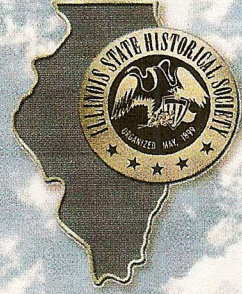


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ILLINOIS VETERANS
AND MILITARY HERITAGE ISSUE

For the record

Military and related activities of some of the Lincolns, including Thomas Lincoln

Editor's note: Historian Jim Siberell kindly shared his remarks (and notes) from the dedication of the Thomas Lincoln memorial plaque in Shiloh Cemetery near Charleston last month, which commemorates Abraham Lincoln's father's service in the Kentucky militia prior to and during the War of 1812. The event was sponsored by the Daughters of the War of 1812, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Lincoln Homestead State Historic Site.

By Jim Siberell

Thank you for attending today's program, and for the invitation to speak today, and for the introduction. My topic is Thomas Lincoln's military service – and that of some of his family and “near relatives”.

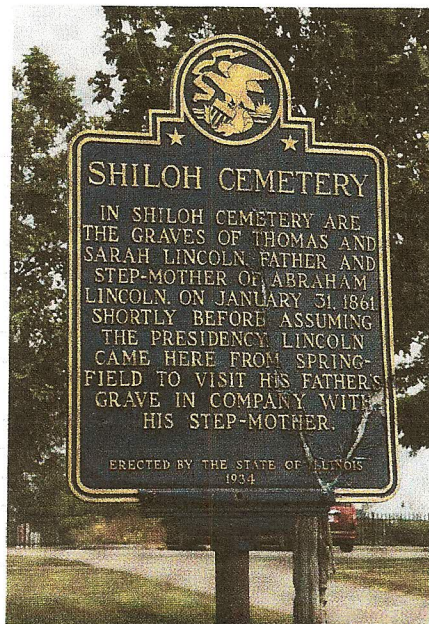
Thomas Lincoln was born on Jan. 5, 1778, in that portion of Augusta County, Virginia that became Rockingham County.¹ Thomas' father was an “Abraham Lincoln” who was a captain of a militia company in Augusta/Rockingham County, who we first meet on August 20, 1777, collecting tithes (or taxes), from those in his “district” in the county.² In late 1778, in what is generally unknown, this Captain Abraham Lincoln – Thomas' father – took part in a two month-long expedition commanded by General Lachlan McIntosh.³ That expedition included some 1200 men who went to central Ohio,⁴ to search for Indians there and put an end to Indian raids that had been troubling frontier people in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Few hostile Indians were found, no battles were fought, and everyone returned home – cold and hungry.

There is one “near relative” of the

Lincolns that we also need to mention. Hananiah Lincoln was a cousin of Thomas' father, and served in the Revolutionary War in the 12th Pennsylvania Regiment in George Washington's army for a short time, in the unsuccessful defense of Philadelphia in September 1777.⁵ He also reached the rank of Captain.⁶

Migration to Kentucky

We know that Captain Abraham Lincoln – Thomas' father – along with Bathsheba (Herring) Lincoln – Thomas' mother – as early as 1780 began to set their sights on migrating to Kentucky, with their purchase of Kentucky “land warrants” at that time.⁷ The move of the family from Virginia to Kentucky appears to have occurred in about 1782.⁸ The family at that time consisted of Captain Abraham and his wife Bathsheba, Thomas (then about 4 years old), and his brothers Mordecai and Josiah (about 11 and 9 years old), and sisters Mary and Nancy



Mary Barringer, President, Daughters of the War of 1812, was instrumental in getting the marker for Thomas Lincoln's military service placed in Shiloh Cemetery.

Photos by Joey Phoenix. All rights reserved.

