

Abraham Lincoln's Genealogical Quest, 1848–1865

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David Herbert Donald's justly acclaimed biography of the 16th president opens with a surprising misstatement: "Abraham Lincoln was not interested in his ancestry. In his mind he was a self-made man, who had no need to care about his family tree."¹

The evidence relied upon by the Harvard historian, however, dealt not with Lincoln's statements concerning his ancestry, but rather with Lincoln's remarks about his impoverished childhood and youth. That context correctly explains Lincoln's often cited quotation from Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) about "the short and simple annals of the poor. That's my life and that's all you or anyone else can make out of it."²

A thorough examination of Lincoln's correspondence, autobiographical statements, handwritten family Bible entries, and retirement plans unequivocally disproves Professor Donald's assertion. In fact, the Illinois lawyer and politician was deeply interested in his family history and quite desirous of learning more, in particular about the antecedents of his paternal grandfather, Captain Abraham Lincoln, Sr. (1744–1786).³

1. David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 19.

2. AL quoted in letter from John Locke Scripps to William H. Herndon (June 24, 1865); printed in *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 57–58.

3. For the record, Lincoln's seven-generation paternal lineage is: (i) Samuel Lincoln (1619–1690), (ii) Mordecai Lincoln, Sr. (1657–1727), (iii) Mordecai Lincoln, Jr. (1686–1736), (iv) John Lincoln (1716–1788), (v) Captain Abraham Lincoln, Sr. (1744–1786), (vi) Thomas Lincoln (1778–1851), and (vii) President Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865). Waldo Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family: An Account of the Descendants of Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts 1637–1920* (Worcester, Mass.: Commonwealth Press, 1923) 5–7, 15–23, 43–53, 92–101, 193–204, 333–42, 464–71.

The younger Lincoln's interest in genealogy was informed, at least in part, by curiosity about hereditary traits.⁴ His longtime law partner, William H. Herndon, shared this revealing anecdote:⁵

On the subject of his ancestry and origin, I only remember one time when Lincoln ever referred to it. It was about 1850, when he and I were driving in his one-horse buggy to the court in Menard county, Illinois. The suit we were going to try was one in which we were likely, either directly or collaterally, to touch upon the subject of hereditary traits. During the ride he spoke, for the first time in my hearing of his mother, dwelling on her characteristics, and mentioning or enumerating what qualities he inherited from her. He said, among other things, that she was the illegitimate daughter of Lucy Hanks and a well-bred Virginia farmer or planter; and he argued that from this last source came his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity, his ambition, and all the qualities that distinguished him from the other members and descendants of the Hanks family . . . and in his case, he believed that his better nature and finer qualities came from this broad-minded Virginian.

No doubt Lincoln mused similarly about qualities he might have inherited from his father's forebears as well.⁶ Recognizing that he was, as biographer Michael Burlingame put it, the exceptional child of unexceptional parents,⁷ Lincoln embarked on a long quest to discover the genealogical origin of his talent.

4. Heredity was poorly understood in 1850, nearly a decade before publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Modern psychology holds that behavioral traits are an evolving product of complex interactions between genetic legacy and life experience, sometimes simplistically dubbed 'nature and nurture.' For useful background on the role of heredity, see Cynthia Garcia Coll et al., *Nature and Nurture: The Complex Interplay of Genetic and Environmental Influences on Human Behavior and Development* (2004; New York: Psychology Press, 2013).

5. William H. Herndon and Jesse William Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co. 1889), 1:3.

6. Lincoln scholars have not been shy in speculating about his inherited traits. See, e.g., J. Henry Lea and J. R. Hutchinson, *The Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 135–39. See also Thomas L. Purvis, "The Making of a Myth: Abraham Lincoln's Family Background in the Perspective of Jacksonian Politics," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 75, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 150–51.

7. Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1:1–3.

Gideon Welles, Lincoln's wartime Secretary of the Navy, blamed the president's lack of knowledge about his family history on his chaotic childhood. Welles wrote,

This vagrant life, by a shiftless father, and without a mother or female relative to keep alive and impress upon him the pedigree and traditions of the family, left the president without definite knowledge of his origin and that of his fathers. The deprivation he keenly felt.⁸

In addition to lack of parental tutoring on genealogy, Lincoln was deprived of another potentially rich source of family history: He never knew either of his grandfathers.⁹ Equally tragic, due to his assassination at age 56, the president never knew his grandchildren, either.¹⁰

