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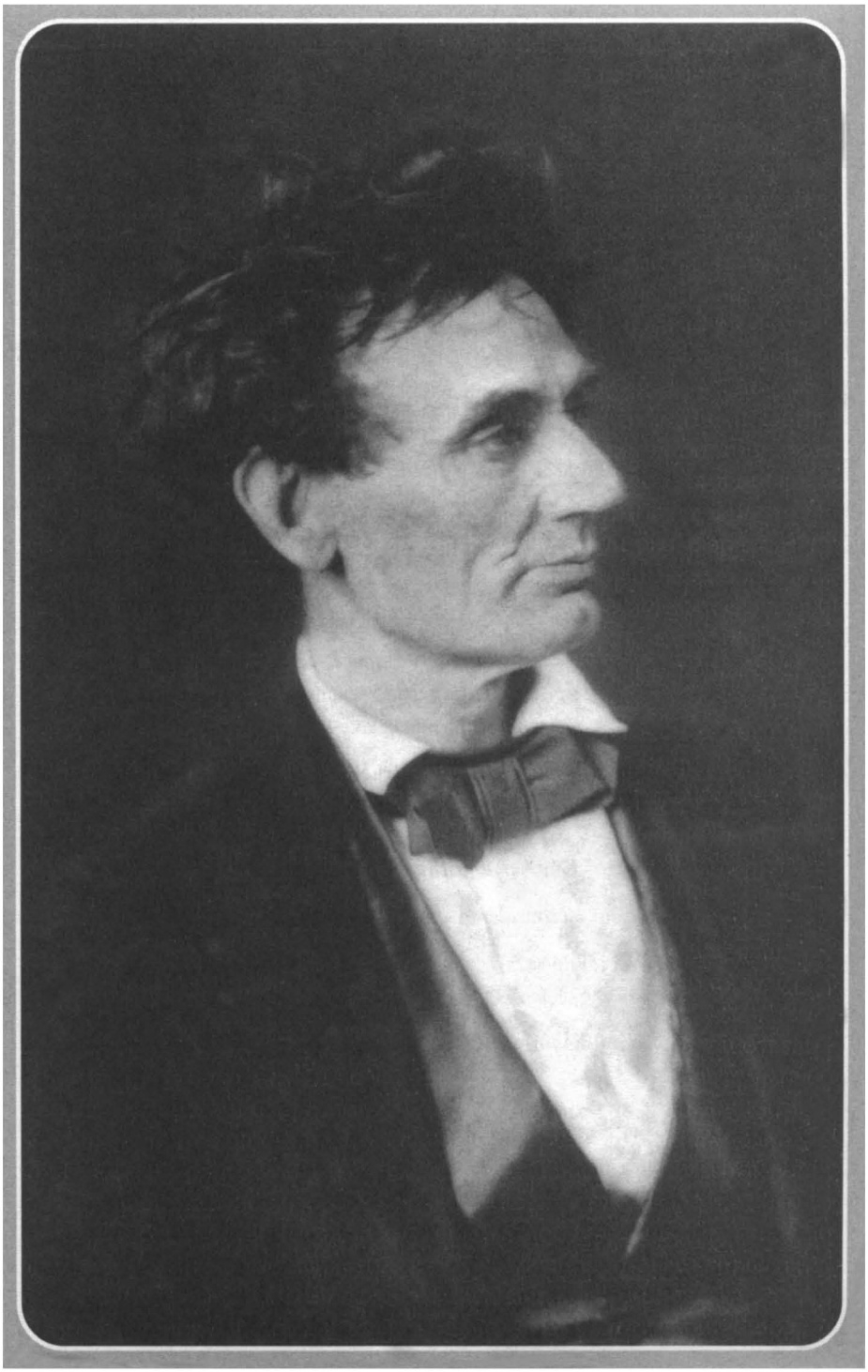

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LINCOLN

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FOR AÏDA AND BRUCE,

WHO HAVE HAD TO LIVE WITH LINCOLN

FOR MOST OF THEIR LIVES

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
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Frontispiece: Lincoln considered this photograph, made by Alexander Hesler of Chicago in February 1857, "a very true one," but Mary Lincoln and others did not like it. "My impression," Lincoln said, "is that their objection arises from the disordered condition of the hair." (Lloyd Ostendorf Collection)

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I CLAIM NOT TO HAVE CONTROLLED EVENTS,

BUT CONFESS PLAINLY THAT EVENTS

HAVE CONTROLLED ME.

Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges,

April 4, 1864

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Contents

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MAPS

Preface

The only time I ever met President John F. Kennedy, in February 1962, he was unhappy with historians. A group of scholars had been in the Oval Office hoping to enlist him in a poll that ranked American presidents. I was not one of those visitors, but the next day when I gave a talk in the White House about Abraham Lincoln, the subject was much on his mind. He voiced his deep dissatisfaction with the glib way the historians had rated some of his predecessors as "Below Average" and marked a few as "Failures." Thinking, no doubt, of how his own administration would look in the backward glance of history, he resented the whole process. With real feeling he said, "No one has a right to grade a President—not even poor James Buchanan—who has not sat in his chair, examined the mail and information that came across his desk, and learned why he made his decisions."

This book was conceived in the spirit of President Kennedy's observations. In tracing the life of Abraham Lincoln, I have asked at every stage of his career what he knew when he had to take critical actions, how he evaluated the evidence before him, and why he reached his decisions. It is, then, a biography written from Lincoln's point of view, using the information and ideas that were available to him. It seeks to explain rather than to judge.

My biography is based largely on Lincoln's own words, whether in his letters and messages or in conversations recorded by reliable witnesses. I have tried as far as possible to write from the original sources—that is, from firsthand contemporary accounts by people who saw and talked with the President. Of course, I have consulted the voluminous secondary literature, but I have used it chiefly for letters and documents that I could not find elsewhere. My approach was made possible by the availability of the Abra-

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ham Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress (now fortunately on microfilm). After use by Lincoln's authorized biographers, John G. Nicolay and John Hay, in 1890, these papers were sealed until 1947 and therefore could not be consulted for the major biographies by Albert J. Beveridge, William E. Barton, Carl Sandburg, and J. G. Randall.*

The results of my inquiries can most readily be defined in negative terms. This book is not a general history of the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century. I have stuck close to Lincoln, who was only indirectly connected with the economic and social transformations of the period. It is not even a history of the Civil War. There is, for example, almost nothing in the following pages about the internal affairs of the Confederacy, because these were matters that Lincoln could not know about. It is not a military history; I have not described campaigns and battles that Lincoln did not witness. I have not offered a broad philosophical discussion of the origins of the Civil War and I have not addressed the question of whether it was the first modern war. These are important subjects, but they did not present themselves to Abraham Lincoln in any practical way. I have not asked whether Lincoln freed the slaves or the slaves freed themselves, because Lincoln never considered these roads to emancipation as mutually exclusive. Certainly he knew that thousands of slaves, in individual heroic acts of rebellion, were leaving their masters to seek freedom behind the Union lines, but he also knew that ending the institution of slavery required official action on the part of the United States government.

In focusing closely on Lincoln himself—on what he knew, when he knew it, and why he made his decisions—I have, I think, produced a portrait rather different from that in other biographies. It is perhaps a bit more grainy than most, with more attention to his unquenchable ambition, to his brain-numbing labor in his law practice, to his tempestuous married life, and to his repeated defeats. It suggests how often chance, or accident, played a determining role in shaping his life. And it emphasizes his enormous capacity for growth, which enabled one of the least experienced and most poorly prepared men ever elected to high office to become the greatest American President.

More important, this biography highlights a basic trait of character evident throughout Lincoln's life: the essential passivity of his nature. Lincoln himself recognized it in a letter he wrote on April 4, 1864, to Albert G. Hodges, a fellow Kentuckian, who asked him to explain why he had shifted from his inaugural pledge not to interfere with slavery to a policy of emancipation. After relating how circumstances had obliged him to change his mind—

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* This was true of the first two volumes of Randall's *Lincoln the President,* published in 1945. Professor Randall was able to make some use of the Lincoln Papers in the third volume of that work, subtitled *Midstream,* published in 1952. Richard N. Current drew heavily on the Lincoln Papers in completing the final volume, *Last Full Measure,* which appeared in 1955. But the basic structure and themes of Randall's magisterial work were selected before the Lincoln Papers became available.