(about 7 and 2 years old). Hananiah Lincoln is also thought to have accompanied the Lincoln family on the trip.⁹

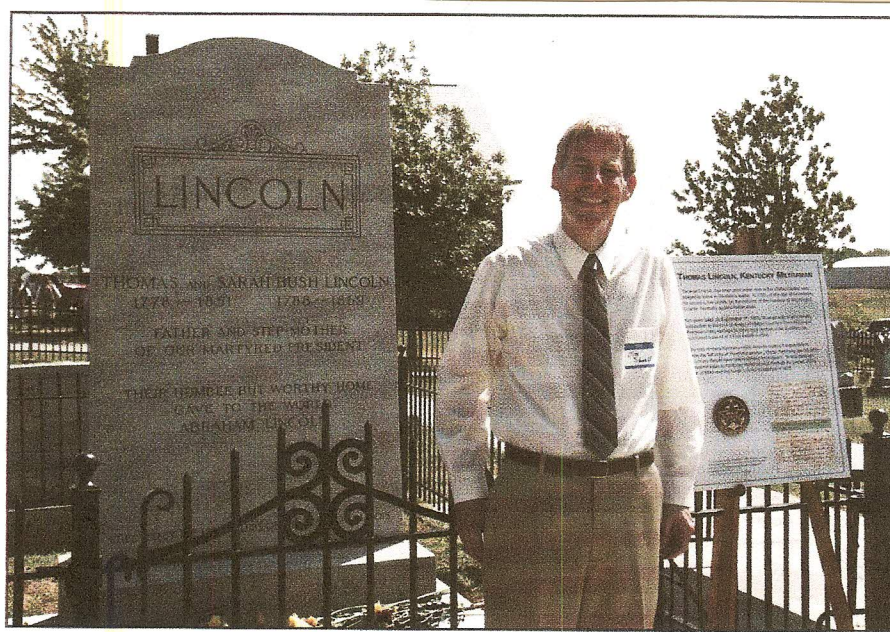
The Lincolns soon found their way to the Louisville area of western Kentucky. As is well known, one day in May 1786 Captain Abraham Lincoln was killed by an Indian while tending his farm, and the youngster Mordecai is said to have shot the Indian, who was also trying to kidnap 8-year-old Thomas.¹⁰

In an evidently difficult situation for everyone, the widow Bathsheba and her family were assisted by the timely help of Hananiah Lincoln, who made land available to the Lincolns a few dozen miles to the east. That land was on Beech Fork in what later became a part of Washington County, in west-central Kentucky.¹¹ These had as their neighbors the family of Richard Berry – which explains how it was that in not too many years Thomas Lincoln would come to meet and marry a houseguest of the Berrys, Nancy Hanks.

Militia service in Washington County, Ky.

So now, in the late 1780s, we find the Lincolns in Washington County.

The ISHS historical marker for Shiloh Cemetery was placed in 1934. Recently repainted, it still shows signs of fatigue.



Historian and author Jim Siberell at the Thomas Lincoln grave near Charleston.

William Brumfield, and moved to the west to Hardin County, and the Mill Creek region there, northwest of Elizabethtown.¹⁹ Bathsheba Lincoln appears to have gone to live with the newly married couple.²⁰

Likewise, Thomas Lincoln – in his early 20s and still a single man – also moved to Hardin County, and to the Mill Creek area. In December 1802, Thomas purchased 238 acres of land for 100 pounds money from one “John F. Stator”, part of a larger tract that Stator was selling.²¹ In short order, we begin to see Thomas quickly entering into a variety of public duties in Hardin County – on a jury, as a road “patroller”, and guarding prisoners being taken to the county jail.²²

Yet the location in Hardin County where Thomas purchased land becomes a key matter in our overall narrative, and which has a large effect on Thomas’ continued military service. Thomas’ farm was located some 10-12 miles northwest of Elizabethtown,²³ so it would have been in the militia company in whose boundaries his farm was enclosed that Thomas was enrolled.²⁴ Thomas would have participated in the periodic “musters” and drills carried out by this militia company.