Solomon Lincoln, noted antiquarian, member of the Massachusetts Bar, author of a history of Hingham, Massachusetts, and (unbeknownst but suspected) distant cousin,¹¹ seems to have been the first person to tap into Abraham Lincoln's pre-existing interest in his paternal genealogy. On March 2, 1848, Solomon wrote to Artemas Hale,¹² a member of Congress from Massachusetts and political associate of Abraham Lincoln, then a Whig colleague of Hale in the House of Representatives. After noting that he had been asked by Lincoln surname-bearers in Hingham about a possible relationship to the Illinoisian, Solomon asked Hale to intercede with the Western congressman about initiating a correspondence concerning Lincoln's family history:

May I venture to ask you to signify my wishes to Mr. Lincoln—that he would inform me of the time and place of his birth—the

8. Gideon Welles, "Administration of Abraham Lincoln," *The Galaxy* xxiii (January-June 1877), 15.

9. Lincoln's paternal grandfather and namesake died 23 years before AL was born; his maternal grandfather, as AL confided in William Herndon (fn. 5, *supra*), was evidently an unidentified Virginia planter.

10. AL had three grandchildren, all children of Robert Todd Lincoln and all born after the president's assassination: (i) Mary Lincoln Isham (1869–1938), (ii) Abraham Lincoln II (1873–1890), and (iii) Jessie Harlan Lincoln Beckwith Johnson Randolph (1875–1948). Michael Beschloss, "Family Tree: Last of the Lincolns," *The New Yorker* (February 20, 1994): 54.

11. Solomon Lincoln (1804–1881) of Hingham, Massachusetts, was a fourth cousin, once removed from AL. W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 313–14.

12. Hale was married to Deborah Lincoln (1783–1852). Although their relationship was then unknown, she was a fourth cousin twice removed from Abraham Lincoln. Jordan Fiore and Jean Stonehouse, "Historical Commentary: Mr. Lincoln's Bridgewater Connections," *Bridgewater Review* 6, no. 1 (September 1988): 21–24 at 22; W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 138–39.

names of his father and grandfather—their residence—and so much of his personal history as he feels inclined to impart—I suppose that if I can be aided by him in tracing his ancestors for two generations, that I may be able to supply the connecting links which connect him with the early settlers of Massachusetts.¹³

Hale delivered Solomon's letter to Congressman Lincoln, who answered immediately with the requested details.

Insofar as the historical record survives, AL's reply of March 6, 1848 (printed in the appendix to this article), is important in three respects. First, it appears to represent the sum of his earliest knowledge about his genealogy. Second, it rebuts the view of some biographers that he was uninterested in his family background. Third, it shows that he was already aware of other Lincoln surname-bearers in New England, especially those forenamed 'Levi.' That comment was almost certainly an allusion to Levi Lincoln, Sr., Attorney General of the United States (1801–1805) during the administration of Thomas Jefferson, and Acting Governor of Massachusetts (1808–1809); and to his two sons, Levi Lincoln, Jr., Governor of Massachusetts (1825–1834), and Enoch Lincoln, Governor of Maine (1827–1829).¹⁴

The correspondence with Solomon Lincoln evidently prompted the Illinois congressman to open a second line of genealogical investigation. AL contacted a Virginia colleague in the House (and former Governor), James McDowell, to inquire about an unverified family tradition concerning Lincoln's ancestors having come from Rockingham County, Virginia. McDowell was able to put AL in touch with David Lincoln, who turned out to be a first cousin, once removed. Their correspondence (dated March 24, March 30, and April 2, 1848) firmed up that relationship.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Solomon Lincoln quickly followed up from Massachusetts with further questions, and that communication resulted

13. Solomon Lincoln to Artemas Hale (March 2, 1848). The original letter is in the Abraham Lincoln Collection (no. 63) at the Rosenbach Museum & Library in Philadelphia. A digital image is available online at Rosenbach.org.

14. All three Lincolns were from Worcester, Massachusetts. They were descendants of Samuel Lincoln (1619–1690) of Hingham, Massachusetts, and, unbeknownst to all, fourth cousins of Abraham Lincoln. W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family* 157–62, 278–83, 286–89. For a useful summary of the Worcester branch, see Monique Manna, "Levi Lincoln, Jr., and the Lincolns of Worcester: One Family's Dedication to Public Service, the Military, and Their Role in the Civil War," at www.academia.edu (2018).

