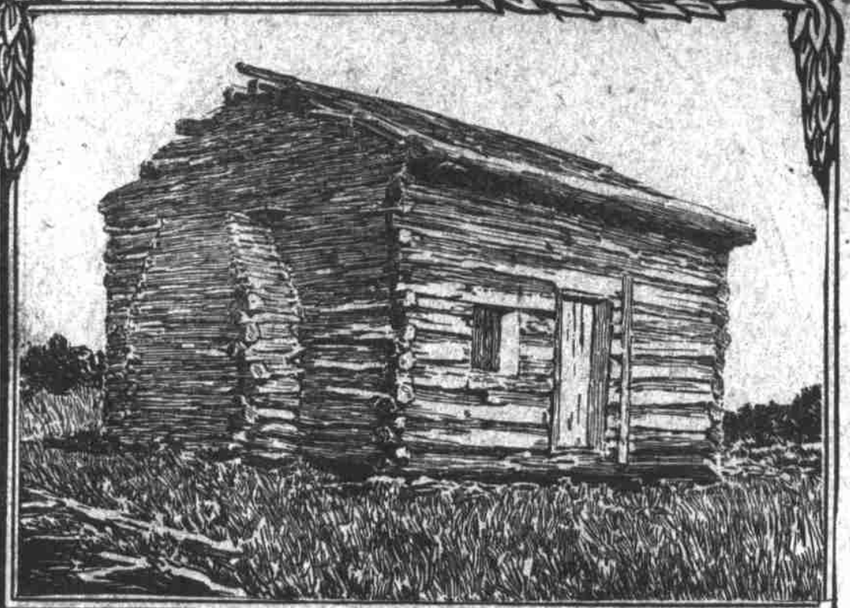
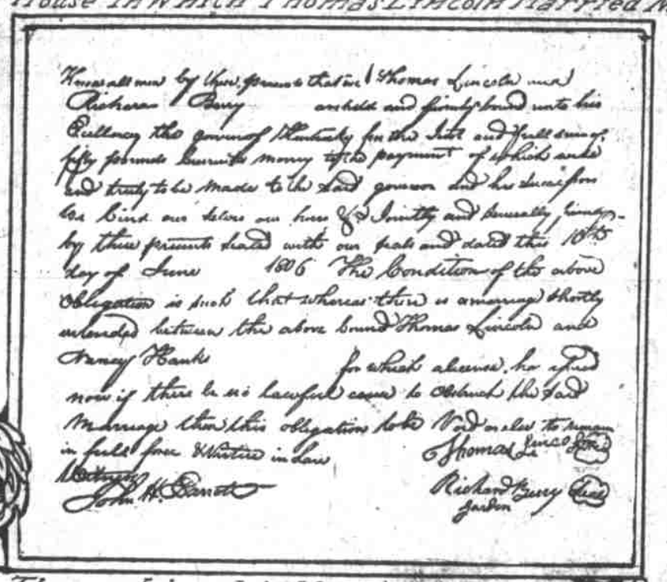
The WOMAN WHO SHAPED a WONDERFUL CAREER

Sarah Bush Lincoln, Stepmother of Abraham Lincoln, at Age of 76 Years.

House in Which Thomas Lincoln Married Nancy Hanks.



The Birthplace of Abraham Lincoln.



Know all men by these presents that we Thomas Lincoln and Richard Berry are held and firmly bound unto his Excellency the governor of Kentucky for the time being and his successors in the full and just sum of fifty pounds lawful money to the payment of which well and truly to be made to the said governor and his successors we bind ourselves our heirs executors and administrators jointly and severally firmly by these presents sealed with our seals and dated this 10th day of June 1806. The condition of the above obligation is such that whereas there is a marriage shortly intended between the above bound Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks for which cause we pray now if there be no lawful cause to obstruct the said marriage then this obligation to be void and to remain in full force & virtues in law.

Thomas Lincoln (Seal)
Richard Berry (Seal)
Jesse H. Head

Thomas Lincoln's Marriage Bond.

All I Am or Ever Hope to Be I Owe to My Mother," Lincoln's Tribute.

