

*Mr. Lincoln
N. H.*

April 13, 1933

My dear Mr. Lemmon:

Please do not think that I was not interested in your letter of March 15th. I was much interested, but at that time I was ill, forbidden to take care of my correspondence. I am only just back to my desk and now only for a brief time. This will explain to you I hope why your letter has gone unanswered.

As to your questions about Dr. Barton's lecture before the Illinois Society in 1924 on "The Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln." So far as I can answer them you will find them answered I think in the Chapter on "The Mother of Abraham Lincoln" in my "Footsteps of the Lincolns."

There I admit that Mrs. Hitchcock and I were wrong about the Nancy of the Joseph Hanks will being Nancy Hanks Lincoln, and explain how we fell into the error, explain what we had behind our opinion.

I have had more or less correspondence with Dr. Barton and I think I have written in "The Footsteps" that he and I agreed amiably to disagree about certain matters, particularly on this ancestry. I do not think myself that Dr. Barton has ever proved beyond a question his contention that Nancy Hanks was the illegitimate daughter of Lucy Hanks. There are investigations now on foot that may, I do not say will, but may upset his contention.

Neither has Dr. Barton proved beyond question that Abraham Lincoln's grandmother, the wife of Abraham Lincoln's grandfather, was a Herring. I think it is possible, perhaps probable, that she was, but we have not yet the documents to prove it. That is, Dr. Barton has made assertions in my judgment very like that that Mrs. Hitchcock and I made about Nancy Hanks.

It all shows the danger of pronouncing finally in genealogical matters. You must have your documents complete. Of course one can and must work on theories.

If you are interested in Nancy Hanks' origin you should get in touch with Dr. Lewis A. Warren of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

You ask if I have expressed any opinion as to Bowers' judgment on Beveridge's Lincoln. No, I have not yet read Bowers', Life of Beveridge, though I hope to do it one of these days.

Regretting that I have so long delayed in answering you letter and hoping that what I say may be of some use to you, believe me

Very truly yours

Mr. George T. Lemmon
The Manse
Chester, New Jersey

In 1899, Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock issued a little book entitled "Nancy Hanks: The Story of Abraham Lincoln's Mother." The lady announced that she had compiled a genealogy of the Hanks family, and that it was soon to be published, this little book being an advance publication of the essential facts so far as they related to the ancestry of Lincoln's mother. Miss Ida M. Tarbell wrote the introduction, and declared that in this book Mrs. Hitchcock had "silenced forever the painful doubts" on this subject, and "deserved the gratitude of every admirer of Lincoln and lover of the truth."

This little book affirmed that Robert Shipley of Virginia had five daughters, Mary, who married Abraham Lincoln, grandfather of the President; Lucy, who married Richard Berry; Sarah, who married Robert Mitchell; Elizabeth, who married Thomas Sparrow; and Nancy who married Joseph Hanks. This Joseph Hanks, she declared, was the father of Nancy Hanks, the mother of the President, the parents of Abraham Lincoln thus being first cousins. In proof of this, she presented one important document, the will of Joseph Hanks, of Nelson County, Kentucky, dated January 9, 1793, and probated May 14, 1793. This will named his wife, Nannie, to whom he left the life use of his property, four sons, Thomas, Joshua, William and Joseph, to each of whom he left a horse, and three daughters, Elizabeth, Polly and Nancy, to each of whom he left a heifer. ... To his son Joseph, he bequeathed his farm of 150 acres, subject to the life use of his widow. His widow Nannie and his son William were appointed as executrix and executor of the will.

Mrs. Hitchcock appears to have been the first to find this will in the clerk's office in Bardstown, where it ~~may~~ may still be seen. For the discovery she deserves credit, though it most unfortunate that the discovery was not made by a more discriminating authority. Mrs. Hitchcock asked herself whether this last named and presumably youngest daughter Nancy was

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not the mother of the president, and at once answered in the affirmative. The fact that almost every other Hanks family at that time contained a daughter Nancy did not prevent her exalting her conjecture into a demonstration, and as such Miss Tarbell accepted it.