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how emancipation and the use of African-American soldiers had become military necessities—the President concluded: "In telling this tale I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

From his earliest days Lincoln had a sense that his destiny was controlled by some larger force, some Higher Power. Turning away from orthodox Christianity because of the emotional excesses of frontier evangelicalism, he found it easier as a young man to accept what was called the Doctrine of Necessity, which he defined as the belief "that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control." Later he frequently quoted to his partner, William H. Herndon, the lines from *Hamlet:*

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

From Lincoln's fatalism derived some of his most lovable traits: his compassion, his tolerance, his willingness to overlook mistakes. That belief did not, of course, lead him to lethargy or dissipation. Like thousands of Calvinists who believed in predestination, he worked indefatigably for a better world—for himself, for his family, and for his nation. But it helped to buffer the many reverses that he experienced and enabled him to continue a strenuous life of aspiration.

It also made for a pragmatic approach to problems, a recognition that if one solution was fated not to work another could be tried. "My policy is to have no policy" became a kind of motto for Lincoln—a motto that infuriated the sober, doctrinaire people around him who were inclined to think that the President had no principles either. He might have offended his critics less if he had more often used the analogy he gave James G. Blaine when explaining his course on Reconstruction: "The pilots on our Western rivers steer from *point to point* as they call it—setting the course of the boat no farther than they can see; and that is all I propose to myself in this great problem."

Both statements suggest Lincoln's reluctance to take the initiative and make bold plans; he preferred to respond to the actions of others. They also show why Lincoln in his own distinctively American way had the quality John Keats defined as forming "a Man of Achievement," that quality "which Shakespeare possessed so enormously . . . *Negative Capability,* that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

Much of the research for this biography was made possible through a generous grant from the Division of Research Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities (Grant No. RO-2128-89). I am particularly indebted

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to Charles Ambler and George R. Lucas, Jr., in that division for their assistance.

I am also grateful to Dean Henry Rosovsky, Dean Michael Spence, and Dean Phyllis Keller, who were instrumental in arranging leaves of absence from my teaching duties at Harvard University.

Throughout the project I was fortunate to have the assistance of Laura Nakatsuka, who not merely performed expert secretarial services but proved a highly efficient research sleuth, uncovering Lincoln items in a dozen or more manuscript collections.

Several gifted Harvard undergraduate and graduate students have performed invaluable work as research assistants who scoured the newspapers and periodicals for material on Lincoln, and I am indebted to them all: Richard Bennett, Steven Chen, Martin Fitzpatrick, Elaine Goldenberg, Sally Hadden, Zachary Karabell, Timothy McCarthy, Matthew Pinsker, Gerald Prokopowicz, and Ronald Ryan.

The tedious work of verifying facts and checking quotations in my manuscript fell to Thomas J. Brown, Fred Dalzell, and Michael Vorenberg, and I thank all three for helping me to eliminate errors of fact and interpretation. Mr. Vorenberg, who is preparing the authoritative history of the Thirteenth Amendment, offered incisive criticisms that have greatly influenced my treatment of colonization and emancipation. On legal and constitutional issues I have profited much from Dr. Brown's unfailingly helpful suggestions.

To the blessed librarians everywhere my obligation is great. As always, Nathaniel Bunker, the Charles Warren Bibliographer at Harvard University, has been responsive to my needs for nineteenth-century American newspapers and manuscripts on microfilm. Thomas F. Schwartz, state historian of Illinois, graciously made available the immense resources of the Henry Horner Collection at the Illinois State Historical Library and patiently answered my frequent questions. Cheryl Schnirring did the same for the manuscript collections in that same great library, and Cheryl Pence assisted in my search for nineteenth-century Illinois newspapers. John Hoffmann was my gracious host at the Illinois Historical Survey in Urbana. At the Chicago Historical Society, Theresa A. McGill provided invaluable assistance, and Sherry Byrne of the University of Chicago Library helped me locate newspaper files. Dallas R. Lindgren served as my guide to the rich collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. At the Huntington Library, John H. Rhodehamel, Lita Garcia, and Karen E. Kearns were helpful in securing microfilm of important manuscript collections. Daniel Weinberg and Thomas Trescott of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in Chicago have energetically assisted me in dozens of bibliographical searches.

At the Lincoln Legal Papers, perhaps the most important archival investigation now under way in the United States, I was welcomed by the director, Cullom Davis, and by the assistant editor, William Beard, and was given full access to the enormous treasure-house of legal documents that they have built up.

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Norman D. Hellmers, superintendent of the Lincoln National Home Site, guided me through the Lincoln home in Springfield and generously shared with me his enormously detailed knowledge of the history of the Lincoln family.

I have had the inestimable good fortune of receiving personally conducted tours of the White House, including the upstairs living quarters, from President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy and from President and Mrs. George Bush.

Numerous scholars and collectors have given me the benefit of their special information and insights, and I am especially grateful to Gabor S. Boritt, Michael A. Burlingame, Joan Cashin, Glen L. Carle, Stanley H. Cath, Eric T. Freyfogle, the late Arnold Gates, Robert Giroux, William F. Hanna, Harold Holzer, Ari A. Hoogenboom, Harold M. Hyman, Richard R. John, Jane Langton, Dick Levinson, John Niven, Matthew Pinsker, H. Douglas Price, Steven K. Rogstad, Scott Sandage, Rex Scouten, Louise Taper, Paul Verduin, and J. Harvey Young.

Through the generosity of Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, and Peter W. Kunhardt, I have been permitted to borrow extensively from the incomparable Meserve-Kunhardt Collection of photographs. Gerald J. Prokopowicz and Carolyn Texley have been equally gracious in sharing the rich photographic resources of the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Rex W. Scouten, the curator of the White House, has made the Lincoln materials in that great collection available to me. Robert W. Remini helped me gain access to the Chicago Historical Society, where Diane Ryan made the collection of prints and photographs available. To Professor and Mrs. Gabor S. Boritt of Gettysburg College and to Mr. Jack Smith of South Bend, Indiana, I am indebted for permission to reproduce rare drawings and prints from their collections.

My interpretation of Lincoln's political philosophy and religious views has been much influenced by the ideas of John Rawls, who collaborated with me in teaching the first seminar ever offered on Abraham Lincoln at Harvard University. Thanks to an invitation from John C. Perry and the other trustees of the Bemis Fund, I was encouraged to explore some of these ideas before my fellow townsmen in Lincoln, Massachusetts, in a public lecture titled "Learning to Be President." I had a further occasion to test them when I delivered the Samuel Paley Lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where Yehoshua Arieli, Menahem Blondheim, and Shlomo Slonim were my gracious hosts. In January 1990, I was afforded the opportunity of presenting a preliminary view of the Lincoln family in the White House when President George Bush invited me to give the inaugural lecture in his Presidential Lecture Series on the presidency.

I have learned most of all from the scholars who took time from their own important researches to read and criticize drafts of my chapters. Daniel Aaron of Harvard University went through every page of the manuscript, pointing out repetition and infelicitous language. My sections on Lincoln's

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assassination have been greatly strengthened by the expert review that Terry Alford of Northern Virginia Community College gave them. Cullom Davis and William Beard of the Lincoln Legal Papers closely examined my chapters that deal with Lincoln's legal practice, and they have saved me countless errors. Aida Donald, editor-in-chief of the Harvard University Press, gave the manuscript the benefit of her expert judgment of style and substance. Robert W. Johannsen of the University of Illinois reviewed the entire manuscript, offering especially valuable advice on Stephen A. Douglas and the Illinois Democratic party. A close reading by Mark E. Neely of St. Louis University caught dozens of errors, great and small, and provided much needed perspective on Lincoln's handling of civil liberties. Wayne C. Temple, deputy director of the Illinois State Archives, gave a detailed criticism of the entire manuscript and shared with me his incomparable expertise on Lincoln's early career.

To my editor, Alice E. Mayhew, and the other members of the editorial team at Simon & Schuster, including Sarah Baker, Eric Steel, and Roger Labrie, who have seen the book through the press, I am greatly indebted for encouragement and support. I also want to thank Victoria Meyer, who was in charge of publicity, and Frank and Eve Metz, at Simon & Schuster. Fred Wiemer did a superb job of copyediting my difficult manuscript. Saving me countless errors, Kathryn Blatt did the heroic work of proofreading the entire book.

With so much assistance I should have written a perfect book, but, of course, I haven't. I alone am responsible for all errors and misinterpretations.