15. A later Lincoln biographer noted the "striking resemblance in features" between AL and David Lincoln. Ida M. Tarbell, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1924), adjoining portraits facing p. 52.

in a second letter from Congressman Lincoln (March 24) supplying additional genealogical information. In the autumn of 1848, Abraham arranged to visit Massachusetts to campaign for General Zachary Taylor, the Whig nominee for president. The Illinois congressman spent three evenings (September 11–13) as a guest in the home of former Massachusetts Governor Levi Lincoln, Jr.¹⁶ The governor's grandson¹⁷ left a brief account of their meeting:

On a visit to New England in 1848, Abraham Lincoln stopped over night in Worcester and was entertained by the writer's grandfather, ex-Governor Levi Lincoln, neither knowing of any blood relations but suspecting it from the numerous Biblical names common to the families of both: Abraham, Samuel, Isaac, Jacob, and especially Mordecai.¹⁸

Governor Lincoln hosted a private dinner party in his home and invited the 39-year-old congressman to speak. One attendee remembered "the jokes between Governor Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln as to their presumed relationship."¹⁹ The Illinoisan then quipped: "I hope we both belong, as the Scotch say, to the same clan; but I know one thing, and that is that we are both good Whigs."²⁰

Six months then lapsed before Solomon Lincoln sent a third letter of inquiry to Abraham. In that correspondence, Solomon wrote: "The names which you gave me, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mordecai &c. are all family names here and I hope yet to link you to a New England ancestry."²¹ That appears to be the last communication between the two cousins who were frustratingly unable to document their cousinship.

16. The Governor Levi Lincoln House, which stands today, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

17. The grandson was Waldo Lincoln (1849–1933) of Worcester, an eminent antiquarian and AL's fourth cousin several times removed. W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, page iv.

18. Old Testament forenames were a hallmark among Puritans. In fact, more than 80% of Puritan children in Massachusetts bore a biblical name. Dennis Scott Smith, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Puritan Naming: Massachusetts, 1771," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1994): 67.

19. Recollection of Henry J. Gardner, another former Governor of Massachusetts, in a statement given to Edward L. Pierce. Wilson and Davis, *Herndon's Informants*, 698–99.

20. *Ibid.*, 699.

21. Solomon Lincoln letter to Abraham Lincoln (February 26, 1849), Abraham Lincoln Papers in Library of Congress: Series 1. General Correspondence 1833–1916: Solomon Lincoln to Abraham Lincoln, February 26, 1849. Digital image available at www.loc.gov.

Abraham Lincoln then pivoted to another traditional genealogical activity. In an era before compulsory registration of vital records, he created private genealogical records by transcribing birth, marriage, and death data in the family register pages of two Bibles to which he had access. In late December 1850, or in the following January, Lincoln inscribed six entries in the family record section of Mary Todd Lincoln's Bible.²² And four or five months later, shortly after his father's death, Lincoln recorded 21 such entries in his own hand in Thomas Lincoln's Bible.²³ Perhaps on the same occasion, he also jotted down a separate list of three births for his step-sister's family.²⁴ The total of 30 entries seems to imply that Lincoln may have drawn upon a pre-existing family register that has not otherwise survived.

In the fall of 1858, James Grant Wilson met Lincoln at his law office in Springfield for an hour-long interview. Wilson began with a question about his genealogy and left this account:

I ventured to inquire from what part of the country his ancestors came, and Mr. Lincoln answered: "Well, my young friend, I believe the first of my ancestors we know anything about was Samuel Lincoln, who came from Norwich, England, in 1638, and settled in a small Massachusetts place called Hingham, or it might have been Hanghim."²⁵

A year later, Lincoln told another visitor that he hoped to travel someday to England, which he described as the land of his ancestors.²⁶

22. Roy P. Basler, Marion Dolores Pratt, and Lloyd, A. Dunlap, eds., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. + 2 suppl. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press for the Abraham Lincoln Association, 1953–55; 1974; 1990) [hereafter *CWAL*], 1:304; Gordon Leidner, "How Many 'Lincoln Bibles'?" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 60–61, 76.

23. *CWAL*, 2:94–95. The convoluted identification and history of this record is discussed in Leidner, "How Many 'Lincoln Bibles'?" 51–52, 54 (and fn. 27). Note that Lincoln's cousin Dennis Hanks tore these pages out of the Thomas Lincoln Bible shortly after the presidential assassination; however, a photograph of the six fragments was published in Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, vol. 1, facing p. 4.

24. Professor Basler and Leidner both presume that AL made this brief undated record in 1851, at the same time as he inscribed his entries in the Thomas Lincoln Bible. *CWAL*, 2:96; Leidner "How Many 'Lincoln Bibles'?" 51–52 (especially the citation in fn. 18).

25. James Grant Wilson, "Recollections of Lincoln," *Putnam's Magazine* v, no. 5 (February 1909), 515. Wilson (1832–1914), then a Chicago journalist, conducted the interview during the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

26. Reminiscences of George Hartley, *Chicago Daily News* (January 28, 1909); cited in Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 1:2–3 (fn. 5), fully annotated manuscript version at Knox College Lincoln Studies Center.