One other document appeared to favor this theory. When Thomas Lincoln made application, June 10, 1806, for license to marry Nancy Hanks, a bond had to be given, and it was customary for the surety signing with the prospective bridegroom should be the father or other male relative of the bride. Where the bride had no father, almost any neighbor would assume a guardianship by courtesy; indeed, so complete a formality was the giving of the marriage bond that it does not appear that the Commonwealth of Kentucky has ever entered suit on a marriage bond. Almost any by-stander in a Kentucky court house will sign a marriage bond where the marriage is evidently one in good faith. But Mr. Hitchcock saw in the "guardianship" of Richard Berry all that her theory lacked of complete proof. After the death of Joseph Hanks, so she declared as confidently as it is had been true, Nancy Hanks was adopted by her "kind Uncle Richard and dear Aunty Lucy Berry". She quoted the names and endearing adjectives as though she had some reason to suppose that Nancy Hanks had ever used them. As a matter of fact, "kind Uncle Richard" had been dead a long time, and he was not her uncle; and "dear Aunt Lucy" was not her aunt and her name was not Lucy. The Richard Berry who, as a neighbor and friend of the Lincolns, signed Thomas Lincoln's bond, was the second Richard Berry, whose wife was Polly Ewing. His mother's name was not Lucy but Rachel.

Mrs. Hitchcock's theory encountered greater difficulties than this however, and she was equal to them. She learned in some way who was the father of Dennis Hanks; and it is not easy to conjecture how she learned who his father was without learning also who his mother was; for Dennis Hanks himself, while admitting to William H. Herndon that he was illegitimate, did not reveal the name of his father. His father's name was

Charles Friend, a brother of the Jessie ~~Friend~~ [So Barton spells it] Friend who married Mary or Polly Hanks. Charles Friend was the father of more than one illegitimate son by more than one mother, and when he married it was not the mother of Dennis Hanks whom he married. This was a fact not difficult to discover, but Mrs. Hitchcock conveniently failed to discover it. Instead she created a new mother for Dennis, thus getting rid of the necessity of acknowledging that Joseph Hanks had a daughter Nancy who had an illegitimate child, and who could not have been the mother of the President. As this process deprived Levi Hall of a wife, he was conveniently married to Elizabeth, another of the daughters of Joseph Hanks. That she had one husband already, Thomas Sparrow, did not greatly disturb this versatile authoress.

I28-9

When in 1909 James Henry Lea ... he turned for assistance to Mrs. Hitchcock. Mr. Lea was evidently staggered by some of Mrs. Hitchcock's extravagances But he had no other source of information concerning the Hankses [WHY? Mrs. H. was not the first to tell of them- at least in the OLD way.] so he adopted her theory with a few rather blundering modifications, though it made a sorry mix-up in his marriages, resulting in at least one case of bigamy. I30.

This "bigamy" would appear to be the (I22 -Lea) Eliz. to Levi Hall. (I28-9 -top, to Thomas Sparrow.

Barton. Ill. Hist. ^{So} Pg. 129. Footnote connecting with Charles Friend above. "C.F. Married, Nov. 19, 1804, not the imaginary Nancy Sparrow, nor Nancy Hanks, nor Nancy Riley, one of whom he might have been expected to marry, but Sarah Huss. Sarah was not one of the women who had him arrested for bastardy. "

In the top quotation above there is a line which Barton gives with no proof of its BASIS where he mentions NANCY Hanks, & of Joseph, and says "WHO COULD NOT HAVE BEEN THE MOTHER OF THE PRESIDENT." I admit she was not- but I do not discern as Barton thinks he did THE REASON on which he sets down that line.

So also in connection with TOP line - several times in later pages he gives the MASCULINE spelling JESSE - so that where spelled "JESSIE" it is likely printers error- but so it IS- in the MINUTELY Critical Barton.

Miss Tarbell in her last book, "In the Footsteps of the Lincoln", clings though with rather a numb grip to this fantastic story: "However grateful we may be to Dennis ~~XXXXXXXX~~ for the color and liveliness which he has imparted to an important segment of the Lincoln story, a segment of which he knew much, he cannot be taken seriously as a genealogist." (87) He not only can be taken seriously, but he must be so taken. All that we need to claim for Dennis as a genealogist is that he was able to distinguish between his mother and his female cousin of the same name." (130)

Miss Tarbell is not to be charged with any responsibility for the falsehoods in Mrs. Hitchcock's theory, nor do I charge Mrs. Hitchcock with them. Mrs. Hitchcock had assistance, and how much of the misinformation came to her readymade I do not undertake to determine. Some one working over this material, deliberately falsified it. I do not think it was Mrs. Hitchcock. But she has published almost superficial and misleading book, untrustworthy in its substantial parts. As for Lea and Hutchinson, who evidently wrought in good faith, and whose book carries conviction by the very beauty of its page, they simply must not be trusted in that part of the book derived from Mrs. Hitchcock. Miss Tarbell has stood sponsor for a theory which she was glad to believe, and unfeignedly did believe. She ought to have been more careful. 131.