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CHAPTER ONE

Annals of the Poor

Abraham Lincoln was not interested in his ancestry. In his mind he was a self-made man, who had no need to care about his family tree. In 1859, when friends asked him for autobiographical information to help promote his chances for a presidential nomination, he offered only the barest outline of his family history: "My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say." The next year, when John Locke Scripps of the *Chicago Tribune* proposed to write his campaign biography, Lincoln told him: "Why Scripps, . . . it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy,

> The short and simple annals of the poor.

That's my life, and that's all you or any one else can make of it."

I

Lincoln knew almost nothing about his mother's family, the Hankses, who moved from Virginia to Kentucky about 1780. They were a prolific tribe, for the most part illiterate but respectable farmers of modest means. Their family tree is hard to trace because for generation after generation they tended to name all the males James or John, and the females Polly, Lucy, or Nancy. Abraham Lincoln's mother was one of at least eight Nancy Hankses born during the 1780s. Abraham Lincoln believed that his mother was illegit-

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imate. It was a subject that he rarely discussed, but in the early 1850s, while driving his one-horse buggy from Springfield over to Petersburg, Illinois, he found himself talking about it. He and his law partner, William H. Herndon, were about to try a case in Menard County Court that involved a question of hereditary traits, and Lincoln observed that illegitimate children were "oftentimes sturdier and brighter than those born in lawful wedlock." To prove his point he mentioned his mother, who he said was "the illegitimate daughter of Lucy Hanks and a well-bred Virginia farmer or planter." From "this broad-minded, unknown Virginian" Lincoln believed he inherited the traits that distinguished him from the other members of his family: ambition, mental alertness, and the power of analysis.

Lincoln may well have been correct in reporting that his mother was born out of wedlock. A grand jury in Mercer County, Kentucky, presented a charge of fornication against his grandmother Lucy (or "Lucey," as it is spelled in the old records), and there were several recorded instances of bastardy among Hanks women of her generation. Since no wedding certificate was ever found for Lucy, there was room for endless speculation about Lincoln's maternal grandsire.

But Lincoln's remarks—if Herndon accurately reported them after a lapse of many years—were not based on any research into his Hanks ancestry. Instead they reflected his sense that he was different from the people with whom he grew up. Like other gifted young men, he wondered how he could be the offspring of his ordinary and limited parents. Some in Lincoln's generation fancied themselves the sons of the dauphin, who allegedly fled to America during the French Revolution. Lincoln imagined a noble Virginia ancestor.

Of his Lincoln ancestors he knew only a little more than he did about the Hankses. From his father he learned that his grandfather Abraham, for whom he was named, had moved from Virginia to Kentucky in the early 1780s. There was a vague family tradition that earlier Lincolns had lived in Pennsylvania, where they had been Quakers, but, as he recorded, the family had long since "fallen away from the peculiar habits of that people." Apart from that, William Dean Howells reported in his 1860 campaign biography, there was only "incertitude, and absolute darkness" about Abraham Lincoln's forebears.

Further research would have showed that the Lincolns did come from Virginia and that an earlier generation had indeed belonged to the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania. In turn, these could be traced to the original Samuel Lincoln, who emigrated from the County of Norfolk, England, and settled in Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1637. A weaver in England, Samuel became a prosperous trader and businessman in America, where he was a pillar of the church and begat eleven children who bore names like Daniel, Thomas, Mordecai, and Sarah, which became traditional in the family. Samuel's grandson Mordecai (1686–1736) was perhaps the most successful member of the family. An ironmaster and wealthy landowner in Pennsylva-

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nia, he was a member of the eighteenth-century economic and social elite; he married Hannah Slater, who was at once the daughter, the niece, and the granddaughter of members of the New Jersey assembly and the niece of the acting royal governor of that colony. It was their son, John Lincoln (1716–1788), who moved to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where he established himself on a large farm in fertile Rockingham County. John was so successful that he could afford to give his son, Abraham Lincoln's grandfather, 210 acres of the best soil in Virginia. In sum, Abraham Lincoln, instead of being the unique blossom on an otherwise barren family tree, belonged to the seventh American generation of a family with competent means, a reputation for integrity, and a modest record of public service.

II

A closer study of the historical records would also have given Abraham Lincoln a different, and probably a kindlier, view of his father, Thomas. It was Thomas's father, the senior Abraham Lincoln, who sold his farm in Virginia and led his wife and five children over the mountains to seek their fortune. They had heard much of the rich lands in Kentucky from their distant relative, Daniel Boone, and they found in that vast, largely unsettled territory, which was still part of the Commonwealth of Virginia, all the opportunities Boone had promised. Within a few years the Lincolns owned at least 5,544 acres of land in the richest sections of Kentucky.

But the wilderness was dangerous. In 1786, while Abraham Lincoln and his three boys, Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas, were planting a cornfield on their new property, Indians attacked them. Abraham was killed instantly. Mordecai, at fifteen the oldest son, sent Josiah running to the settlement half a mile away for help while he raced to a nearby cabin. Peering out of a crack between logs, he saw an Indian sneaking out of the forest toward his eight-year-old brother, Thomas, who was still sitting in the field beside their father's body. Mordecai picked up a rifle, aimed at a silver pendant on the Indian's chest, and killed him before he could reach the boy. This story in later years Thomas Lincoln repeated over and over again, so that it became, as Abraham said, "the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory."

Both Thomas Lincoln and his son seem to have overlooked the economic consequences of the tragedy. According to Virginia law, which prevailed in the Kentucky region, the ancient rule of primogeniture was still in effect, and Mordecai Lincoln, the oldest son, inherited his father's entire estate when he came of age. In due course he became a respected citizen of Washington County, Kentucky, a man of considerable property, who was interested in breeding horses. The only Lincoln relative whom Abraham Lincoln ever knew, Mordecai was a man of considerable wit and great natural gifts, and his nephew once remarked that "Uncle Mord had run off with all the talents of the family." He had also, in effect, run off with all the

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money. Left without a patrimony, the other two Lincoln boys had to fend for themselves.

Thomas, the youngest, had a difficult time. The tragedy abruptly ended his prospects of being an heir of a well-to-do Kentucky planter; he had to earn his board and keep. Abraham Lincoln never fully understood how hard his father had to struggle during his early years. It required an immense effort for Thomas, who earned three shillings a day for manual labor or made a little more when he did carpentry or cabinetmaking, to accumulate enough money to buy his first farm, a 238-acre tract on Mill Creek, in Hardin County, Kentucky. He became a familiar figure in Elizabethtown and Hogdenville, a stocky, well-built man of no more than average height, with a shock of straight black hair and an unusually large nose. "He was an uneducated man, a plain unpretending plodding man," a neighbor remembered; one who "attended to his work, peaceable—quiet and good natured." "Honest" was the adjective most frequently used to describe Thomas Lincoln, and he was respected in his community, where he served in the militia and was called for jury duty. Never wealthy, Thomas owned a respectable amount of property, by 1814 ranking fifteenth (out of ninety-eight listed) in the county.

In 1806 he married Nancy Hanks, and they probably lived at Mill Creek, about five miles north of Elizabethtown, where their first child, Sarah, was born. By 1809, Thomas Lincoln had bought another farm, this time one of three hundred acres, on the south fork of Nolin Creek (not far from Hogdenville). It was called the Sinking Spring Farm, because it had a magnificent spring that bubbled from the bottom of a deep cave. Here, on a little knoll near the spring, he built a one-room log cabin, measuring sixteen by eighteen feet. The sturdy building, which had only a dirt floor and no glass window, was as large as about 90 percent of the pioneer cabins of the region.

Here Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809. He had no recollection of the place of his birth, because his parents moved before he was two years old. The land on the Sinking Spring Farm proved very poor, "a barren waste, so to speak," as one contemporary described it, "save some little patches on the creek bottoms," and Thomas quickly learned that it would not support his family. He bought a smaller but more fertile farm, some ten miles to the northeast, on Knob Creek.

Here, once again, the family lived, as did most of their neighbors, in a one-room log cabin, but the setting was beautiful. The creek, which ran through the property, was so clear that you could see a pebble in ten feet of water; the bottomland, where Thomas planted corn, was rich and easy to cultivate; and on both sides rose small, steep hills, so clearly defined and separate as to be called "knobs"—after which the creek was named.