Thomas Lincoln commissioned an “Ensign”

In late summer or early fall of 1805, Thomas Lincoln was nominated to be an Ensign in that militia company – by “a majority of the field officers and captains” of all of Hardin County. On Sept. 17, 1805, Thomas’ commission was issued to him²⁵ – a written certificate signed by Kentucky’s governor, Christopher Greenup.

“*Thomas Lincoln, Esquire*” was now a militia officer. His duties included helping drill the men in the company (4 times a year at company musters, and once each year at battalion and regimental, or county-wide, musters²⁶). In addition, he would have helped in his company’s organization²⁷ and periodically – when called upon – attended court martials or courts that assessed fines when militia rules weren’t followed.²⁸

At all musters and parades, as well as in actual service should that occur, Thomas was to wear an officer’s uniform,²⁹ consisting of “a coat of blue, lapels of [red], buff under clothes, boots,

Kentucky making a life of their own – though soon without Hananiah’s presence. And it is here that we begin to see the Lincoln young men in military service. In August 1792 – when Washington County was formed – Mordecai Lincoln was nominated and commissioned as an Ensign in one of the original eight militia companies in the county.¹² Two years later, in May 1794, Mordecai was detailed as the only officer of a detachment that was sent to end Indian trouble on the southern border of the county, along the Rolling Fork River.¹³ He evidently did a commendable job as shortly after returning, he was nominated and commissioned to be a Captain.¹⁴ In fact, Mordecai appears to have achieved the highest rank of any of the Lincoln brothers, eventually being promoted to Major.¹⁵

Thomas’ second oldest brother, Josiah Lincoln, also had militia service – all males 18 to 45 were required to serve in the militia¹⁶ – but among all the three brothers Josiah may have been the one having seen the most perilous Indian fighting. In late summer 1794, as a private, Josiah with fellow Washington County militiamen and others – some 1500 in all from Kentucky – joined in a campaign under General Anthony Wayne that ended up in northwest Ohio and the successful “Battle of Fallen Timbers”¹⁷ that most dramatically (for the time

being) put an end to Indian warfare from the north. The subsequent “Treaty of Greenville” with the Indians also opened up southern Ohio land to settlement.

And what about Thomas Lincoln in Washington County? What we know is that Thomas in the summer of 1795 served as a private in two one-month long assignments,¹⁸ like his brother Mordecai earlier, to “guard the frontier” of Washington County – likely also along the Rolling Fork River to the south. The “details” were first of six men and then with twelve men. Precisely who these Indians were that caused these new troubles may not have been clear – but seem to have been southern Indians (rather than those from the north that were recently defeated, and who by the “Greenville” treaty promised to make no further trouble). In any event, Thomas – safe and sound – returned home on Aug. 8, 1795, after his two tours of duty, and it was for those tours of duty – part of the collection of Indian wars of the late 1700s and early 1800s – that we recognize Thomas Lincoln today with this marker.

Lincolns move to Hardin County, Ky.

In the 1801 time period, several of the Lincolns married and members of the family – for the first time – began to leave Washington County. Thomas Lincoln’s youngest sister, Nancy, married



Sons of the War of 1812 fire a volley in honor of Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham Lincoln.

spurs, cocked hat, cockade, and small sword or hanger.³⁰ It is in that context that we can best understand Thomas' purchase of goods from the Bleakley and Montgomery store in Elizabethtown in May 1806 – just weeks before his marriage to Nancy Hanks.³¹ The variety of cloth and buttons he purchased were probably for an Ensign's coat – the red cloth being used for making the coat's "facing" (or lapels)³² – instead of for use in Nancy's wedding dress, as most Lincoln biographies say.

And from the start, uniform regulations seemed to go particularly out of their way to emphasize that a "subaltern" (meaning a Lieutenant or an Ensign) should be properly uniformed. He would be subject to a fine, absent being able to provide a good excuse for not being in uniform³³ – which included having a sword. In January 1807, Thomas obtained a sword at Thomas McIntire's estate sale in Elizabethtown for \$3³⁴ – evidence perhaps that too long a time had passed and Thomas was beginning to run out of "good excuses".

