

Lincoln's Love Affairs

By Ward Hill Lamon,
Lincoln's Friend and Bodyguard

And His Early Experiences as a Lawmaker

CHAPTER I.

Abraham Lincoln's First and Fondest Love.

JAMES RUTLEDGE was the founder of New Salem, the little town in Illinois to which Abraham Lincoln removed at the age of twenty-three, and the owner in part of the famous mill on the Sangamon. He was born in South Carolina and was of the illustrious Rutledge family of that state. From South Carolina he emigrated to Kentucky and thence to Illinois. In 1823 he settled at New Salem, built the mill and laid out the village in conjunction with Mr. Cameron,

a retired minister of the Cumberland Presbyterians. Mr. Rutledge's character seems to have been pure and high, for wherever his name occurs in the voluminous records before us—in the long talks and the numerous epistles of his neighbors—it is almost invariably coupled with some expression of genuine esteem and respect.

At one time and along with his other business, which appears to have been extensive and various, Mr. Rutledge kept the tavern, the small house with four rooms on the main street of New Salem, just opposite Lincoln's grocery. There Mr. Lincoln came to board late in 1832 or early in 1833. The family consisted of the father, mother and nine children, three of them born in Kentucky and six in Illinois, three grown up and the rest quite young. Ann, the principal subject of this chapter, was the third child. She was born on the 7th of January, 1813, and was about nineteen years of age when Mr. Lincoln came to live in the house.

When Ann was a little maiden just turned of seventeen and still attending the school of that redoubtable pedagogue Minter Graham, there came to New Salem a young gentleman of singular enterprise, tact and capacity for business. He was the pioneer of New Salem as a business point and built the first storehouse there at the extravagant cost of \$15. He took boarding with Mr. Rutledge's friend and partner, James Cameron, and gave out his name as John McNeill. He came to New Salem with no other capital than good sense and an active and plucky spirit, but somehow fortune smiled indiscriminately on all his endeavors, and very soon—as early as the latter part of 1832—he found himself a well-to-do and prosperous man, owning a snug farm seven miles north of New Salem and a half interest in the largest store of the place. This latter property his partner, Samuel Hill, bought from him at a good round sum, for McNeill now announced his intention of being absent for a brief period and his purpose was such that he might need all his available capital.

In the meantime the partners, Hill and McNeill, had both fallen in love with Ann Rutledge, and both courted her with devoted assiduity. But the contest had long since been decided in favor of McNeill, and Ann loved him with all her susceptible and sensitive heart. When the time drew near for McNeill to depart, he confided to Ann a strange story and, in the eyes of a person less fond, a very startling story. His name was not John McNeill at all, but John McNamara. His family was a highly respectable one in the state of New York, but a few years before his father had failed in business and there was great distress at home. John then conceived the romantic plan of running away and at some undefined place in the far west making a sudden fortune with which to retrieve the family disaster. He fled accordingly, changed his name to avoid the pursuit of his father, found his way to New Salem and—she knew the rest. He was now able to perform that great act of filial piety which he set out to accomplish, would return at once to the relief of his parents and in all human probability bring them back with him to his new home in Illinois. At all events, she might look for his return as speedily as the journey could be made with ordinary diligence, and thenceforward there should be no more partings between him and his fair Ann. She believed this tale because she loved the man that told it, and she would have believed it all the same if it had been ten times as incredible. A wise man would have rejected it with scorn, but the girl's instinct was a better guide, and McNamara proved to be all that he said he was, although poor Ann never saw the proof which others got of it.

Her Lover Rides Away.

McNamara rode away on old Charley, an antiquated steed that had seen hard usage in the Black Hawk war. Charley was slow, stumbled dreadfully and caused his rider much annoyance and some hard swearing. On this provoking animal McNamara jogged through the long journey from New Salem to New York and arrived there after many delays only to find that his broken and dispirited father was fast sinking into the grave. After all his efforts he was too late. The father could never enjoy the prosperity which the long absent and long silent son had brought him. McNamara wrote to Ann that there was sickness in the family and he could not return at the time appointed. Then there were other and still other postponements. "Cir-

cumstances over which he had no control" prevented his departure from time to time until years had rolled away and Ann's heart had grown sick with hope deferred. She never quite gave him up, but continued to expect him until death terminated her melancholy watch. His inexplicable delay, however, the infrequency of his letters and their unsatisfactory character—these and something else had broken her attachment, and toward the last she waited for him only to ask a release from her engagement and to say that she preferred another and a more urgent suitor. But without his knowledge and formal renunciation of his claim upon her she did not like to marry, and in obedience to this refinement of honor she postponed her union with the more pressing lover until Aug. 25, 1835, when, as many persons believe, she died of a broken heart.