Lincoln did not explain the evidentiary basis of his belief in his English roots, but the most plausible source would have been either his correspondence from Solomon Lincoln or his conversations with Levi Lincoln in Worcester, both of which occurred in 1848.

In 1859, while preparing a possible candidacy for president, Abraham composed an autobiographical synopsis for Whig newspaperman Jesse Fell.²⁷ Reflecting his interest in genealogy, Lincoln included a detailed account of his parents and paternal grandfather, representing about a third of the entire sketch:²⁸

My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon counties, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 2, where a year or two later, he was killed by indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New-England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite, than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age; and he grew up, literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer county, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union.

In 1860, Lincoln fleshed out a second, greatly expanded, third-person version of his family tree (see appendix below), which represents a substantial contribution to his total autobiography. Although he was unable to push his genealogy back beyond his grandfather, he added more lines of cousins. Taken together, the relatively large amount of space Lincoln devoted to his family history demonstrates its importance in his worldview.

At this point in his life, Lincoln's genealogical investigation stalled. He devoted the next five years to winning two presidential elections

27. Harold K. Sage, "Jesse W. Fell and the Lincoln Autobiography," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 3 (1981): 48–58.

28. Autobiographical statement (extract) prepared December 20, 1859, for Jesse Fell. *CWAL*, 3:511–12.

and leading the Union to victory in the Civil War. During that conflict, his cousinship came to the fore one last time. On December 7, 1864, 82-year-old former governor Levi Lincoln, Jr., traveled to the historic Massachusetts State House in Boston where he delivered an “eloquent speech” on behalf of his kinsman from Illinois. Immediately thereafter, Levi cast 1 of the 12 Electoral College votes of Massachusetts for Abraham Lincoln.²⁹ The speech and ballot marked the last living links between the president and his Hingham relations.

President Lincoln looked ahead to his anticipated retirement from politics. According to Navy Secretary Welles, a presidential confidant, “I heard him [AL] say on more than one occasion that when he laid down his official life he would endeavor to trace out his genealogy and family history.”³⁰ Assassination doomed that happy prospect.

The president's death, though, inspired a paternal cousin to complete the quest. In 1865, an anonymous obituary (almost certainly written by Solomon Lincoln) appeared in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. After setting out names of the president's father and grandfather, the author went on to state,

It is supposed that this [presidential] family descended from the Lincoln family of Hingham, Mass. The uncommon name of Mordecai, and the names of Abraham and Thomas, are found in the Hingham and Berks County family.³¹

In the following issue of the *Register*, Solomon proposed a pedigree for the late president linking his paternal forebears to Samuel Lincoln the weaver (1619–1691) who emigrated from Norfolk, England, to Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1637.³² That article tentatively stated,

In the case of the family of the late president, however, we do not claim that the evidence, historical or traditional, has yet been collected to show that Hingham was the home of his ancestors, but . . . we shall present some facts which indicate pretty strongly that such was the fact.³³

29. “The Electoral College . . . The Massachusetts Electoral College,” *New York Times* (December 8, 1864).

30. Welles, “Administration of Abraham Lincoln,” 15.

31. [Anonymous,] “Deaths . . . LINCOLN, Abraham,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* xix, no. 3 (July 1865): 268.

32. Solomon Lincoln, “Notes on the Lincoln Families of Massachusetts, With Some Account of the Family of Abraham Lincoln, Late President of the United States,” *NEHG Register* xix, no. 4 (October 1865): 357–61 (reprinted 1865 as a separate pamphlet by Harvard University Press; see Mon. 603).

33. *Ibid.*, 357.

Solomon Lincoln's seminal statement made him "the first to call attention to the probability that President Abraham Lincoln was a descendant from Samuel Lincoln" of Hingham.³⁴ Solomon then left it to future historians to discover the chain of documentary evidence that would eventually prove his hypothesis. Two decades later, Samuel Shackford, a fifth cousin of the late president and an able genealogist, finally established the seven-generation lineage that had eluded Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime.³⁵

Select Abraham Lincoln Genealogical Records

1. *AL letter to Solomon Lincoln (March 6, 1848)*³⁶

Your letter to Mr. Hale, in which you do me the honor of making some enquiries concerning me, has been handed me by Mr. Hale, with the request that I should give you the desired information. I was born Feb: 12th. 1809 in Hardin county, Kentucky—My father's name is *Thomas*; my grandfather's was *Abraham*,—the same of my own—My grandfather went from Rockingham county in Virginia, to Kentucky, about the year 1782; and, two years afterwards, was killed by indians. We have a vague tradition, that my great-grand father went from Pennsylvania to Virginia; and that he was a quaker. Further back than this, I have never heard any thing—It may do no harm to say that "Abraham" and "Mordecai" are common names in our family; while the name "Levi" so common among the Lincolns of New England,³⁷ I have not known in any instance among us.