THE history of every great man, declares a well-known writer, begins at his mother's knee. Behind every great endeavor and unselfish deed, every noble career of every illustrious man will be found a woman—the frail and gentle creature whose name, perhaps, remains obscured behind the glory of her son, but who began to teach him high thoughts and ideals and to lisp the words of "Our Father, who art in Heaven."

Abraham Lincoln's career began at the knee of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, his mother. It was she who taught him to read from an old Bible he came to know so well, who told him the stories in Aesop's fables and helped him to study the "Kentucky Preceptor."

It was she who taught him the letters of the alphabet and first trained his hand to scrawl them. It was she who instilled in him a hatred of slavery and by her own gentle loveliness inspired a regard and esteem for women which lasted throughout his life.

Nancy Hanks Lincoln, one of the great President's historians declares, was "stoop-shouldered, thin-breasted, sad—at times miserable"; a gentle, kind, uncomplaining woman, whose life had been one of hard labor, with few enjoyments, and who died before her prime. This was Nancy Hanks Lincoln, who lay on her deathbed, tired and worn, her face wan, her thin, bony hands clasping those of a 9-year-old lad, whose deep-sunk eyes were filled with tears, and who, when he later became "a liberator of a race of men," declared:

"All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to my mother. Blessings on her memory."

FROM his mother, Lincoln once told his friend and law partner, William H. Herndon, he believed he inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition. Her memory remained with him as one of the dearest things of his life—a noble type of good, heroic womanhood."

Nancy Hanks was 5 years old when her parents sold their farm in Virginia and went pioneering westward toward Kentucky. Nancy was the youngest of a family of eight children. Her father was Joseph Hanks and her mother Nancy Shipley, a daughter of Robert Shipley. Nancy was born February 5, 1784.

The journey westward was a perilous one, and it is said Nancy was stolen by Indians while her parents were on the way. Roads were bad; in fact, there was only a footpath through the wilderness, where passed the long procession of women and children on horseback, men trudging behind driving the caravans.

Picture to yourself the procession, described by Justice Robertson—through privations incredible and perils thick, thousands of men, women and children came in successive caravans, forming continuous streams of human beings, horses, cattle, and other domestic animals, moving onward along a lonely and homeless path to a wild and cheerless land.

"Cast your eyes back," he continues, "on that long procession of missionaries in the cause of civilization; behold the men on foot, with their trusty guns on their shoulders, driving stock and leading packhorses; and the women, some walking with pails on their heads, others riding with children in their laps and other children swung in baskets on horses, fastened to the tails of others going before; see them encamped at night, expecting to be massacred by Indians; behold them in the month of December, in that memorable season of unprecedented cold called the 'hard winter,' traveling two or three miles a day."

And imagine little Nancy Hanks, spindly-legged and golden-haired, shivering as she snuggled under blankets, pursuing the road of the pioneers. In the child who was to become the mother of Abraham Lincoln was now developed a courage and perseverance which was to be inherited and which afterward marked one of the greatest of men.

The family settled in Washington county, Kentucky, in winter. Hard work confronted them, even privation. Trees had to be felled, a log cabin built and shelter erected for the stock.

Little Nancy, with her sisters, Elizabeth and Polly, helped their mother, cooking and sewing and preparing the rude home, while the brothers, Charles, Joshua, William, Thomas and Joseph, went about with the father, clearing the land for cultivation in the spring. They hunted animals and fished in the cold streams. And when spring came they dug the hard stony ground and planted wheat and corn.

Thus four years passed—four years of hard toil and hard living—and then Joseph Hanks died. Not long afterward the mother, worn with toil, followed; the brothers and daughters married, and Nancy, left alone, was taken in by her Aunt Lucy—a sister of her mother, who had married Richard Berry. This home was a happy one and Nancy grew up, cheerful and pretty.