Lincoln's friend Short was in some way related to the Rutledges, and for awhile Lincoln visited Ann two or three times a week at his house. According to him, "Miss Rutledge was a good looking, smart, lively girl, a good housekeeper, with a moderate education and without any of the so called accomplishments." L. M. Greene, who knew her well, talks about her as "a beautiful and very amiable young woman," and Nult Greene is even more enthusiastic. "This young lady," in the language of the latter gentleman, "was a woman of exquisite beauty, but her intellect was quick, sharp, deep and philosophic as well as brilliant. She had as gentle and kind a heart as an angel, full of love, kindness and sympathy. She was beloved by everybody, and everybody respected and loved her, so sweet and angelic was she. Her character was more than good; it was positively noted throughout the county. She was a woman worthy of Lincoln's love." McNamara, her unfortunate lover, says, "Miss Ann was a gentle, amiable maiden, without any of the airs of your city belles, but winsome and comely withal, a blond in complexion, with golden hair, cherry red lips and bonny blue eyes." Even the women of the neighborhood united with the men to praise the name of this beautiful but unhappy girl. Mrs. Hardin Bale "knew her well. She had auburn hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, was a slim, pretty, kind, tender, good hearted woman, in height about five feet three inches and weighed about 120 pounds. She was beloved by all who knew her. McNamara, Hill and Lincoln all courted her near the same time. She died as it were of grief. Miss Rutledge was beautiful." Such was Ann Rutledge, the girl in whose grave, Mr. Lincoln said, "my heart lies buried."

When Mr. Lincoln first saw Ann, she was probably the most refined woman with whom he had then ever spoken—



GRAVE OF ANN RUTLEDGE, PETERSBURG, ILL.

a modest, delicate creature, fascinating by reason of the mere contrast with the rude people by whom they were both surrounded. She had a secret, too, and a sorrow, the unexplained and painful absence of McNamara, which no doubt made her all the more interesting to him whose spirit was often even more melancholy than her own. It would be hard to trace the growth of such an attachment at a time and place so distant, but that it actually grew and became an intense and mutual passion the evidence before us is painfully abundant.

CHAPTER II.

Lincoln Wins During First Lover's Long Absence.

MR. LINCOLN was always welcomed at the little tavern, at Short's, on the Sand Ridge, or at the farm, half a mile from Short's, where the Rutledges finally abode. Ann's father was his devoted friend, and the mother he called affectionately "Aunt Polly." It is probable that the family looked upon McNamara's delay with more suspicion than Ann did herself. At all events all her adult relatives encouraged the suit, which Lincoln early began to press, and as time, absence and apparent neglect gradually told against McNamara she listened to him with augmenting interest until, in 1835, we find them formally and solemnly betrothed. Ann now waited only for the return of

McNamara to marry Lincoln. David Rutledge urged her to marry immediately without regard to anything but her own happiness, but she said she could not consent to it until McNamara came back and released her from her pledge. At length, however, as McNamara's reappearance became more and more hopeless, she took a different view of it and then thought she would become Abe's wife as soon as he found the means of a decent livelihood. "Ann told me once," says James M. in a letter to R. B. Rutledge, in coming from camp meeting on Rock creek, "that engagements made too far ahead sometimes failed, that one had failed (meaning her engagement with McNamara), and gave me to understand that as soon as certain studies were completed she and Lincoln would be married."

In the summer of 1835 Ann showed unmistakable symptoms of failing health, attributable, as most of the neighborhood believed, to the distressing attitude she felt bound to maintain between her two lovers. On the 25th of August in that year she died of what the doctors chose to call "brain fever." In a letter to Mr. Herndon her brother says: "You suggest that the probable cause of Ann's sickness was her conflicts, emotions, etc. As to this I cannot say. I, however, have my own private convictions. The character of her sickness was brain fever." A few days before her death Lincoln was summoned to her bedside. What happened in that solemn conference was known only to him and the dying girl. But when he left her and stopped at the house of John Jones on his way home Jones saw signs of the most terrible distress in his face and his conduct. When Ann actually died and was buried, his grief became frantic. He lost all self control, even the consciousness of identity, and every friend he had in New Salem pronounced him insane, mad, crazy. "He was watched with especial vigilance," as William Green tells us, "during storms, fogs, damp, gloomy weather, for fear of an accident." At such times he raved wildly, declaring, among other vile expressions of his woe, "I can never be reconciled to have the snow, rains and storms to beat upon her grave!"