It was of this Knob Creek farm that Abraham Lincoln had his earliest memories, but few of them concerned his mother, who remains a shadowy image. It is not even clear what she looked like. No one ever bothered to

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draw a likeness of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, and the age of photography was far in the future. Many years later those who had known her described her variously as being tall or of average height, thin or stout, beautiful or plain. Most agreed that she was "brilliant" or "intellectual." According to tradition, she was able to read, but, like many other frontier women, she did not know how to write and had to sign legal documents with an *X*. Abraham must have remembered how his mother set up housekeeping, cooked the family meals, washed and mended the scanty clothing that her husband and children wore, and perhaps helped in the farming. But of her life on Knob Creek he recorded only that she gave birth to a third child, named Thomas, who died in infancy. On the rare occasions in later years when he mentioned her, he referred to his *"angel mother,"* partly in recognition of her loving affection, but partly to distinguish her from his stepmother, who was very much alive. If he ever said, as Herndon reported, "God bless my mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her," it was a tribute not so much to her maternal care as to the genes that she allegedly transmitted from his unnamed grandfather.

Lincoln's Knob Creek recollections were of working in what he called "the big field," of seven acres, where his father planted corn and the son followed, dropping two pumpkin seeds in every other hill on every other row. Once, as he remembered, there was a big rain in the hills, though not a drop fell in the valley, and "the water coming down through the gorges washed ground, corn, pumpkin seed and all clear off the field." He also remembered going for two brief periods to an "A.B.C. school," some two miles from the Lincolns' cabin, where he was sent, according to a relative, "more as company for his sister than with the expectation that he would learn much." It was first taught by one Zachariah Riney, about whom little is known except that he was a Catholic, and then by Caleb Hazel, who, according to a contemporary, "could perhaps teach spelling, reading and indifferent writing and perhaps could cipher to the rule of three, but had no other qualifications of a teacher, except large size and bodily strength to thrash any boy or youth that came to his school." Abraham probably mastered the alphabet, but he did not yet know how to write when the family left Kentucky.

In general, young Lincoln seems to have been an entirely average little boy, who enjoyed playing, hunting, and fishing. Perhaps he was quieter than his playmates and kept his clothes clean longer, but there was not much to distinguish him. As a relative declared, "Abe exhibited no special traits in K[entuck]y except a good kind—somewhat wild nature."

III

In 1816, when Abraham was only seven years old, the Lincolns moved across the Ohio River to Indiana. Many years later he stated, quite accurately, that his father left Kentucky "partly on account of slavery; but chiefly on account

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of the difficulty in land titles in Ky." In Thomas Lincoln's mind the two causes were interrelated. He had religious grounds for disliking slavery. He and his wife joined the Separate Baptist Church, whose members accepted traditional Baptist beliefs, like predestination and opposition to infant baptism, but refused to endorse any formal creed. Adhering to a very strict code of morality, which condemned profanity, intoxication, gossip, horse racing, and dancing, most of the Separate Baptists were opposed to slavery. Abraham shared his parents' views. He was "naturally anti-slavery," he remarked in 1864, adding, "I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel."

Thomas Lincoln's hostility to slavery was based on economic as well as religious grounds. He did not want to compete with slave labor. Kentucky had been admitted to the Union in 1792 as a slave state, and in the central, bluegrass region of the state "nabobs" were accumulating vast holdings of the best lands, tilled by gangs of black slaves. Hardin County, just to the west of this region, was not so well suited to large-scale agriculture, but its inhabitants felt threatened. By 1811 the county had 1,007 slaves and only 1,627 white males over the age of sixteen.

Small farmers like Thomas Lincoln also worried about the titles to their land. Kentucky never had a United States land survey; it was settled in a random, chaotic fashion, with settlers fixing their own bounds to the property they claimed: a particular tree here, a rock there, and so on. Soon the map of the state presented a bewildering overlay of conflicting land claims, and nobody could be sure who owned what. So uncertain were land titles that Kentucky became one of the first states to do away with the freehold property qualification for voting—not so much out of devotion to democratic principles as because even the wealthy often had trouble proving they owned clear title to their acres. Naturally the courts were filled with litigation, and the lawyers in Kentucky were busy all the time. To a small farmer like Thomas Lincoln, who was unable to pay the attorneys' fees, it seemed that they were all working for the rich, slaveholding planters.

He had trouble gaining a clear title to any of the three farms that he purchased in Kentucky. The details were exceedingly complicated, and not particularly important: one had been improperly surveyed, so that it proved to be thirty-eight acres smaller than what he thought he had purchased; another had a lien on it because of a small debt by a previous owner; in the case of the Knob Creek farm, non-Kentucky residents brought suit against Thomas and other occupants of the rich valley, claiming prior title. Having neither the money nor the inclination to fight for his claims in court, he heard with great interest of the opening of Indiana, territory from which slavery had been excluded by the Northwest Ordinance. Here the United States government had surveyed the land and offered purchasers guaranteed titles to their farms.

In the fall of 1816 he made a trip across the Ohio to explore the region and stake out a claim. He found what he wanted in the heavily wooded, almost totally unoccupied wilderness on Little Pigeon Creek, in Perry (later

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Spencer) County, in southern Indiana. After selecting the site, he constructed what was called a "half-faced camp," a rough shelter, with no floor, about fourteen feet square, enclosed on three sides but open on the fourth. Then, blazing trees to mark the boundaries and heaping piles of brush on the corners of the tract he expected to occupy, he returned to Kentucky, gathered his small family and his few possessions, and set out for his new home. The Lincolns arrived in Indiana just as the territory was admitted to the Union as a state.

The land Thomas claimed was in an unbroken forest, so remote that for part of the distance from the Ohio there was no trail and he had to hack out a path so that his family could follow. It was a wild region, Abraham remembered, and the forests were filled with bears and other threatening animals. Many years later, when he revisited the region, his childhood fears surfaced in verse:

> When first my father settled here,
> 'Twas then the frontier line:
> The panther's scream, filled night with fear
> And bears preyed on the swine.

The Lincolns stayed in the half-faced camp for a few days after they arrived, until Thomas, probably with the assistance of members of the seven other families in the general vicinity, built a proper log cabin. It offered more protection, but because of the freezing weather the men could not work up the usual mixture of clay and grass for chinking between the logs and the winds still swept through.

The family was able to get through the winter because they ate deer and bear meat. "We all hunted pretty much all the time," one of the party remembered. Young Abraham did his part, too. In February 1817, just before his eighth birthday, he spied a flock of wild turkeys outside the new log cabin. He seized a rifle and, taking advantage of one of the chinks, "shot through a crack, and killed one of them." But killing was not for him, and he did not try to repeat his exploit. Recalling the incident years later, he said that he had "never since pulled a trigger on any larger game."

The immediate task before the Lincolns was to clear away enough trees and undergrowth so that they could plant corn. Thomas could only do so much, and he had to enlist the services of his son. Though Abraham was only eight years old, he was, he recalled, "large of his age, and had an axe put into his hands at once; and from that till within his twentythird year, he was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument—less, of course, in plowing and harvesting seasons."

That first year in Indiana was a time of backbreaking toil and of desperate loneliness for all the family, but by fall they were fairly settled. Thomas was so satisfied with the site that he had chosen that he undertook the sixty-mile trip to Vincennes in order to make initial payments on two adjoining eighty-

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acre tracts he had claimed. Nancy also began to feel more at home, because Elizabeth (Hanks) and Thomas Sparrow, her aunt and uncle, who had lost their home in Kentucky through an ejectment suit, came to the Little Pigeon Creek neighborhood. They stayed for a while in the Lincolns' half-faced camp until they could build their own cabin on a nearby lot. Sarah and Abraham rejoiced because the Sparrows brought with them the eighteen-year-old Dennis Hanks, illegitimate nephew of Elizabeth Sparrow. They had known Dennis in Kentucky—indeed, he claimed to be the second person to touch Abraham after his birth—and they welcomed this young man of endless loquacity and irrepressible good spirits.

But shortly afterward everything began to go wrong. First, Abraham had a dangerous accident. One of his chores was to take corn over to Gordon's mill, some two miles distant, to be ground into meal. When he got there, he hitched his old mare to the arm of the gristmill. Because it was getting late and he was in a hurry to get home before dusk, he tried to speed up the mare by giving her a stroke of the whip with each revolution. She lashed out at him with a kick that landed on his forehead, and he fell bleeding and unconscious. At first it was thought that he was dead and his father was summoned. He could not speak for several hours, but he revived and suffered no permanent damage.

