

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S VIRGINIA FAMILY

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It comes as quite a surprise to most people to learn that Abraham Lincoln had strong family ties to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and that there remain today in the Valley multiple homes and graves of Abe's Virginia relatives. While his birth and early childhood in Kentucky are well known, the fact that his father, grandfather, grandmother, great-grandparents and dozens of other relatives lived in Virginia is not as well known.

Lincoln's great-grandparents moved from Pennsylvania to Virginia around 1768. With their nine children, "Virginia John" and Rebecca settled on 600 acres in what is now Rockingham County. They spent the rest of their lives in Rockingham County and were laid to rest in a small family cemetery on their farm, joined over time by four additional generations of Lincolns, the last in 1938.

The oldest of the nine children of Virginia John and Rebecca Lincoln was Abraham Lincoln, born in 1744. He was the President's grandfather and namesake, called "Captain Abraham" in recognition of his service in the local militia as well as the American Revolution. While in Virginia, Captain Abraham married Bathsheba Herring, a native of Rockingham County. He and Bathsheba had all five of their children, including Tom Lincoln, the President's father, while living in Rockingham County. After fourteen years in Virginia, Captain Abraham, moved his family to Kentucky where, in just a few years, he was killed by Indians. His son Tom Lincoln grew up in Kentucky, where Abe was born in 1809.

Another of the nine children of Virginia John, Captain Jacob, who also served in the Revolution, remained in Virginia. The uncle of Tom Lincoln, great-uncle of Abe Lincoln and ancestor of almost all the remaining Virginia Lincolns,

Lincoln Homestead

he built a beautiful two-story house within a short distance of his parents' home around 1800. Known today as the Lincoln Homestead, it was impressive not only in its day but remains an elegant house. In stark contrast to President Lincoln's boyhood, his relatives in Virginia at the time were living in comfort. After the deaths of Jacob and his wife Dorcas, one of their sons, "Colonel" Abraham Lincoln, first cousin to Tom Lincoln and first cousin once-removed to Abe, moved into the Lincoln Homestead. About 1840 he built an addition to the rear of the Homestead. After his death in 1851, his wife, Mary Homan Lincoln, remained in the dwelling until her death in 1874. During the Civil War, including the Fall of 1864 when Sheridan's troops burned so much of the Shenandoah Valley, including crops and barns of the Lincolns, she lived in the Homestead, supported by her slaves. At her death it passed from the Lincoln family, but Lincolns continued to live and own land in Rockingham County for many years thereafter. They built several substantial brick homes, which are still occupied

David, born in the Lincoln Homestead, son of Capt. Jacob, who maintained the Lincoln Inn in Rockingham County, exchanged letters with Congressman Abraham Lincoln in 1848. Congressman Lincoln initiated the correspondence by introducing himself as David's relative and asked for additional information about his Virginia family. He wrote:

My father's name is *Thomas*; my grandfather's was *Abraham*.... My grandfather went from Rockingham *County* in Virginia, to Kentucky, about the year 1782; and, two years afterwards, was killed by the Indians. We have a vague tradition, that my great-grandfather went from Pennsylvania to Virginia; and that he was a *Quaker*. Further back than this, I have never heard any thing.... 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, or, in fact, whether you shall or not, I should be pleased to have a line from you at any time.

Virginia's Lincoln Country has attracted notable students of Lincoln, as well as his son, Robert. Other visitors included Waldo Lincoln (1914), Ida Tarbell (1922), William Barton (1924), Carl Sandburg (1925) and Louis Warren (1926).

Sadly, the once elegant Lincoln Homestead, unoccupied for many years, is falling into a state of serious disrepair and neglect. Over the years efforts have been made to acquire the Homestead to convert it into a museum but those efforts have been unsuccessful. Unless the house is soon acquired and restored, it will probably be lost forever. The Lincoln Homestead is a poignant metaphor for the issues swirling around our nation during the Civil War: Its occupants were Confederates; their cousin in Washington was President of the Union. Children of the Homestead's builder fought in the Confederate Army; their cousin was Commander-in-Chief of the Union. Residents of the Homestead owned slaves; their cousin was the Great Emancipator and freed even the Lincoln slaves. Barns and crops belonging to the Virginia Lincolns were burned by Sheridan; President Lincoln authorized that campaign. What landmark better represents the way America and its families were torn apart by the great Civil War! Preserving the Lincoln Homestead as a museum to the Lincolns of Virginia and their famous cousin, President Abraham Lincoln, in the "Bread Basket" of the Confederacy,

Lincoln Homestead

would be good way to respond to Lincoln's appeal for unity and the restoration of the Union.