Lincoln Practically Insane.

About three-quarters of a mile below New Salem, at the foot of the main bluff and in a hollow between two lateral bluffs, stood the house of Bowlin Greene, built of logs and weather boarded. Thither the friends of Lincoln, who apprehended a total abdication of reason, determined to transport him, partly for the benefit of a mere change of scene and partly to keep him within constant reach of his near and noble friend Bowlin Greene. During this period of his darkened and wavering intellect, when "accidents" were momentarily expected, it was discovered that Bowlin Greene possessed a power to persuade and guide him proportioned to the affection that had subsisted between them in former and better times. Bowlin Greene came for him, but Lincoln was cunning and obstinate. It required the most artful practices of a general conspiracy of all his friends to "disarm his suspicions" and induce him to go and stay with his most anxious and devoted friend. But at last they succeeded, and Lincoln remained down under the bluff for two or three weeks, the object of undisguised solicitude and of the strictest surveillance. At the end of that time his mind seemed to be restored, and it was thought safe to let him go back to his old haunts—to the study of law, to the writing of legal papers for his neighbors, to petting before the justice of the peace and perhaps to a little surveying. But Mr. Lincoln was never precisely the same man again. At the time of his release he was thin, haggard and careworn, like one risen from the verge of the grave. He had always been subject to fits of great mental depression, but after this they were more frequent and alarming. It was then that he began to repeat, with a feeling which seemed to inspire every listener with awe and to carry him to the fresh grave of Ann at every one of his solemn periods, the lines entitled "Immortality; or, Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?" None heard him but knew that he selected these curiously empty yet wonderfully sad, impressive lines to celebrate a grief which lay with continual heaviness on his heart, but to which he could not with becoming delicacy directly allude. He muttered them as he rambled through the woods or walked by the roaring Sangamon. He was heard to murmur them to himself as he slipped into the village at nightfall.

After a long walk of six miles and an evening visit to the Concord graveyard, and he would suddenly break out with them in little social assemblies after noticeable periods of silent gloom. They came unbidden to his lips, while the air of affliction in face and gesture, the moving tones and touching modulations of his voice, made it evident that every syllable of the recitation was meant to commemorate the mournful fate of Ann. The poem is now his. The name of the obscure author is forgotten, and his work is imperishably associated with the memory of a great man and interwoven with the history of his greatest sorrow. Mr. Lincoln's adoption of it has saved it from merited oblivion and translated it from the "Poet's Corner" of the country newspaper to a place in the story of his own life, a story that will continue to be written or written about as long as our language exists.

Many years afterward, when Mr. Lincoln, the best lawyer of his section, with one exception, traveled the circuit with the court and a crowd of his jolly brethren, he always rose early, before any one else was stirring, and, raking together a few glowing coals on the hearth, he would sit looking into them, musing and talking with himself, for hours together. One morning in the year of his nomination his com-

panions found him in this attitude, when "Mr. Lincoln repeated aloud and at length the poem 'Immortality.'" Indicating his preference for the two last stanzas, but insisting that the entire composition "sounded to him as much like true poetry as anything that he had ever heard."

In Carpenter's "Anecdotes and Reminiscences of President Lincoln" occurs the following passage:

"The evening of March 22, 1864, was a most interesting one to me. I was with the president alone in his office for several hours. Busy with pen and papers when I went in, he presently threw them aside and commenced talking to me of Shakespeare, of whom he was very fond. Little 'Tad,' his son, coming in, he sent him to the library for a copy of the plays and then read to me several of his favorite passages. Relapsing into a sadder strain, he laid the book aside and, leaning back in his chair, said:

"There is a poem which has been a great favorite with me for years, which



LINCOLN AT THE GRAVE OF ANN RUTLEDGE.

was first shown to me when a young man by a friend and which I afterward saw and cut from a newspaper and learned by heart. I would," he continued, "give a great deal to know who wrote it, but I have never been able to ascertain."

Lincoln's Favorite Poem.

