

A. E. EWING
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR
532 MICHIGAN TRUST CO. BLDG.
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

Feb. 18, 1925.

*thought you
might like to have
it - S.T.*

Ida M. Tarbell,
120 E. 19th St.,
New York City.

Dear Miss Tarbell:-

Following mine of the 13th relative to the Barton N.Y. Times article of Feb. 8, I have given the story a "once over". I would like nothing better than to have the time to devote to an analytical review of the various claims and counterclaims of the Nancy Hanks researchers. I believe we are in a stage of "research", rather than "investigation", if a distinction may be drawn. I would like to make report on it as would the foreman of a grand jury after hearing the evidence, good, bad and indifferent. I do not think the case has yet reached the court. You know the witnesses before a court on the trial of an issue are confined to matters of personally known facts, leaving it to the court and jury to adduce the conclusions. Before a grand jury, greater latitude is permitted. Reports, rumors, hearsay, opinions etc., are expressed, - not exactly as evidence, but as a means of discovering evidence. Before the grand jury now in session, there have been many witnesses called. I am not thoroughly posted on all the testimony, but if I were summing it up at this time, the witnesses I believe I would pay most attention to would be Dennis Hanks, Herndon, Hitchcock, Tarbell and Barton. I would not go at it with a view to proving that any one of them knew the whole truth, nor that any one of them proves any other of them knowingly false. It has been a case of groping in the dark. The recent pathetic case of Floyd Collins wriggling through the dank caverns of the unexplored Kentucky caves is quite analogous to the explorations of the Nancy Hanks genealogists. They have been literally feeling their way by the light of a flickering candle.

All I can possibly do at present is to make a few general observations, and without a book at hand to refer to for the definite statement of any author.

There has always been in the Lincoln background an overhanging cloud of mystery in his maternal genealogy. Undeniably, he was the son of Nancy Hanks. Some have claimed that he was the illegitimate (so called) son of Nancy Hanks, and that Thomas Lincoln married Nancy in order to give her child a name, etc. I believe it was to disprove this story that largely prompted Mrs. Hitchcock to crawl into the caverns. She came out with proofs of a regular marriage and the subsequent mature birth of the child Abraham. This was her great triumph. She may have pieced Nancy's ancestral Hanks into a crazy quilt, but that was more or less incidental to her main purpose. Perhaps she was so vertical in her sense of social rectitude as to "lean backwards" in her effort to prove strict virtue in all the Hanks lines, collateral as well as lineal. I believe one "grand jury" hearsayer went so far as to claim that Nancy was not true to Thomas after he had married her and that there came near being a family fight over it, and that the removal to Indiana was to get away from the disgrace into which she had fallen in the Kentucky neighborhood. The public received such stories as slanderous inventions, and likely they were, and yet, you know the old adage "where there is much smoke, there must be some fire". I do not always swallow that adage without salt, but still it has lived on its merit. Dennis Hanks

A. E. EWING
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR
532 MICHIGAN TRUST CO. BLDG.
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

was admittedly an illegitimate child. As I recall it, Herndon quoted Abraham Lincoln as saying that Dennis came into the world "by the back door", or something to that effect. I do not just recall where Mrs. Hitchcock places Dennis Hanks (if she does it at all). Barton says he was the illegitimate son of Nancy, daughter of Joseph. It is this daughter, Nancy, that has been regarded as Abraham's mother. That would make Dennis and Abraham half brothers. Not probable. Nor could Joseph Hanks have two Nancies. It is also true, I believe, that a Nancy Hanks lived much with the Sparrows. Was this Nancy Mrs. Sparrow's sister, or her niece?

As I said at the start, I cannot take the time to technically analyze the situation, nor would I attempt to do it without reviewing all that has been written on that topic.

For the present, I must say that I am impressed with the consistency of Barton's claims. Out of the "mess" he has at least adduced a fairly consistent story. I can hardly say that he has "proved" his assertions, but he asserts them with such emphasis as to suggest his possession of the proofs. Perhaps he has had to bridge some of the apertures with weak timbers, but if he can construct a bridge that satisfies unbiased reason, he has at least made a valuable contribution. His report takes care of Dennis Hanks, of Nancy Hanks the daughter of Joseph, of Lucy the sister of Nancy, of Lucy's Nancy the mother of Abraham Lincoln, of the Hanks-Sparrow confusion: he has made Lucy the goat and given her a good whitewashing. He has unearthed some Rockingham County records, the integrity of which we cannot reasonably question. They say truth harmonizes with every other fact. The fact that we are confronted with inconsistent statements from different researchers would indicate the ~~the~~ harmonizer of facts is yet to come forth. Barton is attempting that job, and a large one it is. I am not disposed to dispute him simply because he contradicts others. Hitchcock and Tarbell contradicted predecessors. Barton, it seems to me, has made such a prima facie case that is likely to stand until broken down by others. He has the advantage of being the latest witness.

I am patiently waiting for someone to tell me who was William Hank, of Rockingham and Monroe, my great grandfather. And what my grandfather Caleb (b. 1789) meant when he said (in 1860) that an aunt, or cousin, or other relative by the name of Nancy Hank had gone to Kentucky and married a man by the name of Lincoln (Lin-con, was the way he pronounced it) and had not been heard from for years. According to Barton, Lincoln's mother Nancy was born in 1785, making her five years old than my grandfather Caleb. She married Thomas Lincoln in 1806, when my grandfather was 17. At that time he lived in Monroe Co., a sort of half way point between Rockingham and Kentucky. Why and how could such a report have reached him and stuck in his memory till 1860, in Ohio. He was a good old Methodist and was regarded as a man of high character. As to whether he said "aunt" or "cousin" or "relative", I am inclined to allow more or less latitude in the transmission of his tradition from his generation to the present one. It seems improbable from anything actually proved to date that Nancy Hanks Lincoln could have been his aunt. Joseph Hanks' William is accounted for by Mrs. Hitchcock. Our William Hank died in 1823, and his wife was Susanna Berry who died in 1837, as I have recently learned. We may have descended from John Hank of Pa., but I believe that the Penn. Hank and the Amelia Co., Va., Hanks families were one and the same clan. For the present, Yours sincerely, A. E. Ewing

A. E. Ewing