A QUAINT OLD WILL

When Nancy's father died he left a will. It is still on the records of the Bardstown clerk's office, and as will be seen, Nancy was the proud heiress of one heifer, a pet called Peldy. The quaint will, which was probated May 14, 1792, runs:

In the name of God, Amen. I, Joseph Hanks, of Nelson county, state of Kentucky, being of sound mind and memory, but weak in body and calling to mind the frailty of all human nature, do make and demise this my last will and testament in the manner and form following, to wit:

Item: I give and bequeath unto my son Thomas one sorrel horse called Major. Item: I give and bequeath unto my son Joshua one gray mare Bonny. Item: I give and bequeath unto my son William one gray horse called Gilbert. Item: I give and bequeath unto my son Charles one roan horse called Tobe. Item: I give and bequeath unto my son Joseph one horse called Bald. Also the land whereon I now live, containing one hundred and fifty acres.

Item: I give and bequeath unto my daughter Elizabeth one heifer yearling called Gentle. Item: I give and bequeath unto my daughter Polly one heifer yearling called Lady. Item: I give and bequeath unto my daughter Nancy one heifer yearling called Peldy. Item: I give and bequeath unto my wife Nanny all and singular my whole estate during her life, afterward to be equally divided between all my children. It is also my wish and desire that the whole of the property first above bequeathed should be the property of my wife during her life.

Here, too, can be found a record of the seed which budded so nobly in Joseph Hanks' grandson. Joseph Hanks, unlike most of the pioneers, owned no slaves. When Nancy Hanks later married Thomas Lincoln they bought no slaves and never owned any.

Nancy's life while she lived with her Aunt Lucy was happy. She grew into a young miss of unusual beauty and became the belle of the countryside. She learned to read and write, and was considered exceptionally accomplished. When she married Thomas Lincoln she taught him to spell the letters of his name.

There are but few, and meager descriptions of Nancy Hanks. One learns that she was slight of figure, that her hair was pale golden, almost flaxen, and her eyes were blue. Her wit was nimble.

Suitors thronged the parlor of Aunt Lucy's farm. But Nancy lost her heart to none; she laughed gaily at their protests, parried their importunate proposals with jest and was so good-natured, so mirthful and funny about it that all remained her friends.

Nancy often went to the farm of Joseph Hanks, at Elizabethtown, where she saw her cousin, Thomas Lincoln. Thomas was a carpenter, and if the records are true, the best in the country for many miles.

He not only hacked and hewed and chiseled wood with skill, but he did what none others had succeeded in doing—chiseled his way into the heart of Nancy.

Thomas Lincoln had a varied career. He was strong as an ox, temperate in his habits, an attendant at church and was bitterly opposed to slavery. Both he and Nancy agreed in that. The couple entered into a marriage bond on June 12, 1806. On June 14 the couple were married by a Methodist preacher, the Rev. Jesse Head, who besides being a clergyman, was an editor, country judge and carpenter.

And a wedding it was—with merrymaking and feasting. There were present the Mitchells, Shipleys and Berrys, Nancy's cousins, relatives and friends from the country roundabout. In a pit near the house a great fire was built, over which a sheep was placed and barbecued. During the morning it roasted, covered by green boughs, and after the wedding it was cut and served for dinner. There were venison, too, and wild turkey and ducks. The wedding was remembered for years.

"There was no hint of future glory in the wedding or bringing home of Nancy Lincoln," wrote Nicolay and Hay. "All accounts represent her as a handsome young woman of 23, of appearance and intellect superior to her lowly fortunes. She could read and write—a remarkable accomplishment in her circle—and even taught her husband to form the letters of his name. He had no such valuable wedding gift to bestow upon her; he brought her to a little house in Elizabethtown, where he and she and want dwelt together in fourteen feet square."

For two happy but needy years the couple lived in a log cabin on the banks of what was then known as Mill creek. Picture to yourself that home of the young bride—a single room, with a huge fireplace, where logs burned in winter; an iron pot suspended from a crane, rough chairs hewn by the carpenter husband of logs, a number of crude benches, a bed made of rough trees from which the bark had not been removed, a spinning wheel by which the industrious wife sat and wove the material for clothing; a room lacking in comforts, typical of the pioneer cabins of those days, with an opening above into a loft, reached by a ladder, where things were stored.

There, one day in 1807, Nancy's first baby was born. It was a little girl, and was called Nancy, after the mother. Later the little girl's name was changed to Sarah. That was when Thomas Lincoln married his second wife, Sarah Bush.