Then the Little Pigeon Creek community was devastated by an attack of what was called milk sickness. It was a mysterious ailment, which settlers realized was somehow connected with the milk of their cows, but it was not until many years later that scientists discovered that the cows, which ran wild in the forest, had been eating the luxuriant but poisonous white snakeroot plant. Dizziness, nausea, and stomach pains were the initial symptoms, followed by irregular respiration and pulse, prostration, and coma. Death usually occurred within seven days. Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow were first afflicted, and Thomas Lincoln sawed rough boards to make coffins to bury them in. Then Nancy fell ill. She struggled on, day after day, for a week, but she knew she was failing. Calling her children to her bedside, she "told them to be good and kind to their father—to one an other and to the world." She died on October 5, and Thomas Lincoln buried another coffin on a wooded knoll a quarter of a mile from the cabin.

The next year may have been the hardest in Abraham Lincoln's life. With the help of Dennis Hanks, who moved in with the Lincolns after the Sparrows died, Thomas was able to put food on the table. "We still kept up hunting and farming," Dennis remembered. "We always hunted[;] it made no difference what came, for we more or less depended on it for a living—nay for life." Sarah, who had her twelfth birthday in February 1819, tried to cook and keep house, but at times she felt so lonesome that she would sit by the fire and cry. To cheer her up, Dennis recalled, "me 'n' Abe got 'er a baby coon an' a turtle, an' tried to get a fawn but we couldn't ketch any."

Abe—as Dennis and the other children insisted on calling the boy, even

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though he always disliked the nickname—left no words describing his sense of loss. His wound was too sensitive to touch. But many years later he wrote a letter of condolence to a bereaved child: "In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. . . . I have had experience enough to know what I say."

Deeper consequences of the loss of his mother before he was ten years old can only be a matter of speculation. It is tempting to trace his subsequent moodiness, his melancholy, and his occasional bouts of depression to this cause, but the connections are not clear and these patterns of behavior appear in persons who have never experienced such loss. Perhaps his mother's death had something to do with his growing aversion to cruelty and bloodshed. Now he began to reprove other children in the neighborhood for senseless cruelty to animals. He scolded them when they caught terrapins and heaped hot coals on their shells, to force the defenseless animals out of their shells, reminding them "that an ant's life was to it as sweet as ours to us." Certainly the death of his mother, coming so soon after the deaths of other friends and neighbors, gave a gloomy cast to his memories of his Indiana home. In the 1840s, revisiting his old neighborhood, he recorded his thoughts in verse:

My childhood's home I see again,
  And sadden with the view;
And still, as mem'ries crowd my brain,
  There's pleasure in it too.

. . .

I range the fields with pensive tread,
  And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
  I'm living in the tombs.

IV

Within a year of Nancy's death, Thomas Lincoln recognized that he and his family could not go on alone, and he went back to Kentucky to seek a bride. In Elizabethtown he found Sarah Bush Johnston, whom he had perhaps unsuccessfully courted before he wed Nancy. She was the widow of the Hardin County jailer and mother of three small children. There was no time for a romantic engagement; he needed a wife and she needed a husband. They made a quick, businesslike arrangement for him to pay her debts and for her to pack up her belongings and move with him to Indiana.

The arrival of Sarah Lincoln marked a turning point in Abraham Lincoln's life. She brought with her, first, her collection of domestic possessions—comfortable bedding, a walnut bureau that had cost her forty-five dollars, a

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table and chairs, a spinning wheel, knives, forks, and spoons—so that the Lincoln children felt they were joining a world of unbelievable luxury. Her children—Elizabeth, John D., and Matilda, who ranged from thirteen to eight years in age—brought life and excitement to the depressed Lincoln family. But most of all she brought with her the gift of love. Sarah Bush Lincoln must have been touched to see the dirty, ill-clad, hungry Lincoln children, and she set to work at once, as she said, to make them look "more human." "She soaped—rubbed and washed the children clean," Dennis Hanks remembered, "so that they look[ed] pretty neat—well and clean."

At her suggestion, the whole household was reorganized. Thomas Lincoln and Dennis Hanks had to give up hunting for a while to split logs and make a floor for the cabin, and they finished the roof, constructed a proper door, and cut a hole for a window, which they covered with greased paper. The cabin was high enough to install a loft, reached by climbing pegs driven into the wall, and here she installed beds for the three boys—Dennis Hanks, Abraham, and John D. Downstairs she had the whole cabin cleaned, a decent bedstead was built, and Thomas used his skill as a carpenter to make another table and stools. Remarkably, these reforms were brought about with a minimum of friction.

What was even more extraordinary, Sarah Bush Lincoln was able to blend the two families harmoniously and without jealousy. She treated her own children and the Lincoln children with absolute impartiality. She grew especially fond of Abraham. "Abe never gave me a cross word or look and never refused in fact, or even in appearance, to do anything I requested him," she remembered. "I never gave him a cross word in all my life. . . . His mind and mine—what little I had[—]seemed to move together—move in the same channel." Many years later, attempting to compare her son and her stepson, she told an interviewer: "Both were good boys, but I must say—both now being dead that Abe was the best boy I ever saw or ever expect to see."

Starved for affection, Abraham returned her love. He called her "Mama," and he never spoke of her except in the most affectionate terms. After he had been elected President, he recalled the sorry condition of Thomas Lincoln's household before Sarah Bush Johnston arrived and told of the encouragement she had given him as a boy. "She had been his best friend in this world," a relative reported him as saying, "and . . . no man could love a mother more than he loved her."

V

The years after Sarah Bush Lincoln came to Indiana were happy ones for young Abraham. Afterward, when he spoke of this time, it was as "a joyous, happy boyhood," which he described "with mirth and glee," and in his recollections "there was nothing sad nor pinched, and nothing of want." His parents enrolled him, along with the other four children in the household, in the school that Andrew Crawford had opened in a cabin about a mile

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from the Lincoln house. Though Sarah Bush Lincoln was illiterate, she had a sense that education was important, and Thomas wanted his son to learn how to read and cipher.

Possibly young Lincoln knew how to read a little before he entered Crawford's school, but Dennis Hanks, who was only marginally literate himself, claimed credit for giving Abraham "his first lesson in spelling—reading and writing." "I taught Abe to write with a buzzards quill which I killed with a rifle and having made a pen—put Abes hand in mind [sic] and moving his fingers by my hand to give him the idea of how to write." Abraham learned these basic skills slowly. John Hanks, another cousin who lived with the Lincolns for a time, thought he was "somewhat dull . . . not a brilliant boy—but *worked* his way by toil: to learn was hard for him, but he worked slowly, but surely." But Abraham's stepmother understood him better, recognized his need fully to master what he read or heard. "He must understand every thing—even to the smallest thing—minutely and exactly," she remembered; "he would then repeat it over to himself again and again—some times in one form and then in an other and when it was fixed in his mind to suit him he . . . never lost that fact or his understanding of it."

Abraham attended Crawford's school for one term, of perhaps three months. Crawford, a justice of the peace and man of some importance in the area, ran a subscription school, where parents paid their children's tuition in cash or in commodities. Ungraded, it was a "blab" school, where students recited their lessons aloud, and the schoolmaster listened through the din for errors. He was long remembered because, according to one student, "he tried to learn us manners" by having the pupils practice introducing each other, as though they were strangers. After one term Crawford gave up teaching, and the Lincoln children had no school for a year, until James Swaney opened one about four miles from the Lincoln house. The distance was so great that Abraham, who had farm chores to perform, could attend only sporadically. The next year, for about six months, he went to a school taught by Azel W. Dorsey in the same cabin that Crawford had used. With that term, at the age of fifteen, his formal education ended. All told, he summarized, "the agregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year."

In later years Lincoln was scornful of these "schools, so called," which he attended: "No qualification was ever required of a teacher, beyond *'readin, writin, and cipherin,'* to the Rule of Three [i.e., ratio and proportions]. If a straggler supposed to understand latin, happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizzard."

Though his censure was largely deserved, a school system that produced Abraham Lincoln could not have been wholly without merit. Indeed, his teachers, transient and untrained as they were, helped him master the basic tools so that in the future he could educate himself. *Dilworth's Spelling-Book,* which he and Sarah had begun to use in Kentucky, provided his introduction to grammar and spelling. Beginning with the alphabet and Arabic and Roman numerals, it proceeded to words of two letters, then three

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letters, and finally four letters. From these the student began to construct sentences, like: "No man may put off the law of God." *Dilworth's* then went on to more advanced subjects, and the final sections included prose and verse selections, some accompanied by crude woodcuts—which may have been the first pictures that Abraham had ever seen. Other readers, like *The Columbian Class Book* and *The Kentucky Preceptor,* expanded and reinforced what he learned from *Dilworth's.*

Through constant repetition and drill the boy learned how to spell. Indeed, he became so proficient that it was hard to stump him in the school spelling bees. He was generous with his knowledge. Many years later a girl in his class told how he helped her when the teacher gave her a difficult word, "defied," which she was about to misspell "defyed." When she came to the fourth letter, she happened to look at Abraham, who pointed to his eye, and, taking the hint, she spelled the word correctly.