Owing to my father being left an orphan at the age of six years, in poverty, and in a new country, he became a wholly uneducated man; which I suppose is the reason why I know so little of our family history. I believe I can say nothing more that would at all interest you. If you shall be able to trace any connection between yourself and me,

34. W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 314.

35. The first scholar to do so was Samuel Shackford, "The Lineage of President Abraham Lincoln Traced from Samuel Lincoln," *NEGH Register* 41, no. 2 (April 1887): 153–57. Shackford (1821–1908) used deeds, wills, headstone inscriptions, and family Bible entries to reconstruct the seven-generation presidential pedigree. See also W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 180.

36. *CWAL*, 1:455–56.

37. This reference suggests that, sometime before 1848, Abraham was aware of the prominent Massachusetts father-son duo of Levi Lincoln, Sr., and Levi Lincoln, Jr., for whom see above.

or, in fact, whether you shall or not, I should be pleased to hear a line from you at any time.

Very respectfully,
A. Lincoln

2. *AL letter to Solomon Lincoln (March 24, 1848)*³⁸

Yours of the 21st., is received. I shall not be able to answer your interrogatories very fully; I will, however, do the best I can. I have mentioned that my grandfather's name was Abraham. He had, as I think I have heard, four brothers, Isaac, Jacob, Thomas, and John. He had three sons, Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas, the last my father. My uncle Mordecai, had three sons, Abraham, James, and Mordecai. Uncle Josiah had several daughters, and an only son, Thomas. My father has an only child, myself, of course.

This is all I know certainly on the subject of names; it is, however, my father's understanding that, Abraham, Mordecai, and Thomas are old family names of ours. The reason I did not mention Thomas as a family name in my other letter was because it is so very common a name, as to prove but little, if any thing, in the way of identification.

Since I wrote you, it occurred to me to enquire of Gov. McDowell, who represents the district in Virginia, including Rockingham, whether he knew persons of our name there. He informs me he does; though none very intimately except one, an old man by the christian name of David. That he is of our family I have no doubt. I now address him a letter, making such enquiries as suggest themselves; and when I shall receive an answer, I will communicate to you, any thing that may seem pertinent to your object.

Very truly yours,
A. Lincoln

3. *AL letter to David Lincoln (March 24, 1848)*³⁹

Your very worthy representative, Gov. McDowell has given me your name and address, and, as my father was born in Rockingham, from where his father, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated to Kentucky, about the year 1782, I have concluded to address you to ascertain whether we are not of the same family. I shall be much obliged, if you will write me, telling me, whether you, in any way, know any thing of

38. *CWAL*, 1:459–60.

39. *CWAL*, 1:459. David Lincoln (1781–1849), a first cousin of AL's father, operated the Lincoln Inn in Lacey Spring, Rockingham County, Virginia. His family background is set out in W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 342–43. David's son, Abraham B. Lincoln (1822–1905), served in a Virginia militia company during the Civil War. *Idem*, 473–74.

my grandfather, what relation you are to him, and so on. Also, if you know, where your family came from, when they settled in Virginia, tracing them back as far as your knowledge extends.

Very respectfully,
A. Lincoln

4. *AL letter to David Lincoln (April 2, 1848)*⁴⁰

Last evening I was much gratified by receiving and reading your letter of the 30th. of March.⁴¹ There is no longer any doubt that your uncle Abraham, and my grandfather was the same man. His family did reside in Washington county, Kentucky, just as you say you found them in 1801 or 2. The oldest son, uncle Mordecai, near twenty years ago, removed from Kentucky to Hancock county, Illinois, where within a year or two afterwards, he died, and where his surviving children now live. His two sons there now are Abraham & Mordecai; and their Post-office is "La Harp."

Uncle Josiah, farther back than my recollection, went from Kentucky to Blue River in Indiana. I have not heard from him in a great many years, and whether he is still living I can not say—My recollection of what I heard is, that he has several daughters & only one son, Thomas. Their Post-office is "Corydon, Harrisson county, Indiana.

My father, Thomas, is still living, in Coles county, Illinois, being in the 71st year of his age. His Post-office is Charleston, Coles, co. Ill. I am his only child. I am now in my 40th year; I live in Springfield, Sangamon county, Illinois. This is the outline of my grandfather's family in the West.

I think my father has told me that grandfather had four brothers, Isaac, Jacob, John and Thomas. Is that correct? and which one of them was your father? Are any of them alive? I am quite sure that Isaac resided on Wataga, near a point where Virginia and Tennessee join; and that he has been dead more than twenty, perhaps thirty, years. Also, that Thomas removed to Kentucky, near Lexington, where he died a good while ago.