"Then, half closing his eyes, he repeated the verses to me:

"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 molder to dust and together shall lie."
"The infant a mother attended and loved;
The mother that infant's affection who proved,
The husband that mother and infant who blest—
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 who loved her and praised her
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 miter 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 who enjoyed the communion of heaven,
The sinner who 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 our fathers have been;
We see the same sights our fathers have seen;
We drink the same stream, we 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 from 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 wall from their slumber will come;
They joyed, but the tongue of their gladness is dumb."

"They died—aye; 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."

"Yea; hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
Are mingled 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 draft of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the pale-ness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud—
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

CHAPTER III.

Abe Always True to the Memory of Ann.

IT was only a year or two after the death of Ann Rutledge that Mr. Lincoln told Robert L. Wilson, a distinguished colleague in the legislature, parts of whose letter will be printed in another place, that although "he appeared to enjoy life rapturously" it was a mistake; that when alone he was so overcome by mental depression that he never dared to carry a pocket knife. And during all Mr. Wilson's extended acquaintance with him he never did own a knife, notwithstanding he was inordinately fond of whittling.

Mr. Herndon says: "He never addressed another woman, in my opinion, 'Yours affectionately,' and generally and characteristically abstained from the use of the word 'love.' That word cannot be found more than a half dozen times, if that often, in all his letters and speeches since that time. I have seen some of his letters to other ladies, but he never says 'love.' He never ended his letters with 'Yours affectionately,' but signed his name, 'Your friend, A. Lincoln.'"

After Mr. Lincoln's election to the presidency he one day met an old friend, Isaac Cogdale, who had known him intimately in the better days of the Rutledges at New Salem. "Ike," said he, "call at my office at the state-house about an hour by sundown. The company will then all be gone."

Cogdale went according to request, "and sure enough," as he expressed it, "the company dropped off one by one, including Lincoln's clerk."

"I want to inquire about old times and old acquaintances," began Mr. Lincoln. "When we lived in Salem there were the Greens, Potters, Armstrongs and Rutledges. These folks have got scattered all over the world. Some are dead. Where are the Rutledges, Greens, etc.?"

"After we had spoken over old times," continues Cogdale—"persons, circumstances—in which he showed a wonderful memory, I then dared to ask him this question:

"May I now, in turn, ask you one question, Lincoln?"

"Assuredly. I will answer your question, if a fair one, with all my heart."

"Well, Abe, is it true that you fell in love and courted Ann Rutledge?"

"It is true—true! Indeed I did. I have loved the name of Rutledge to this day. I have kept my mind on their movements ever since and love them dearly."

"Abe, is it true," still urged Cogdale, "that you ran a little wild about the matter?"

"I did really. I ran off the track. It was my first. I loved the woman dearly. She was a handsome girl; would have made a good, loving wife; was natural and quite intellectual, though not highly educated. I did honestly and truly love the girl and think often—often—of her now."

A few weeks after the burial of Ann McNamara returned to New Salem. He saw Lincoln at the postoffice and was struck with the deplorable change in his appearance. A short time afterward Lincoln wrote him a deed, which he still has and prizes highly, in memory of his great friend and rival. His father was at last dead, but he brought back with him his mother and her family. In December of the same year his mother died and was buried in the same graveyard with Ann. During his absence Colonel Rutledge had occupied his farm, and there Ann died, but "the Rutledge farm" proper adjoined this one to the south. "Some of Mr. Lincoln's corners as a surveyor are still visible on lines traced by him on both farms."

On Sunday, the 14th day of October, 1866, William H. Herndon knocked at the door of John McNamara at his residence, but a few feet distant from the spot where Ann Rutledge breathed her last. After some preliminaries not necessary to be related Mr. Herndon says: "I asked him the question:

"Did you know Miss Rutledge? If so, what did she die?"

"He sat by his open window, looking westerly, and, pulling me closer to himself, looked through the window and said: 'There, by that—choking up with emotion, pointing his long forefinger, nervous and trembling, to the spot—there, by that current bush, she died. The old house in which she and her father died is gone.'"

Grave of Ann Rutledge.

"After further conversation, leaving the sadness to momentarily pass away, I asked this additional question:

"Where was she buried?"

"In Concord burying ground, one mile southeast of this place."

Mr. Herndon sought the grave. "S. C. Berry," says he, "James Short (the gentleman who purchased in Mr. Lincoln's compass and chain in 1834 under an execution against Lincoln or Lincoln & Berry and gratuitously gave them back to Mr. Lincoln), James Miles and myself were together."