He also learned to write, in a clear, round hand. The handwriting of a bit of doggerel in his sum book is recognizably that of the future President:

> Abraham Lincoln is my name
> And with my pen I wrote the same
> I wrote in both hast[e] and speed
> and left it here for fools to read.

So adept did he become that unlettered neighbors in the Pigeon Creek community often asked him to write letters for them.

Even more important was the ability to read. Once he got the hang of it, he could never get enough. "Abe was getting hungry for book[s]," Dennis Hanks recalled, "reading every thing he could lay his hands on." He would carry a book with him when he went out to work, and read when he rested. John Hanks remembered that when Abraham returned to the house from work, "he would go to the cupboard, snatch a piece of corn bread, take down a book, sit down in a chair, cock his legs up as high as his head, and read."

His contemporaries attributed prodigies of reading to him, but books were scarce on the frontier and he had to read carefully rather than extensively. He memorized a great deal of what he read. "When he came across a passage that struck him," his stepmother remembered, "he would write it down on boards if he had no paper and keep it there till he did get paper —then he would re-write it—look at it [and] repeat it."

Other than classroom texts, his first books were the few that Sarah Bush Lincoln had brought with her from Kentucky. One was her family Bible. Abraham read it at times, she remembered, "though not as much as said: he sought more congenial books—suitable for his age." *The Pilgrim's Progress* was one of them, and the biblical cadences of Lincoln's later speeches owed much to John Bunyan. Another of Sarah Bush Lincoln's books was *Aesop's Fables,* which it was said Abraham read so many times that he could write it

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out from memory. The morals of some of the stories became deeply ingrained in his mind, like the lesson drawn from the fable of the lion and the four bulls: "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand." In his stepmother's copy of *Lessons in Elocution,* by William Scott, he studied basic lessons on elocution, and the selections in this book were probably his introduction to Shakespeare. Among the set pieces it included was King Claudius's soliloquy on his murder of Hamlet's father, "O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven." It remained one of Lincoln's favorite passages.

History also fascinated him. He probably read William Grimshaw's *History of the United States,* which began with the discovery of America and ended with the annexation of Florida. With a sharp denunciation of slavery as "a climax of human cupidity and turpitude," Grimshaw stressed the importance of the American Revolution and exhorted students: "Let us not only declare by words, but demonstrate by our actions, that 'all men are created equal.' " Even more than history, biography interested young Lincoln. He enjoyed the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, but it was Parson Mason Weems's *Life of George Washington* that stirred his imagination. Many years later, when he was on his way to Washington and his first inaugural, he told the New Jersey Senate that Weems's account of Washington's heroic struggles at Trenton—"the crossing of the river; the contest with the Hessians; the great hardships endured at that time"—had made an indelible mark on his mind. "I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was," he said, "that there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for."

The pioneer schools of Indiana also gave Lincoln a good grounding in elementary mathematics. His teachers probably never used an arithmetic textbook but drew their problems from two handbooks, Thomas Dilworth's *Schoolmaster's Assistant* and Zachariah Jess's *American Tutor's Assistant.* Because paper was scarce, he often had to cipher on boards, and, his stepmother recalled, "when the board would get too black he would shave it off with a drawing knife and go on again." Then from somewhere he found a few sheets of paper, which he sewed together to form a little notebook in which to write down the problems and his answers. In it he recorded complicated calculations involving multiplication (like 34,567,834 x 23,423) and division (such as 4,375,702 divided by 2,432), which he completed with exceptional accuracy, and he also solved problems concerning weights and measures, and figured discounts and simple interest. Apparently ratio and proportion taxed his instructors to their limits, but he was able to work out simple problems such as: "If 3 oz of silver cost 17s[hillings] what will 48 oz Cost." Neither the student nor the teachers seemed quite to get the idea of "casting out nines," a cumbersome and inaccurate method of verifying long division. Nevertheless, he liked the logic and the precision of mathematics, and years later, after serving a term in Congress, he went back to the subject and worked his way through most of a geometry textbook.

What Lincoln learned from school was not all in books. Here for the first time he had a chance to see children from other families and to pit his wits

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against theirs. Taller than most of the other students, he wore a coonskin cap and buckskin pants that were always too short, so that, a classmate remembered, "there was bare and naked six or more inches of Abe Lincoln's shin bone." Unconscious of his peculiar appearance, he would rapidly gather the other students around him, cracking jokes, telling stories, making plans. Almost from the beginning he took his place as a leader. His classmates admired his ability to tell stories and make rhymes, and they enjoyed his first efforts at public speaking. In their eyes he was clearly exceptional, and he carried away from his brief schooling the self-confidence of a man who has never met his intellectual equal.

VI

These happy years of Lincoln's boyhood were short, for his relationship with his father began to deteriorate. Thomas was perceptibly aging. After an exceptional burst of energy at the time of his second marriage, he began to slow down. He was probably not in good health, for one neighbor remembered that he became blind in one eye and lost sight in the other. He was not a lazy man, another settler reported, but "a tinker—a piddler—always doing but doing nothing great."

He was under considerable financial pressure after his marriage because he had to support a household of eight people. For a time he could rely on Dennis Hanks to help provide for his large family, but in 1821 Dennis married Elizabeth Johnston, Sarah Bush Lincoln's daughter, and moved to his own homestead a half mile or so away. As Abraham became an adolescent, his father grew more and more to depend on him for the "farming, grubbing, hoeing, making fences" necessary to keep the family afloat. He also regularly hired his son out to work for other farmers in the vicinity, and by law he was entitled to everything the boy earned until he came of age.

Generally an easygoing man, who, according to Dennis Hanks, "could beat his son telling a story—cracking a joke," Thomas Lincoln was not a harsh father or a brutal disciplinarian. He encouraged Abraham to go to school, though he had a somewhat limited idea of what an education consisted of, and he rarely interrupted his son's studies. "As a usual thing," Sarah Bush Lincoln remembered, "Mr Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do any thing if he could avoid it. He would do it himself first." But Dennis Hanks said that Thomas thought his son spent too much time on his books, "having sometimes to slash him for neglecting his work by reading." The father would not tolerate impudence. When Abraham as a little boy thrust himself into adult conversations, Thomas sometimes struck him. Then, as Hanks recalled, young Abraham "never balked, but dropt a kind of silent unwelcome tear, as evidence of his sensations."

As Abraham became a teenager, he began to distance himself from his father. His sense of alienation may have originated at the time of his mother's

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death, when he needed more support and compassion than his stolid father was able to give. It increased as the boy got older. Perhaps he felt that his place in the household had been usurped by the second family Thomas Lincoln acquired when he remarried; contemporaries noted that Thomas seemed to favor the stepson, John D. Johnston, more than he did his own son. He disagreed with his father over religion. In 1823, Thomas Lincoln and his wife joined the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, as did his daughter Sarah soon afterward; but Abraham made no move toward membership. Indeed, as his stepmother said, "Abe had no particular religion—didn't think of these question[s] at that time, if he ever did." That difference appears to have led to the sharpest words he ever received from his father. Though Abraham did not belong to the church, he attended the sermons, and afterward, climbing on a tree stump, he would rally the other children around him and repeat—or sometimes parody—the minister's words. Offended, Thomas, as one of the children recalled, "would come and make him quit —send him to work."

The heavy chores he had to perform contributed to his dissatisfaction. The boy had limited energy because at about the age of twelve he began growing so rapidly. By the time he was sixteen he had shot up to six feet, two inches tall, though he weighed only about one hundred and sixty pounds. One contemporary remembered he was so skinny that he had a spidery look. He grew so fast that he was tired all the time, and he showed a notable lack of enthusiasm for physical labor. "Lincoln was lazy—a very lazy man," Dennis Hanks concluded. "He was always reading—scribbling—writing—ciphering—writing Poetry." The neighbors for whom he worked agreed that he was "awful lazy," and, as one remarked, "he was no hand to pitch in at work like killing snakes." Their dissatisfaction doubtless contributed to the friction between father and son.

But Abraham's pulling away from his father was something more significant than a teenage rebellion. Abraham had made a quiet reassessment of the life that Thomas lived. He kept his judgment to himself, but years later it crept into his scornful statements that his father "grew up, litterally without education," that he "never did more in the way of writing than to bunglingly sign his own name," and that he chose to settle in a region where "there was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education." To Abraham Lincoln that was a damning verdict. In all of his published writings, and, indeed, even in reports of hundreds of stories and conversations, he had not one favorable word to say about his father.