What was your grandfather's christian name? Was he or not, a Quaker? About what time did he emigrate from Berks county,⁴² Pa.

40. CWAL, 1:461–62.

41. David Lincoln's letter of March 30, 1848, has not survived.

42. This is earliest mention of the specific Pennsylvania county in which his great-grandfather resided. Confirmation and discussion of this ancestral home can be found in Louis A. Warren, "The Lincolns of Berks County," *Historical Review of Berks County* 14, no. 3 (April 1949): 83–85. Some years later, Abraham Lincoln referred back to David Lincoln's letter as the source of his knowledge of the Berks County connection. See AL letter to Richard V.B. Lincoln (April 6, 1860), printed below.

to Virginia? Do you know any thing of your family (or rather I may now say, our family) farther back than your grandfather?

If it be not too much trouble to you, I shall be much pleased to hear from you again. Be assured I will call on you, should any thing ever bring me near you. I shall give your regards to Gov. McDowell, as you desire.

Very truly yours,
A. Lincoln

5. *AL handwritten entries in Mary Todd Lincoln Bible*,⁴³ 1850–1851

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd, married, November 4 – 1842 –
Robert Todd Lincoln, born August 1 – 1843 –
Edward B. Lincoln, born March 10 – 1846 –
William Wallace Lincoln born December 21 – 1850 –
Thomas Lincoln, born April 4. 1853.
Edward B. Lincoln died February 1 – 1850

6. *AL handwritten entries in Thomas Lincoln Bible*⁴⁴
May 17–18, 1851

[Thos. Lincoln was born Jan. the 6th A.D. 1778 and was married June 12th 1806 to Nancy Hanks who was born Feb 5th 1784

Sarah, Lincoln Daughter of Thos. and] Nancy Lincoln, was born Feb. 10th. 1807.

Abraham Lincoln, Son of Thos. & Nancy Lincoln, was born Feb. 12th. 1809.

Sarah Bush, first married to Daniel Johnston, and afterwards second wife of Thos. Lincoln, was born Decr. 13th. 1788.

John D. Johnston, Son of Daniel & Sarah Johnston, was born May [10] th. 18[15] married to Mary Bar[ker] October 13th. 1834 – who was born July 22nd. 1816.

43. *CWAL*, 1:304; discussed in Leidner, “How Many ‘Lincoln Bibles’?,” 59–61. As this edition was published in 1847, that year establishes the earliest possible date for the first entry. Neither Leidner nor Professor Basler suggested a date for AL’s entries. From a visual examination of the digital images for these two pages, it appears that the first three inscriptions, as well as the final one, were made by AL’s hand with the same ink. See Image 5 of the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress: Series 3. General Correspondence 1837–1897: Lincoln Family Bible, 1847, at www.loc.gov. Therefore, this writer concludes that these four inscriptions were most likely made in late December 1850 or in January 1851.

44. *CWAL*, 2:94–95; discussed in Leidner, “How Many ‘Lincoln Bibles’?,” 49–58.

Thomas L. D. Johnston, Son of John [D.] and Mary Johnston, was born January 10th. 1837.

Abraham L. B. Johnston, Son of same parents, was born March 27th. 1838.

Marietta, Sarah Jane Johnston, Daughter [of] same parents, was born January 21[st.] 1840.

Squire H. Johnston, son of same parents, was born, December 15th. 1841.

Richard M. Johnston, son of same parents, was born, October 26th. [sic] 1843.

Dennis F. Johnston, son of same parents, was born, November 18th. 1845.

Daniel W. Johnston, son of same parents, was born, December 13th. 1847.

Nancy Jane Williams, was born, March 18, 1836.

Thomas Lincoln married to Sarah Johnston, Decr. 2nd. 1819.

Sarah Lincoln, daughter of Thos. Lincoln, was married to Aaron Grigsby, Aug. .1826.

Abraham Lincoln, son of Thos. Lincoln, was married to Mary Todd, Novr. 4th. 1842.

John D. Johnston was married to his second wife, Nancy Jane Williams, March 5. 1851.

Nancy Lincoln wife of Thos. Lincoln, died October 5th. 1818.

Sarah, daughter of Thos. Lincoln, wife of Aaron Grigsby, died [Jan] uary 20th. 1828.

Thomas Lincoln, died, January 17 [1851] aged 73 years & 11 days.

Daniel W. Johnston, Son of John D. & Mary Johnston, died July 5th. 184[8 or 9?]