In the 1806 Kentucky militia law, at least one item was included that may

have given Thomas some unease as to his militia service – with the mention that an officer once commissioned was to retain his commission for at least three years, or unless he left the "district" in which his command operated.³⁵ Was there some sense in which his "commission" might expire in 3 years – or by 1808? As it turned out, Thomas probably had no basis for concern that he might soon be "out of commission". Yet, ironically, events in 1808 appear to have indeed had an impact on Thomas' future militia service.

Thomas Lincoln's continued militia service

We know that through early 1808, Thomas and his wife Nancy and their small family – with infant daughter Sarah – were living in Elizabethtown.³⁶ That year – in 1808 – the Lincolns determined to move fifteen miles to the south, to the South Fork of Nolin Creek, where Thomas would purchase land from fellow militia officer, Isaac Bush.³⁷ Why Thomas did so at first seems a puzzle. Why move south a farther distance, to land he did not own, when he still

owned 238 acres of land a shorter distance to the north (in the Mill Creek area)? Though at first a puzzle, the answer is understandable. The reason for the move is that it was in the South Fork of Nolin Creek area where Thomas and Elizabeth (Hanks) Sparrow lived.³⁸ The move would enable Nancy to live close by these relatives of hers in the nearby area. Nancy and the Sparrows had known each other from their days together in Mercer County, Ky. to the east.³⁹ There, Elizabeth Hanks had married Thomas Sparrow, and Nancy's mother, Lucy Hanks, had married Henry Sparrow.⁴⁰ Now, with the opportunity to renew that friendship, a move near the Sparrows made perfect sense. While making sense, though, the move was not without problems, especially as in late 1808 Nancy was within a few months of giving birth to their second child – the future President, Abraham Lincoln.

Upon reaching their South Fork Farm, Thomas was no doubt within the boundaries of a different militia company than he was in the north, above Elizabethtown. Though he likely soon found that his Ensign commission was

still active (he was not “out of commission”), he probably was out of his Ensign’s “office” (his new company probably already had an Ensign) – meaning that he would have to wait until an office became available in his new company before resuming his Ensign’s duties. Whether this actually occurred – whether he was able at some point to regain his office – has not been learned. The records that list commissions don’t show this⁴¹ and probably wouldn’t in any event – as the records list only *new nominations* for commissions. That is, Thomas could well have moved into a vacant “Ensign” office in the company, and would not have needed to be “recommissioned”.

In about 1811, the Lincolns moved yet again, the short distance to the northeast, to the Knob Creek area,⁴² and once again Thomas may have found himself waiting for an “Ensign” vacancy to occur in his militia company, perhaps yet another new company. Other matters, though, would soon take over “center stage”.

In early 1812, all of Kentucky was stirred by the approaching war with Great Britain. In May 1812, Kentucky officials organized a fraction of the state’s militia – perhaps about one out of every seven of all the militiamen across the state – into “detached” units, to be ready to serve, in the event that war broke out.⁴³ Some by volunteering and others by draft came forward to serve in these “detached” units.⁴⁴ From Hardin County, and the 3 adjoining counties, a total of 300 men came forward⁴⁵ – though possibly not Thomas Lincoln, on the basis of what records we have.⁴⁶ Here, in 1812, family concerns may have been particularly pressing – especially if it was at this time (in 1812) that occurred the birth and death of the Lincolns’ son, Thomas, Jr. These family concerns would have made service difficult – particularly since that first call for troops by Kentucky’s governor was for terms of service up to six months long.⁴⁷

Yet of interest, Kentucky’s governor in late 1812 also made an additional call for troops – this one for a shorter (30-day) term,⁴⁸ and this call may have held more interest for Thomas, had family issues lessened by late 1812. That second call for a shorter term of service occurred after war was declared and was answered by thousands of Kentuckians, as patriotic fever swept the State.