VII

By the time Abraham Lincoln was in his late teens, he was itching to get away from Little Pigeon Creek. One after another, his ties to home and to the community were snapped. When he was seventeen, his sister, Sarah, married a neighbor, Aaron Grigsby, and the couple set up housekeeping

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several miles from the Lincoln cabin. Then Matilda, Sarah Bush Lincoln's youngest daughter, who had been very fond of Abraham, married Squire Hall and also moved away. A year and a half later Sarah Lincoln Grigsby died in childbirth. Abraham blamed the death of his sister on the negligence of the Grigsbys in sending for a doctor, and the ensuing quarrel further alienated him from his Little Pigeon Creek neighbors.

Increasingly he began to go farther afield from his father's cabin. A contemporary remembered that he went all over the county attending "house raisings, log rolling corn shucking and workings of all kinds." To be sure, he got bored easily and on many of these occasions, as Dennis Hanks remembered, "would Commence his pranks—tricks—jokes stories, and . . . all would stop—gather around Abe and listen." At the age of seventeen he, together with Dennis Hanks and Squire Hall, got the idea of making money by selling firewood to the steamers plying the Ohio River, and they set to work sawing logs at Posey's Landing, only to find that demand was slack and money was scarce. They were finally able to swap nine cords of firewood for nine yards of white domestic cloth, out of which, Hanks reported, "Abe had a shirt made, and it was positively the first white shirt which . . . he had ever owned or worn." Next he hired out to James Taylor, who ran a ferry along the Anderson River in the same vicinity; when he was not helping on the river, he plowed, killed hogs, and made fences, doing what he remembered as "the roughest work a young man could be made to do." He earned $6 a month, with 31¢ extra on days when he slaughtered hogs. In what spare time he had, he built a little flatboat, or rowboat. When two men asked him to row them out into the river so that they could take passage on a steamer that was coming downstream, he sculled them out, helped them aboard, and lifted their heavy trunks onto the deck. As they left, each of them tossed a silver half-dollar on the floor of his boat in payment. "I could scarcely believe my eyes as I picked up the money," Lincoln recalled nearly forty years later. "I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day. . . . The world seemed wider and fairer before me."

The lure of the river was irresistible, promising escape from the constricted world of Little Pigeon Creek. In 1828, when James Gentry, who owned the local store, decided to send a cargo of meat, corn, and flour down the rivers for sale in New Orleans, Lincoln accepted the offer to accompany his son, Allen, on the flatboat, at a wage of $8 a month. They made a leisurely trip, stopping frequently to trade at the sugar plantations along the river in Louisiana, until the dreamlike quality of their journey was rudely interrupted. "One night," as Lincoln remembered, "they were attacked by seven negroes with intent to kill and rob them. They were hurt some in the melee, but succeeded in driving the negroes from the boat, and then 'cut cable' 'weighed anchor' and left." New Orleans was by far the largest city the two country boys had ever seen, with imposing buildings, busy shops, and incessant traffic. Here they heard French spoken as readily as English. In New Orleans, Lincoln for the first time encountered large

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numbers of slaves. But neither boy made any record of their visit to the Crescent City; perhaps it was too overwhelming.

Returning to Indiana, Lincoln dutifully handed over his earnings to his father, but he began to spend more and more time away from home. He liked to go to the village of Gentryville, about a mile and a half away, where he occasionally helped out at James Gentry's store, and he worked sometimes with John Baldwin, the local blacksmith. As always, he was full of talk and plans and jokes and tricks, and he gathered about him all the young men who were about to come of age and were restless in the narrow society of southern Indiana.

In the spring of 1829, Lincoln and his little gang pulled off the most imaginative, and longest remembered, of their pranks when two sons of Reuben Grigsby—Reuben, Jr., and Charles—were married. The Lincolns had been carrying on something of a feud with the Grigsby family since Sarah's death, and when Abraham was not invited to the wedding celebration, he "felt miffed—insulted." Through a confederate he arranged that when the party was over and the bridegrooms were brought upstairs to their waiting brides, they would be led to the wrong beds. The mix-up was, of course, immediately discovered, but it became the cause of great gossip and much laughter in the Gentryville community. Its fame grew because Lincoln wrote out a scurrilous description of the affair, which he entitled "The Chronicles of Reuben." In language supposed to be reminiscent of the Scriptures, he recounted the story and then went on in verse to tell of another Grigsby brother, Billy, who was turned down by the girl he wooed:

> You cursed baldhead,
> My suitor you never can be;
> Besides, your low crotch proclaims you a botch
> And that never can answer for me.

Rejected, Billy turned to a male lover, Natty:

> . . . he is married to Natty.
> So Billy and Natty agreed very well;
> And mamma's well pleased at the match.

Years afterward the doggerel was still remembered in southern Indiana. According to one settler, parts of it were known "better than the Bible—better than Watts hymns."

If the whole episode had any significance, it indicated that Lincoln needed to break away from home. He realized this as well as anyone. He longed to become a steamboat man and asked a neighbor, William Wood, to go with him to the Ohio River and give him a recommendation to a ship's captain. "Abe," Wood said, "your age is against you—you are not 21 yet." "I know that," the young man replied, "but I want a start." Unwilling to break the law

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or to offend his neighbor, Thomas Lincoln, Wood did make some discreet, though unsuccessful, inquiries in Abraham's behalf in Rockport.

But Abraham still legally owed Thomas Lincoln another year of labor, and he remained with his father out of obligation and with his stepmother out of affection. Early in 1830 he helped them move from Spencer County, Indiana, into Macon County, Illinois. John Hanks had already settled there and sent back glowing reports of the fertility of the Illinois lands, and Dennis Hanks was eager to move with his family. A rumor of a new outbreak of the milk sickness in southern Indiana triggered the Lincolns' decision to go with them. Selling his land, his hogs, and his corn, Thomas Lincoln gathered up his household, and in March started off in a wagon drawn by two yoke of oxen.

Abraham did his best to keep the company cheerful, making jokes as he goaded on the oxen. Such roads as there were proved almost impassable; the ground was still frozen from winter, and it melted a little each day only to freeze back at night. When the party crossed the Wabash River at Vincennes, the river was so high that the road was covered with water for half a mile at a stretch. Everywhere the streams were swollen, and usually there were no bridges. At one crossing Lincoln's favorite little fice dog jumped from the wagon, broke through the ice, and began struggling for his life. "I could not bear to lose my dog," Lincoln recalled many years later, "and I jumped out of the waggon and waded waist deep in the ice and water[,] got hold of him and helped out and saved him."

After passing through the village of Decatur, which consisted of fewer than a dozen log cabins, the Lincolns went on about ten miles to a tract of land on the north bank of the Sangamon River, which John Hanks had staked out for them. That summer they broke up fifteen acres of land, and Abraham and John Hanks split the rails to fence them in. Abraham already felt so much at home in Illinois that he signed a petition, along with forty-four other "qualified voters," asking for a change of polling place for elections—even though he had not lived in the state the six months required to qualify as an elector.

That summer, too, he made his first political speech, addressing a campaign meeting in front of Renshaw's store in Decatur. Two established politicians, candidates for the state legislature, made addresses, and when they failed to follow custom and offer the crowd something to drink, the boys about the store urged Lincoln to reply, expecting him to ridicule the candidates' stinginess. It was a small affair, but a notable step in Abraham's continuing effort to distance himself from his father. To put himself forward and make a public speech was something that Thomas Lincoln would never have dreamed of doing. But Abraham had for several years been reading anti-Jackson National Republican newspapers, like the *Louisville Journal,* and he ardently favored Henry Clay's "American System," which called for internal improvements, a protective tariff, and a national bank. He surprised his audience at Decatur, which had been expecting some rude political humor,

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with a plea for improving the Sangamon River for transportation. Showing no evidence of stage fright except for frequently shifting his position to ease his feet, he ended with an eloquent picture of the future of Illinois.

Abraham Lincoln was now a man, both physiologically and legally, and ready to leave the family nest forever. How he would support himself was not clear. He was willing to try anything—so long as it was not his father's occupations of farming and carpentry. So when Denton Offutt, a bustling, none too scrupulous businessman, asked him and John Hanks to take another flatboat loaded with provisions down to New Orleans, Lincoln, having nothing better to do, promptly accepted. When he went over to the river landing at Sangamo Town to help build the boat for Offutt, he left his father's house for good. He did not yet know who he was, or where he was heading, but he was sure he did not want to be another Thomas Lincoln.