Thomas Lincoln owned a farm near Buffalo, which he had bought in 1803. During the two years he lived on Mill creek he cultivated the farm, improving the ground, and there he moved the spring following the birth of Sarah. In their life of Lincoln, Nicolay and Hay write:

"Thomas Lincoln settled down in this dismal solitude to a deeper poverty than any of his name had ever known; and there, in the midst of the most unpromising circumstances that ever witnessed the advent of a hero into this world, Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809."

The family, however, could not have been extremely destitute, for, we are told, they had a cow and a calf, milk and butter and a feather bed. What wealth! When Abraham was 4 the family moved again—this time to a cabin, situated on Muldraugh's hill. There a third child was born, which died when a few months old.

Of the life of Nancy Lincoln at this time nothing has been written. Of his boyhood Lincoln himself seldom spoke. But one can imagine the patient woman, alone and unassisted, performing the work of her household, tending the cows and milking them, making butter, cleaning the meagerly furnished cabin in which the family lived, cooking and spinning cloth of which she made garments for her husband, little Sarah and Abe.

Nancy Lincoln's beauty faded; the roses fled from her cheeks, her body became wasted and her shoulders stooped. But her happy spirit never left her; she had a word of cheer for all her neighbors. Stories are told of how she visited the sick and comforted them, and how, when her neighbors were in difficulty, her tender heart was moved and she helped them as best she could.

Log Cabin Which Young Lincoln Helped His Father Build on Goose Nest Prairie.

"LITTLE ABE" HER SOLACE

Her life was hard. But there was cause for joy in Nancy Lincoln's life. Little Abe was her constant delight. At night, when her work was over, she would open the "preceptor" book and teach the two children the letters of the alphabet. With what tenderness and love she must have watched them as they studied—so hard to memorize the A's, B's and C's—and with what doting fondness she must have trained little Abe's tiny hand to trace the letters on a slate!

Those were wonderful evenings. As she sat by the hearth she would read stories from an old, torn copy of Aesop's fables. And the deep-eyed boy would listen, with eager gaze, tense face, to the story of the wicked fox longing for the grapes, the fox and the stork and the tortoise and the hare! Then, when the story was read, little Abe would ask questions; he would repeat the wonderful stories, and the characters and animals in the old fables became his friends.

Dearly Nancy Lincoln loved the Bible, and there were readings from the sacred book; there was told the old, old story. And these stories Lincoln never forgot. When, in after life, he electrified the world by his eloquence, his mastery of pure and perfect English and his tempestuous oratory, he retold the same stories—the stories he heard at his mother's knee.

Life was not prosperous with the father. He left Kentucky and went prospecting in Illinois, where he took up land on Little Pigeon creek, in Spencer county. And again the hard-worked wife was called upon to move her home.

With their furniture packed in a wagon and their cow behind, the family started on their long pilgrimage in 1816. During the winter of 1816 and 1817 the family lived in a camp. The winter was rigorous. Hardship and privation and suffering from cold were the portion of the little family.

Uncomplainingly the tender, gentle woman bore her lot, but her health slowly gave way, her face became more wan. A rough cabin was begun in the spring and life opened anew. Land was cleared, Thomas Lincoln plied his trade among the scattered inhabitants of the solitary region. They began to prosper. But the life had been too hard for the tender, loving wife and she sank under the burden.

One day in October, 1818, as she lay in her bed in the little cabin, she called her two children to her.

The sun, flooding through the doorway, wreathed the faded face with a halo of gold. Through the door came the crisp odor of warm, brown leaves. Outside the birds sang. A smile wreathed the face of the tired, weary woman.

"BE GOOD TO ONE ANOTHER"

She took the hands of Sarah and the thin, serious-faced boy. "Be good to one another," she said, brokenly, with infinite tenderness. Then she closed her eyes. The wonderful smile deepened. The sunlight faded into evening, and little Abe, leaving Sarah kneeling by the bed, crept away and climbed the pegs in the wall to the garret, where he flung himself on a mattress of leaves.

Night fell, and from the loft came a stifled sound of sobbing—sobbing repressed, checked, restrained, yet so poignant, so keen, so heart-forlorn that the father, returning home, paused hearing it; his heart sinking. He knew the sunlight of the boy's life had departed.

