

**J. L. ROLL'S AUDITION
for
POSTERITY.**

by

John Linden Roll.

QUESTION: Mr. Roll, we know that you and your family have been pioneers in this section and that you know, intimately, the Abraham Lincoln family. Would you tell us something that you personally remember about the Lincolns ?

ANSWER: In June 1828 my grandfather William Roll and his brother Jacob C. Roll and Pearson Roll emigrated from New Jersey and settled in Sangamon County, seven and one half miles north west of Springfield. They preempted large tracts of land in Gardner Township. They also owned lots in Sangamo Town. Pierson Roll had large holdings across the Sangamon River and to reach the village had to ford the River, as there were no bridges, and to this day the crossing is known as Rolls Ford. Two years later in 1830, my father John Eddy Roll, with the balance of the William Roll family, started from New Jersey in covered wagons and landed in Sangamon Town in June 1830. The delay in their coming to Sangamon Town was caused by the fact that a sister of my fathers was an invalid and she was not expected to recover. She, realizing that they were delaying their trip on account of her physical condition insisted upon their making the trip and taking her with them. They laid her on a mattress in a spring wagon and drove to the Ohio River where they transferred to boats. She made the entire trip with them and lived to the age of ninety-three - the oldest in the family.

QUESTION: We have read a number of articles in the press and records in the State Historical Library, stating that your father helped Abraham Lincoln in building the much publicized flat boat that caught on the mill dam at New Salem.

Answer: The circumstances of my father's meeting Lincoln, was that Lincoln had been employed by Offett and Green of New Salem to build a flat boat to carry shipments of produce to New Orleans. Sangamon Town was selected for the building of the boat, because there was an abundance of suitable timber and a saw mill there. The flat boat is the one that had been published so much as the boat that got stuck on the New Salem mill dam, in the launching of which, my father told of an adventure in which Lincoln rescued four men from drowning. Lincoln employed my father to help in the building of the boat and embarked on the boat with Lincoln down the river.

QUESTION: You mention Sangamon Town, Mr. Roll. Do you know any thing more about this place?

ANSWER: Sangamon Town was located in Gardner Township on a bend on the west side of the Sangamon River. The records show that it was platted on June 1, 1824. A plat of the town shows that it was platted into eight city blocks intersected by streets and divided into lots. The town grew quite rapidly, so that at the time my father landed there it had the appearance of a thriving village, with a number of stores, a grist mill, a saw mill, a carding mill, a public square, a doctor and cemetery. There was also a brick yard in the town. The plat shows that my grandfather owned a lot in the town and that Jacob C. Roll was the Postmaster, a merchant in the town, and a miller, a distiller and owned 1,000 acres of land. Pierson Roll farmed over a thousand acres on the opposite side of the river. Sangamon Town Plat was vacated by an act of General Assembly March 3, 1845. Sixty one years after my

father lived in Sangamo Town, he returned for his first visit. All he found were some bricks of the foundation of some of the buildings and some pieces of crockery that had been plowed up. He located the spot where he had helped Lincoln build the flat boat. I visited the spot one hundred years after the boat had been built.

QUESTION: It seems strange that such a flourishing town, as you say it once was, should be abandoned. How did that happen ?

ANSWER: At the time the agitation for the removal of the State Capitol from Vandalia in 1836, Sangamon Town was one of the towns seeking the permanent location. At that time Sangamo was a more pretentious town than Springfield and considered by some as being a better location than Springfield and might possibly have been selected, but the Springfield Committee selected to represent Springfield played a trick on the legislative committee selected to decide on a location. It is told that this Springfield Committee conducted the Legislative Committee over the worst roads, over hills and dales, through sloughs and brush and so disgusted the committee that they returned to Springfield, declaring Sangamo was too inaccessible. The village was afterwards absorbed by Springfield and soon became extinct until now it is but a memory of an incident in the life of a great American. The spot should and probably will, some day, be marked by a tablet memorable to that location and tradition.

QUESTION: In looking over your collection of Abraham Lincoln curios, it occurs to us, that there is one thing of special interest. The account book of your fathers contracting business showing charges for labor and material at different times, covering repairs and construction on the Lincoln home.

ANSWER: In April 1849 my father had a repair job in the Lincoln Springfield home on Eight Street. A charge account shown in a book in my possession shows that the work came to \$26.60 and the account was settled by a credit, by six walnut doors, sash and cash. I have constructed from the wood of these doors, furniture and souvenirs. The charge book contains the names of many prominent people in the period of 1849 and 1850. The book also shows that my father had contracts for plastering the Old State House, now the County Court House.

QUESTION: No doubt, Mr. Roll, you recall the time that Lincoln and his family left here to go to Washington for his inauguration.

ANSWER: My brother and I were about the same ages as Willie and "Tad" Lincoln. We, having an uncle (Charles Arnold), living across the street from the Lincoln home on Eight Street, brought us in close contact with the Lincoln family, so we became close friends of the Lincoln boys and their Dog "Fido". When Lincoln left for Washington to assume the presidency, one of the serious questions was, what to do with "Fido". It was finally decided, inasmuch as the Roll boys were friends of the family, we should assume the responsibility of his care.

QUESTION: Did he live to be very old, Mr. Roll ?

ANSWER: We possessed the dog about ten years, when one day, the dog in a playful manner put his dirty paws upon a half drunken man sitting on the street curbing. In his drunken rage, he thrust a knife into the body of poor old "Fido". He was buried by loving hands. So "Fido", just a poor "Yaller Dog" met the fate of his illustrious master - assassination.

QUESTION: Mr. Roll we know that you remember the depressing tragedy when Abraham Lincoln's remains were brought back here to Springfield. Will you tell us your recollections of it, please.

ANSWER: The depressing days of the return to Springfield of the remains of our revered citizen and illustrious head of the Nation were sorrowful days never to be forgotten. You can readily understand what a deep impression the event would have on the mind of a boy of eleven years. I remember how we stood in line for hours, double file, waiting our turn to view the remains and how overcome we were when we looked upon the face of the great Martyr.

The next few days, great crowds from all parts of the Country, among them illustrious personages from all over the Nation, gathered to bow in reverence at the shrine of "Father Abraham". The spectacular funeral parade to Oak Ridge in which my father took part on the reception committee, and my oldest brother was Marshall of one of the sections of the parade. Can you imagine a small city of ten or twelve thousand people trying to entertain seventy-five thousand visitors? You can understand how such an event might impress a boy at my age.

QUESTION: We can well understand that, Mr. Roll. But you are merely a young lad now. Do you object to telling us your age?

ANSWER: If it is true, as the saying goes, that I am living on borrowed time, I think it much preferable to be living on borrowed capital, I have tried both. I am living about 35 years longer than was prescribed for me by my Doctor. At that time I was in failing health caused by years of close application at book-keeping. Realizing my condition my Doctor told me, if I didn't get out in the open, "get out in the dirt", as he expressed it, I would not live 3 years. Well I got out in the dirt, and here I am, 84 years, plus. If the Doctor had adopted the advice that he gave me, he might be here offering congratulations. Getting out in the dirt proved beneficial in business as well as in health.

I was born in Springfield June 25, 1854 and proud, indeed, of my native city.