The destination of the 300 men (in “6-month” service) and thousands (in “30-day” service) was to Louisville and then to the west, through southern Indiana, and ironically, to a location not many miles from where we meet today, in central Illinois.⁴⁹ Illinois’ Territorial Governor had requested assistance to fight Indians thought to be in the region around Peoria.⁵⁰ In the end, though, Kentucky’s militia barely made it into southeastern Illinois, saw few Indians, and were turned back by a prairie fire set by the Indians and by an early winter snow and ice-storm.⁵¹

In 1813, the crucial year for the war against British and Indians in the West, events took on an emergency tone. Eventually, a “general rendezvous” was called of Kentucky volunteers for August 31, 1813⁵² – exactly 200 years ago today – to assemble volunteers only (no draftees). These would go into northern Ohio, to fight a final – and it turned out a successful – “Battle of Thames River” in southern Canada. This time, though, the notice given for volunteers was short – those rendezvousing needed to do so in 30 days at a location in northern Kentucky just below Cincinnati, before marching north into Ohio and beyond. Actually, both geography as well as time appear to have been the main obstacles to Thomas having served in 1813. In examining the records, only five companies of volunteers were raised from the entire western half of Kentucky – that included Hardin County – as compared to over fifty companies from the eastern half of the state, which was closer to the place of rendezvous.⁵³

In 1814, while the war was largely over in the West, events were just beginning to stir in the East – parts of the City of Washington were burned by the British that year – and in the South, Andrew Jackson was making preparations which would lead to the “Battle of New Orleans” in January 1815. Again, numbers of Kentucky militia were called out – some 2500 in total⁵⁴ – which included some from Hardin County.⁵⁵ But tours of service were again to be upwards of six months,⁵⁶ which would again have made the possibility of service unlikely for Thomas Lincoln.

In 1814 and through 1816, we continue to find the Lincoln family in the Knob Creek area, Thomas serving as a “surveyor” (care-taker) of a road near his

home,⁵⁷ widening his involvement with his local church,⁵⁸ taking care of his family, and getting his stubborn crops to grow. In addition, Thomas was finding himself increasingly involved in fending off land title suits – first with his former South Fork Farm and most recently with his present Knob Creek farm.⁵⁹ In 1814 as well, he finally sold the 238-acre farm in the Mill Creek area to the north,⁶⁰ that he had kept for nearly a dozen years.

Likewise, militia service was continuing to require his time. Militia musters were still required to be attended to, by Kentucky law, and we can only hope that Thomas finally was able to resume his Ensign duties in the county.

Overall, when the Lincoln family left Kentucky in late 1816, Thomas could look back on over twenty years of militia service – service that was similar in many respects to that of family members and relatives before him – and of having served well in his “Ensign” duties for however long he held that office. And lastly, he could look back a longer time, to how as a 17-year old in 1795, he had served two month-long tours of guard duty “on the frontiers” of Washington County, Kentucky – for which we recognize him today.

Thank you again. ☺

Jim Siberell is a retired engineer, living in Portsmouth, Ohio. He has made frequent trips during the past ten years to central Illinois, serving as a volunteer and historian/researcher at the Abraham Lincoln “Long Nine” Museum in Athens, Ill. – one of the “Looking for Lincoln” sites in the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. In 2006 he co-authored with John Eden, Director of the Abraham Lincoln “Long Nine” Museum, the book, Looking at Abraham Lincoln’s Land – the Historic Sangamon Region of Central Illinois (self-published). His other books include Coming to Illinois: Abraham Lincoln and the “Long Nine of Old Sangamon” in 2008, and The “Mitchells” and “Rodgers” of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee – Abraham Lincoln’s “lost ancestors” in 2010 (both also self-published). Thomas Lincoln’s “Ensign” commission was uncovered at the Kentucky State Archives in Frankfort, Ky. during the course of research for Coming to Illinois: Abraham Lincoln and the “Long Nine of Old Sangamon”. ☺