Many years afterward people wondered at the sorrow moulded indelibly on the face of Lincoln—like agony graven on a figure of stone.

Nancy Hanks Lincoln succumbed to a fever which had ravaged the country, and which carried away the Sparrows, husband and wife, a few days before; all were buried on the same day.

Before the next December Thomas Lincoln married Sarah Bush Johnston, a widow, who, it is said, had rejected him many years before. She came from Kentucky and became a mother to the two motherless children. She loved Abe, and he became a dutiful son to her. The family became more prosperous. But the face of the boy, as he grew up, became more melancholy. It was not until after the death of Anne Rutledge, his first love, that there developed in him the gloom and sense of fatality which colored his life.

In later years, when Lincoln, again shrouded in sorrow, sat by the bedside of his little son, Willie, who was dying, he cried in despair: "This is the hardest trial of my life. Why is it? Why is it?" A nurse who had lost her husband and children told him of her loss, adding, "But I trust in God. I rely upon his will." Lincoln shook his head sadly.

On the day of the funeral he asked the nurse and some friends to pray for him. "I will try to go to God with my sorrows," he said. "I wish I had that childlike faith you speak of. I trust God will give it to me."

Then his memory traveled back over the years and his first loss by death came to his mind. He told of his mother's confident belief in the wisdom of God. "I remember her prayers," he said in a low voice, "and they have always followed me. They have followed me all my life."

The POEM that MOST STIRRED LINCOLN'S SOUL

OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN it was once said that the prevailing sentiment of his powerful, yet sad, countenance was expressed in the line, "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

The sympathetic observer, who found there so splendid a significance, guessed the secret that lay within with almost clairvoyant insight.

That is the opening line of the poem which was Lincoln's favorite. It was written by a young Scotchman, who died at the age of 37—the age fatal to Burns, Byron, Motherwell and other gifted poets.

ONE evening in December, 1863, Mr. Lincoln repeated the verses to Colonel J. G. Wilson, then in Washington.

"Mr. President," remarked his guest, "you have omitted a portion of it."

"What! Is there more of it?" exclaimed Mr. Lincoln, with eager astonishment.

"Yes, sir; two more stanzas."

Colonel Wilson repeated them, to the delight of the President.

"Can you tell me who wrote the poem?" Mr. Lincoln inquired. "I can't find out. Some of the newspapers have attributed its authorship to me."

"It was written," Colonel Wilson replied, "by William Knox, a Scottish poet of considerable talent, who died in Edinburgh in 1825. He published several volumes of poems, and was well known to Sir Walter Scott; 'Christopher North,' of glorious memory, and to many others among the literary leaders of his day."

To those who appreciate meritorious verse, the same pleasure can be enjoyed here, in the reading of the poem in its completeness, as was vouchsafed Lincoln on that night of rare peace and talk of beauty amid the tumult of war and stress of his people's peril. This is the poem in full:

MORTALITY.

Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift, fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall moulder to dust and together shall lie.

The infant and mother attended and loved;
The mother that infant's affection who proved;
The husband that mother and infant who blessed—
Each, all, are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure—her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those that beloved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the scepter hath borne;
The brow of the priest that the mitre hath worn;
The eye of the sage and the heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant, whose lot was to sow and to reap;
The herdsman, who climbed with his goats up the steep;
The beggar, who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint that enjoyed the communion of heaven;
The sinner that dared to remain unforgiven;
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes, like the flower or the weed,
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes, even those we behold,
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

For we are the same as our fathers have been;
We see the same sights that our fathers have seen;
We drink the same stream and view the same sun,
And run the same course our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking our fathers would shrink;
To the life we are clinging they also would cling;
But it speeds for us all like a bird on the wing.

They loved, but the story we cannot unfold;
They scorned, but the heart of the haughty is cold;
They grieved, but no wail from the slumber will come;
They joyed, but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died—ay! they died. We things that are now,
That walk on the turf that lies over their brow,
And make in their dwellings a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage road.

Yes! hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
We mingle together in sunshine and rain;
And the smile and the tear, the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud.
Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?