7. *AL letter to Jesse Lincoln (April 1, 1854)*⁴⁵

On yesterday I had the pleasure of receiving your letter of the 16th of March. From what you say there can be no doubt that you and I are of the same family. The history of your family, as you give it, is

45. CWAL, 2:217–18. Jesse Lincoln (1785–1857) of Clarktown, Tennessee, a first cousin of AL's father. Jesse's family background is covered in W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 347–48.

precisely what I have always heard, and partly know, of my own. As you have supposed, I am the grandson of your uncle Abraham; and the story of his death by the Indians, and of Uncle Mordecai, then fourteen years old, killing one of the Indians, is the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory. I am the son of grandfather's youngest son, Thomas. I have often heard my father speak of his uncle Isaac residing at Watauga (I think), near where the then States of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee join,—you seem now to be some hundred miles or so west of that. I often saw Uncle Mordecai, and Uncle Josiah but once in my life; but I never resided near either of them. Uncle Mordecai died in 1831 or 2, in Hancock County, Illinois, where he had then recently removed from Kentucky, and where his children had also removed, and still reside, as I understand. Whether Uncle Josiah is dead or living, I cannot tell, not having heard from him for more than twenty years. When I last heard of him he was living on Big Blue River, in Indiana (Harrison Co., I think), and where he had resided ever since before the beginning of my recollection. My father (Thomas) died the 17th of January, 1851, in Coles County, Illinois, where he had resided twenty years. I am his only child. I have resided here, and hereabouts, twenty-three years. I am forty-five years of age, and have a wife and three children, the oldest eleven years. My wife was born and raised at Lexington, Kentucky; and my connection with her has sometimes taken me there, where I have heard the older people of her relations speak of your uncle Thomas and his family. He is dead long ago, and his descendants have gone to some part of Missouri, as I recollect what I was told. When I was in Washington in 1848, I got up a correspondence with David Lincoln, residing at Sparta, Rockingham county, Virginia, who, like yourself, was a first cousin of my father; but I forget, if he informed me, which of my grandfather's brothers was his father. With Col. Crozier, of whom you speak, I formed quite an intimate acquaintance, for a short one, while at Washington; and when you meet him again, I will thank you to present him my respects. Your present governor, Andrew Johnson, was also at Washington while I was; and he told me of there being people of the name of Lincoln in Carter County, I think. I can no longer claim to be a young man myself; but I infer that, as you are of the same generation as my father, you are some older. I shall be very glad to hear from you again.

Very truly your relative,
A. Lincoln

8. AL letter to Richard V.B. Lincoln (April 6, 1860)⁴⁶

Owing to absence from home, yours of March 19th. was not received till yesterday. You are a little mistaken. My grand-father did not go to Berks Co. Pa; but, as I learn, his ancestors did, some time before his birth. He was born in Rockingham Co Va; went from there to Kentucky, and there was killed by indians about 1784. That the family originally came from Berks, I learned a dozen years ago, by letter, from one of them, then residing at Sparta, Rockingham Co. Va. His name was David Lincoln. I rem[em]ber, long ago, seeing Austin Lincoln & Davis Lincoln, said to be sons of Hannaniah, or Annaniah Lincoln, who was said to have been a cousin of my grand-father. I have no doubt you and I are distantly related. I should think from what you say, that you and my father were second cousins.

I shall be glad to hear from you any time.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

9. AL letter to Samuel Haycraft (May 28, 1860)⁴⁷

Your recent letter, without date, is received. Also the copy of your speech on the contemplated Daniel Boone monument,⁴⁸ which I have not yet had time to read. In the main you are right about my history. My father was Thomas Lincoln, and Mrs. Sally Johnston, was his second wife. You are mistaken about my mother—her maiden name was Nancy Hanks. I was not born at Elizabethtown: but my mother's first child, a daughter, two years older than myself, and now long since deceased, was. I was born Feb 12. 1809, near where Hogginsville [*sic*] now is, then in Hardin county. I do not think I ever saw you, though I very well know who you are—so well that I recognized your hand-writing, on opening your letter, before I saw your signature. My recollection is that Ben. Helm was first Clerk, that you succeeded him, that Jack Thomas and William Farleigh graduated in the same office, and that your handwritings were all very similar. Am I right?

46. CWAL, 4:37. The correspondent was Richard Van Buskirk Lincoln (1822–1901) of Laurelton, Pennsylvania. His background is given in W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 223, 503–4.

47. CWAL, 4:56–57.

48. Although AL was not a direct descendant of Daniel Boone (1734–1820), multiple marriages occurred between the families of the famed frontiersman and the future president. The Boones and Lincolns were friends and neighbors from 1735 to 1764. These links are detailed in Lea and Hutchinson, *Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln*, 98–105. Daniel Boone was born in Berks Co., Pennsylvania.