At page 125. "As for the American genealogy, set forth by Lea and Hutchinson, it is high praise to say that it is not always wrong."

Page. 126. Thomas Lincoln ... died on his farm on Goose Nest Prairie, Coles Co. ILL. Jan. 17, 1851, and is buried in the churchyard of Sholoh Church, near Janesville, Ill. ~~XXXXXXXX~~ A monument to the memory of T and Sarah Lincoln was dedicated in Shiloh Cemetary, .. May 14, 1924.

Barton can be clear - as well as FUNNY when he pleases-he should have been clear on Pg 131. I do not find him so.

"What then about Lucy? The lame reply of those who hold the Hitchcock tradition is that there was no Lucy, daughter of Joseph Hanks, but a "dear Aunt Lucy", wife of Richard Berry. The answer is that neither of these statements is true. There was no "dear aunt Lucy Berry," and there was a daughter Lucy Hanks.

Why then did not Joseph Hanks remember her in his will? He remembered her to his sorrow, and in his wrath disinherited her. Nancy Hanks, the mother of the President, did not inherit the spotted heifer; she was the innocent reason why her mother Lucy did not receive a heifer. But was the moral standard of the Hanks family so high that Joseph Hanks cherished his wrath nine years after the birth of his little granddaughter, and cut off his daughter Lucy without a penny for no other reason than that one youthful indiscretion? No; the moral standard of the Hanks family was not so high as that, and no family standard ought to be of that sort; but unfortunately we know all too well that Joseph Hanks had later and very strong provocation, and that his disinheritance of Lucy was no inadvertance. Lucy had caused him great sorrow, both in Virginia and in Kentucky. At the time of her father's death she was married and living a respectable life, but he died without granting her forgiveness.

BUT WHY DOES HE NOT HERE COME OUT AND GIVE THE RECORD, IF HE HAS IT?

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The Hanks family was not the illustrious clan of super-royal lineage described by Mrs. Hitchcock. It was a ^{Common} commonplace family, migratory and illiterate, an "undistinguished or second" family as Lincoln said. But it was not a vicious family. It had practically no criminal record; and cases of sexual irregularity, while not unknown in it, were the exception and not the rule. Moreover, such irregularities did not permanently continue in the lives of those members of the family who occasionally displayed the weakness of human flesh in this regard. The family was not an occasion of pride to Lincoln, but if he had known all that we know-- he need not have felt it a disgrace. It was a decent, humble, honest clan, with no marked abnormalities. It was a family neither of drunkards nor degenerates. It was not degraded; it simply was not graded up.

It was a religious family--of the emotional type well known on the frontier. That religion, for its time and need, is lightly spoken of by those who view it from the outside without intimate knowledge of frontier conditions.

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In this address I am making unblushing use of material furnished by Dennis Hanks. He was the most given to writing of any Hanks of his generation, and a considerable number of his letters are preserved, chiefly through the industry of Wm. H. Herndon. (But he does not say the number of years that had ELAPSED between the Dates of the Happening and the Telling - at Herndon's persistent FISHING- and SUGGESTING) . . .

Dennis was given to a cheerful egotism, and loved to exaggerate his own influence in shaping the career of Lincoln. In one matter, when he believed the honor of one of the Hanks sisters to be involved, he lied like a gentleman. But for the most part Dennis was remarkably consistent, and his ~~biographical~~ biographical notes in the main reliable.

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[It will be interesting- later -to tally up the time B-accepts AND DOES NOT accept Dennis as his guide.

It remains to say a word about Thomas and Elz. Sparrow. They assumed the care of their unfortunate nephew, Dennis, and their niece Nancy. When the latter married T. L. and moved to Nolin Creek, they were near her; and E was almost certainly present when A. L. was born. They followed her to Ind. and were to her as parents. The neighbors who knew them in life and buried them when they died never doubted that T and E. Sparrow were in fact her father and mother.

138. By footnote B connects this with ~~Wm. H.~~ Herndon and Nic. and Hay. So despite all the SPIURGE of 50 years of investigation- NO ADVANCE - is actually alleged.