lady did not have satisfactory evidence that the sow she claimed was hers, and yet, in spite of this, the deputies stood by her - she was poor, the man she sued was rich.

Indians, damnation, infant baptism, the rich against the poor, the tyranny of the General Court - these were the questions that Samuel Lincoln was forced to consider and decide - questions that kept his and his neighbors' minds active - not altogether peaceful subjects, but stout ones, fit for men, bound to develop grip, character.

Unhappily, not all of the Hingham quarrels in which Samuel Lincoln must have taken part, were as worthy in substance as these. In the later years of his life, Hingham was rent in twain by a row over the church. - a common enough happening among the Puritans. Indeed, Cotton Mather says that "the rebuilding and removing of meeting houses unfitted neighbors for lifting up pure hands without wrath in those houses." It certainly did so in Hingham.

A new meeting house had become necessary. It was estimated that it would cost £ 450, besides what could be gotten

for the old building. In 1680 a subscription was taken up to which 143 members put their names. Samuel and his sons did very well, putting in between them, something like \$5. Then came the question of the site. It was to be changed, and there was sharp division of opinion. In 1681 the constable took a vote "for another place to get y^e new meeting house on." The majority ruled but the feud has never quite died out. "If they had not put the meeting house there," ^{once} I heard a Hinghamite say, ~~only a few months ago~~.

However, that meeting house, built in 1681 with the money that Samuel and his sons and his neighbors subscribed, still stands; its splendid timbers sound and seasoned, are to be seen in its loft. It has been enlarged, to be sure, ceiled, made comfortable in many ways unknown to Samuel's day, but its bones and sinews are the same. And it has the distinction of being the oldest meeting house in this country, to have been in continuous use for as long as 240 years.

Samuel Lincoln worshipped in it to the end of his life. That end came on May 26, 1690. Under that date, Daniel Cushing put down in his account book: "Old Sam Linkoln died of the small-pox." Dread disease! - the only disease one finds mentioned in Peter Hobart's diary or Daniel Cushing's account book.

Samuel undoubtedly was buried in the family lot in the old cemetery, but no mark of his grave nor one of Martha his wife nor of the three babes she lost exist today. Hingham seems

to have gone through a period of vandalism in the 18th and early part of the 19th century, when its chief idea was to rid herself as completely and as rapidly as possible of the old graveyard and all that was in it, above and below the ground. I do not know that I have ever come across any more ruthless treatment than this that Hingham gave to the graves of the men and women who had broken the first ground and put up the first houses and built the first church, as well as the church of which they are so proud today. They wanted the land, wanted it for shops and an easier approach to the bluffs beyond, so they hacked down the hill, dumping bones and headstones into something like a garbage heap, as they went. Hingham's boys and girls of the early 19th century remembered the old burial ground as a cow pasture, with heaps of broken coffins, fragments of shrouds and decaying bones scattered about. They played push ball on the flat tomb stones and fought Indian battles among the graves of their fathers.

The old slate headstone, one of which undoubtedly belonged to Samuel, were many of them sold. There are at least two chimneys to be seen in Hingham today in which it is known that headstones went, and I was told on a visit to the town in 1922 that only a short time before, when repairs were making on the old dye house, the great door step - a fine piece of stone - was turned over, only to discover that it was the headstone of one of the Rev. Peter Hobart's family.

But Samuel Lincoln, though dead and his bones unhonored, did not pass out of the life of New Hingham. He left behind four sons, grown, and four daughters. These children he had seen married into the best of Hingham's families. In the old home in which he died his oldest son, his namesake, was living, and there, sitting at the fireside, was his grandson, Samuel. He was not to know it, but it was to be true, that out of the line of this oldest son were to come some of the most distinguished of New England's citizens, among them three governors of commonwealths. He was not to know, but it was true, that from another of his sons, the one whose acquaintance we must now make, was to come the man who was to contribute as much as any man which this, or any other country has produced, to the solution of those tangled problems of liberty and authority, of the rich and the poor, of tolerance and intolerance, with which he had been forced to grapple in those early days.

(The next article will deal with Mordecai Lincoln, fourth son of Samuel Lincoln, and great-great-great-grandfather of Abraham Lincoln.)