"I asked Mr. Berry if he knew where Miss Rutledge was buried—the place and exact surroundings. He replied: 'I do. The grave of Miss Rutledge lies just north of her brother's, David Rutledge, a young lawyer of great promise, who died in 1842.'"

"The cemetery contains but an acre

of ground in a beautiful and secluded situation. A thin skirt of timber lies on the east, commencing at the fence of the cemetery. The ribbon of timber, some fifty yards wide, hides the sun's early rise. At 9 o'clock the sun pours all his rays into the cemetery. An extensive prairie lies west, the forest north, a field on the east and timber and prairie on the south. In this lonely ground lie the Berrys, the Rutledges, the Clarys, the Armstrongs and the Joneses, old and respected citizens, pioneers of an early day. I write, or, rather, did write, the original draft of this description in the immediate presence of the ashes of Miss Ann Rutledge, the beautiful and tender dead. The village of the dead is a sad, solemn place. Its very presence imposes truth on the mind of the living writer. Ann Rutledge lies buried north of her brother and rests sweetly on his left arm, angels to guard her. The cemetery is fast filling with the hazel and the dead." [In 1890 the remains of Miss Rutledge were removed to Oakwood cemetery, Petersburg, Ill., and the new grave was marked by a plain granite bowlder.—Editor.]

A lecture delivered by William H. Herndon at Springfield in 1896 contained the main outline, without the minutest details, of the story here related. It was spoken, printed and circulated without contradiction from any quarter. It was sent to the Rutledges, McNeelys, Greens, Shorts and many other of the old residents of New Salem and Petersburg, with particular requests that they should correct any error they might find in it. It was pronounced by them all truthful and accurate, but their replies, together with a mass of additional evidence, have been carefully collated with the lecture, and the result is the present narrative. The story of Ann Rutledge, Lincoln and McNamara as told here is as well proved as the fact of Mr. Lincoln's election to the presidency.

CHAPTER IV.

Mary Owens, Sweetheart No. 2, Is Introduced.

THREE-QUARTERS of a mile, or nearly so, north of Bowlin Greene's and on the summit of a hill stood the house of Bennett Able, a small frame building 13 by 20 feet. Able and his wife were warm friends of Mr. Lincoln, and many of his rambles through the surrounding country, reading and talking to himself, terminated at their door, where he always found the latchstring on the outside and a hearty welcome within. In October, 1833, Mr. Lincoln met there Miss Mary Owens, a sister of Mrs. Able, and, as we shall presently learn from his own words, admired her, although not extravagantly. She remained but four weeks and then went back to her home in Kentucky.

Miss Owens' mother being dead, her father married again, and Miss Owens, for good reasons of her own, thought she would rather live with her sister than with her stepmother. Accordingly, in the fall of 1836, she reappeared at Able's, passing through New Salem on the day of the presidential election, where the men standing about the polls stared and wondered at her "beauty." Twenty-eight or twenty-nine years of age, "she was," in the language of Mr. L. M. Greene, "tall and portly, weighed about 120 pounds and had large blue eyes, with the finest trimmings I ever saw. She was jovial, social, loved wit and humor,



MARY OWENS.

had a liberal English education and was considered wealthy. Bill," continues our excellent friend, "I am getting old; have seen too much trouble to give a lifelike picture of this woman. I won't try it. None of the poets or romance writers has ever given to us a picture of a heroine so beautiful as a true description of Miss Owens in 1836 would be."

Mrs. Hardin Bale, a cousin to Miss Owens, says "she was blue eyed, dark haired, handsome (not pretty), was rather large and tall, handsome, truly handsome, matronly looking, over ordinary size in height and weight. Miss Owens was handsome—that is to say, noble looking, matronly seeming."

Respecting her age and looks, Miss Owens herself makes the following note Aug. 6, 1866:

"Born in the year eight; fair skin, deep blue eyes, with dark curling hair; height five feet five inches, weighing about 150 pounds."

Johnson G. Greene is Miss Owens' cousin, and while on a visit to her in 1866 he contrived to get her version of the Lincoln courtship at great length. It does not vary in any material part from the account currently received in the neighborhood and given by various persons, whose oral or written testimony is preserved in Mr. Herndon's collection of manuscripts. J. G. Greene described her in terms about the same as those used by Mrs. Bale, adding that "she was a nervous and muscular woman," very "intellectual," "the most intellectual woman he ever saw," "with a forehead massive and angular, square, prominent and broad."