My father has been dead near ten years, but my step-mother (Mrs. Johnson) is still living.

I am really very glad of your letter, and shall be pleased to receive another at any time.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

10. *AL autobiographical statement, extract (June 1860)*⁴⁹

His [AL's] father, Thomas, & grand-father, Abraham, were born in Rockingham county, Virginia, whither their ancestors had come from Berks county, Pennsylvania. His lineage has been traced no farther back than this. The family were originally quakers, though in later times they have fallen away from the peculiar habits of that people. The grandfather, Abraham, had four brothers—Isaac, Jacob, John & Thomas. So far as known, the descendants of Jacob and John are still in Virginia. Isaac went to a place near where Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee join; and his descendants are in that region. Thomas came to Kentucky, and after many years died there, whence his descendants went to Missouri. Abraham, grandfather of the subject of this sketch, came to Kentucky, and was killed by indians about the year 1784. He left a widow, three sons and two daughters. The eldest son, Mordecai, remained in Kentucky till late in life, when he removed to Hancock county, Illinois, where soon after he died, and where several of his descendants still reside. The second son, Josiah, removed at an early day to a place on Blue River, now within Harrison county, Indiana; but no recent information of him, or his family, has been obtained. The eldest sister, Mary,⁵⁰ married Ralph Crume and some of her descendants are now known to be in Breckenridge county Kentucky. The second sister, Nancy, married William Brumfield, and her family are not known to have left Kentucky, but there is no recent information from them. Thomas, the youngest son, and the father of the present subject, by the early death of his father, and very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering laboring boy, and grew up literally without education. He never did more in the way of writing than to bunglingly sign his own name. Before he was grown, he passed one year as a hired hand with his uncle Isaac on Wataga, a branch of the Holsteen River. Getting back

49. *CWAL*, 4:60–61. Prepared for a campaign biography. John Locke Scripps, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago: [Press and Tribune], 1860; and as *Tribune Tracts*, no. 6 (N.Y.: H. Greeley & Co., 1860). See fn. 27, *supra*.

50. See fn. 53, *infra*.

into Kentucky, and having reached his 28th. year, he married Nancy Hanks—mother of the present subject—in the year 1806. She also was born in Virginia; and relatives of hers of the name of Hanks, and of other names, now reside in Coles, in Macon, and in Adams counties, Illinois, and also in Iowa. The present subject has no brother or sister of the whole or half blood. He had a sister, older than himself, who was grown and married, but died many years ago, leaving no child. Also a brother, younger than himself, who died in infancy.

11. *AL letter to John Chrisman (September 21, 1860)*⁵¹

Yours of the 13th. was duly received. I have no doubt that you and I are related. My grand-father's Christian name was "Abraham." He had four brothers—Isaac, Jacob, John & Thomas. They were born in Pennsylvania, and my grand-father, and some, if not all the others, in early life removed to Rockingham Co. Virginia. There my father—named Thomas—was born. From there my grand-father removed to Kentucky, and was killed by Indians, about the year 1784. His brother Thomas, who was my father's uncle—also removed to Kentucky—to Fayette Co. I think—where, as I understand he lived, and died. I close, by repeating, I have no doubt you and I are related.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

12. *AL letter (extract) to Mrs. Susannah Weathers
(December 4, 1861)*⁵²

Your letter informs me that your maiden name was Crume, and that you were raised in Washington county, Kentucky, by which I infer that an uncle of mine by marriage was a relative of yours. Nearly, or quite sixty years ago, Ralph Crume married Mary Lincoln,⁵³ a sister of my father, in Washington county, Kentucky.

51. CWAL, 4:117. Professor Basler adds this footnote: "John Chrisman, born at Linville, Virginia, was the son of Joseph Chrisman and Elizabeth Lincoln (daughter of Jacob who was the brother of Lincoln's grandfather (Abraham))." Elizabeth Lincoln Chrisman (1803–1824) was thus a second cousin to AL. W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 208.

52. CWAL, 5:57. The exact relationship between AL and Susannah Crume Weathers is unstated.

53. For details of Mary Lincoln Crume and her family, see Louis A. Warren, ed. "Lincoln's Aunt Mary: Thomas Lincoln's Oldest Sister and the Crume Family into Which She Married," *The Lincoln Kinsman*, no. 42 (December 1941): 1–8; W. Lincoln, *History of the Lincoln Family*, 202–3. As of 2023, research into the Crume family was still being expanded by Dean and Diane (Crume) Gladow of Emporia, Kansas; see, e.g., *For the People: A Newsletter of the ALA* 23:3 (Fall 2021): 2.