

Vincennes — the start of it all

by **Caroline Ebert**

While the state of Indiana was founded in 1816, the town that holds the historical title of first town in Indiana was founded not only before the state's founding, but also the founding of the entire United States. Vincennes was established in 1732 and was originally part of a French colony. It has been an important part of the state of Indiana even before its founding as the 19th state in 1816. Its history stretches back centuries from a French territory, to American territory, to American

state. The French influence from the city's founding are visible to this day. Many of the buildings in the city draw inspiration from French architecture even if they were built long after France lost control of the city.

Vincennes also holds the title as the home of the ninth president of the United States, and only president from the state of Indiana, William Henry Harrison. This is also the president who is infamous for dying after only 31 days in office. The home where he lived has now become a

museum. The city was named after François-Marie Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, a French fur trader and later Revolutionary War veteran. He built a trading post where the modern city of Vincennes would be located. Vincennes was not only the first town of Indiana, it was also the first capitol of the state, before Corydon and finally Indianapolis. Its centuries old history also means that the city contains many firsts in the state, like the Jefferson Academy now Vincennes University, the first school of higher learning in the state

and west of the Alleghenies, or The Indiana Gazette as the first newspaper. In 1732, the year of its founding, it was little more than a small trading post. Those who would live there would have to make their living through trapping and fur trading, traveling using the Wabash or other surrounding rivers. There were no well-made roads in the wilderness at that time, and water travel was more reliable. Compare this to today, Vincennes is a city that has been built on many centuries of rich history and culture.



Among Vincennes' other claims to fame, it is also the site of the only Revolutionary War battle fought on Hoosier soil. Lt. Colonel George Rogers Clark successfully surprised the garrison of Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton in 1779, compelling the surrender of the British garrison. The fortifications were renamed Fort Patrick Henry after the victory.

Grandfather of Abraham Lincoln served in the American Revolution

To live in Southern Indiana and to be a reader of this newspaper, it would be hard to miss the fact that Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of these United States, spent his youth as a Hoosier and led the country through the bloodiest battle on American soil since the Revolution.

But possibly less well known is the fact that the president's grandfather and namesake had actually fought in the American Revolution.

This is that Abraham Lincoln's story.

Abraham Lincoln (13 May 1744 – May 1786) was a militia captain during the American Revolution, and a pioneer settler of Kentucky.

Captain Abraham Lincoln was a descendant of Samuel Lincoln (1622 – 1690), who was born in Hingham, Norfolk, England, and who, as a weaver's apprentice, emigrated to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637. Abraham's father John Lincoln (1716 – 1788) was born in Monmouth County in the province of New Jersey, and grew up in the Schuylkill river valley in the province of Pennsylvania.

Typical of his class, John Lincoln learned a trade, in his case weaving, to practice alongside the subsistence farming necessary on the colonial frontier. His father Mordecai died when John was barely 20 years-old. The Lincoln home farm on Heister's Creek, in what is now Exeter Township, Berks County, was left to John's half-brothers, the children of his father's second marriage.

In 1743, John Lincoln married Rebecca Flowers Morris (1720 – 1806), daughter of Enoch Flowers of Caernarvon Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Rebecca

was the widow of James Morris and the mother of a young son, Jonathan Morris.

Abraham Lincoln was born May 13, 1744 in what is now Berks County, Pennsylvania. Abraham was the first child born to John and Rebecca Lincoln, who had nine children in all: Abraham born 1744, twins Hannah and Lydia born 1748, Isaac born 1750, Jacob born 1751, John born 1755, Sarah born 1757, Thomas born 1761, and Rebecca born 1767.

Abraham Lincoln learned the tanner's trade and later took his brother John as his apprentice. A prominent tanner of Berks County in those days was James Boone (1709 – 1785), uncle of Daniel Boone. James Boone was a near neighbor to the Lincolns and his daughter Anne was married to John Lincoln's half-brother. This family connection may have influenced Abraham's choice of occupation.

John Lincoln moved to Virginia from Pennsylvania, probably influenced by his friend, Daniel Boone, who had moved to North Carolina with his father's family in 1748.

In 1768 John purchased land in the Shenandoah Valley. He settled his family on a 600-acre tract on Linville Creek in Augusta County (now Rockingham County). In 1773, John and Rebecca Lincoln divided their tract with their two eldest sons, Abraham and Isaac. Abraham built a house on his land, across Linville Creek from his parents' home.

In 1770 Abraham Lincoln married Bathsheba Herring (c. 1742 – 1836), a daughter of Alexander Herring and his wife Abigail Harrison of Linville Creek. Five children were born to Abraham and Bathsheba Lincoln:

Mordecai born circa 1771, Josiah born circa 1773, Mary born circa 1775, Thomas born 1778 (father of the future president), and Nancy born 1780.

During the American Revolutionary War, Abraham served as a captain of the Augusta County militia, and with the organization of Rockingham County in 1778, he served as a captain for that county. He was in command of sixty of his neighbors, ready to be called out by the governor of Virginia and marched where needed. Captain Lincoln's company served under General Lachlan McIntosh in the fall and winter of 1778, assisting in the construction of Fort McIntosh in Pennsylvania and Fort Laurens in Ohio.

In 1780, Abraham Lincoln sold his land on Linville Creek, and in 1781 he moved his family to Kentucky, then a district of the commonwealth of Virginia. The family settled in Jefferson County, about twenty miles east of the site of Louisville. The territory was still contested by Native Americans living across the Ohio River. For protection the settlers lived near frontier forts, called stations, to which they retreated when the alarm was given. Abraham Lincoln settled near Hughes's Station on Floyd's Fork and began clearing land, planting corn, and building a cabin.

In May of 1786, Abraham Lincoln was working in his field with his three sons when he was shot from the nearby forest and fell to the ground. The eldest boy, Mordecai, ran to the cabin where a loaded gun was kept, while the middle son, Josiah, ran to Hughes's Station for help. Thomas, the youngest, stood in shock by his father. From the cabin, Mordecai

observed a Native come out of the forest and stop by his father's body. The man reached for Thomas, either to kill him or to carry him off. Mordecai took careful aim and shot the man in the chest, killing him.

Tradition states that Captain Abraham Lincoln was buried by his cabin, which is now the site of Long Run Baptist Church and cemetery near Eastwood, Kentucky. A stone memorializing Captain Abraham Lincoln was placed in the cemetery in 1937.

Bathsheba Lincoln was left a widow with five underage children. She moved the family away from the Ohio River, to Washington County, Kentucky, where the country was more thickly settled and there was less danger of Indian attack.

When he was killed by Indians, Abraham Lincoln owned 12,000 acres of land. According to the laws of Kentucky governing property, nearly all of his estate went to his oldest son, Mordecai, who inherited two-thirds of his father's estate when he reached the age of twenty-one, with Bathsheba receiving one-third. The other children inherited nothing.

Life was hard, particularly for Thomas, the youngest, who got little schooling and was forced to go to work at a young age.

In later years Thomas Lincoln would recount the story of the day his father died to his son, Abraham Lincoln, the future sixteenth president of the United States of America. "The story of his death by the Indians," the president later wrote, "and of Uncle Mordecai, then fourteen years old, killing one of the Indians, is the legend more strongly than all others imprinted on my mind and memory."