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CHAPTER TWO

A Piece of Floating Driftwood

The years after Abraham Lincoln left his father's household were of critical importance in shaping his future. In 1831 he was essentially unformed. It was not clear to him or to anybody else what career he might ultimately follow. His strong body and his ability to perform heavy manual labor equipped him only to be a farmer—his father's occupation, which he despised. In the next ten years he tried nearly every other kind of work the frontier offered: carpenter, riverboat man, store clerk, soldier, merchant, postmaster, blacksmith, surveyor, lawyer, politician. Experience eliminated all but the last two of these possibilities, and by the time he was thirty the direction of his career was firmly established.

I

Lincoln arrived at New Salem, which was to be his home for the next six years, by accident. He was, he used to tell fellow residents, "a piece of floating driftwood," accidentally lodged by the floodwaters of the Sangamon River. He first saw the village in April 1831, when the flatboat that he, John Hanks, and John D. Johnston had constructed for Offutt became lodged on the milldam that John Camron and James Rutledge had erected across the river. Loaded with barrels of bacon, wheat, and corn, the flatboat was too heavy to float over the dam, and it began taking on water at an ominous rate. The whole village turned out to watch as the crew frantically struggled to save the boat and the cargo. The young giant Lincoln attracted their special attention as he worked in the water, with his "boots off, hat, coat and vest off. Pants rolled up to his knees and shirt wet with sweat and combing

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his fuzzie hair with his fingers as he pounded away on the boat." Unable to budge the flatboat, he bored a hole in the bow and unloaded enough of the barrels in the rear so that the stern rose up. When the water poured out through the hole, the whole boat lifted and floated over the dam. Townsmen marveled at Lincoln's ingenuity, and Offutt, even more deeply impressed, vowed that, once the trip down the Mississippi was completed, he would set up a store in New Salem and make Lincoln the manager.

In late July, back from New Orleans, Lincoln returned to New Salem, to find that Offutt, characteristically, had not lived up to his great promises. There was as yet no store, though a stock of goods had been ordered from St. Louis. Now living—as he later expressed it—"for the first time, as it were, by himself," Lincoln had to take odd jobs to tide him over the summer, but, fortunately, laborers were always in demand on the frontier.

New Salem was a place for which young Abraham Lincoln was perfectly suited. Founded only two years earlier, on a high bluff above the Sangamon River, by the mill owners Camron and Rutledge, it was in 1831 not so much a frontier settlement as a commercial village that supplied the needs of the surrounding rural areas, like Clary's Grove and Concord. In addition to the sawmill and the gristmill, both powered by the river, New Salem counted a blacksmith's shop, a cooper's shop, an establishment for carding wool, a hatmaker, one or more general stores, and a tavern. With about one hundred residents, who occupied a dozen or so houses and stores, it was the largest community Lincoln had ever lived in.

Everyone grew very fond of this hardworking and accommodating young man, so able and so willing to do any kind of work. Quickly he established himself with the men of the town, who gathered daily at the store run by Samuel Hill and John McNeil, to exchange news and gossip. They welcomed Lincoln because, like his father, he had an inexhaustible store of anecdotes and stories. One concerned an Indiana Baptist preacher who, dressed in old-fashioned baggy pantaloons and a shirt fastened only at the collar, announced his text: "I am the Christ, whom I shall represent today." Then a little blue lizard ran up his leg, and the preacher, unable to slap him away and unwilling to stop his sermon, loosened his pants and kicked them off. But the lizard proceeded up the minister's back, and this time, without missing a word, he opened his collar button and swept off his shirt, too. The congregation looked dazed, but one old lady rose up and shouted: "If you represent Christ then I'm done with the Bible."

When no women were present, his stories sometimes took on a scatological tone. For instance, he recounted an anecdote he attributed to Colonel Ethan Allen, famed for his role in the American Revolution. Allegedly making a visit to England after the war, Allen found his hosts took great pleasure in ridiculing Americans, and George Washington in particular, and, to irritate their guest, hung a picture of the first President in the toilet. (In telling the story, Lincoln called it "the Back House.") Allen announced that they had found a very appropriate place for the picture, because "there

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is nothing that will Make an Englishman Shit so quick as the sight of Genl Washington."

Such stories had no special point. Unlike Lincoln's later anecdotes, they were not used to illustrate any argument or to ridicule any particular person. Lincoln repeated them because he thought they were funny and because he had grown up in a household where swapping stories was an accepted way of passing the time. Told at great length, with much mimicry and many gestures, his stories eased his acceptance by the predominantly masculine society of New Salem; it was the rare man who could fail to be amused when this shambling youth with the mournful visage began to spin out one of his tales. As he talked, one old-timer remembered, "his countenance would brighten up, the expression would light up not in a flash but rapidly, the muscles would begin to contract. Several wrinkles would diverge from the inner corners of his eyes, and extend down and diagonally across his nose, his eyes would sparkle, all terminating in an unrestrained laugh in which every one present willing or unwilling were compelled to take part."

In September, when Offutt's store finally opened, Lincoln had to gain acceptance from a different group. As a trading center, New Salem attracted farmers and laborers from the surrounding communities who came in to have their corn ground at the mill, to buy supplies, or to have a few drinks at the "groceries" (as stores that also sold liquor were known). These visitors came closer to being traditional frontiersmen than the relatively sedentary inhabitants of the village. None were wilder than the boys from Clary's Grove, a few miles to the west, whose leader was the stalwart Jack Armstrong. Uninhibited, ignorant, careless of rules and proprieties, these roughnecks were always ready for fun and a frolic. They could be generous and good-natured. For their friends, as Herndon remarked, they "could trench a pond, dig a bog, build a house," and they melted with sympathy for defenseless women and the invalid. But much of their time in New Salem was spent in devilment, like cockfighting and ganderpulling (a contest to see which rider could snap off the head of a live gander suspended from a tree limb). Above all, they valued physical strength.

When Offutt, enchanted with his new assistant, began boasting that Lincoln was not merely the smartest man in New Salem but also the strongest, the Clary's Grove boys called his bluff. They cared not at all about Lincoln's mental superiority, but they dared him to test his strength in a wrestling match with their champion, Jack Armstrong. Lincoln was reluctant, because he said he did not like all the "wooling and pulling" of a wrestling match, but the urging of his employer and the taunts of his rivals obliged him to fight. In the collective memory of New Salem residents, the contest was an epic one, and various versions survived: how Armstrong defeated Lincoln through a trick; how Lincoln threw Armstrong; how Armstrong's followers threatened collectively to lick the man who had defeated their champion until Lincoln volunteered to take them all on, but one at a time. The details

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were irrelevant. What mattered was that Lincoln proved that he had immense strength and courage, and that was enough to win the admiration of the Clary's Grove gang. Thereafter they became Lincoln's most loyal and enthusiastic admirers.

At the same time, the better-educated, more stable residents of New Salem came to think highly of this new arrival. Though the village was close to the frontier, a surprising number of the inhabitants were people of some culture and education. Dr. John Allen, for instance, was a graduate of Dartmouth College, and at least five residents had attended Illinois College, in nearby Jacksonville. Those without formal education often had intellectual interests. Fat, lazy Jack Kelso, for example, had a remarkable mastery of the writings of Burns and Shakespeare, which he could recite by the hour. Though self-educated, Mentor Graham conducted the town's only school. All were struck by Lincoln's unabashed eagerness to learn. They were also impressed by his participation in the New Salem debating club, which James Rutledge had started. When he first took the floor, with both hands thrust deeply into his pockets, Lincoln spoke diffidently, but as he proceeded, his voice grew more assured, he started using his hands for awkward gestures, and, one participant remembered, "he pursued the question with reason and argument so pithy and forcible that all were amazed."

Town worthies grew convinced that this was a young man with a future. They noted his painstaking attention to his duties at Offutt's store, which were presently extended to include management of the nearby gristmill and the sawmill. "He was among the best clerks I ever saw," schoolmaster Graham recalled; "he was attentive to his business—was kind and considerate to his customers and friends and always treated them with great tenderness—kindness and honesty." They took satisfaction in the great interest he showed in town affairs. For instance, he regularly attended the sessions of the local court, over which the corpulent Bowling Green, the justice of the peace, presided. Always looking for amusement, Green initially allowed the awkward young man to make informal comments on cases before the court because he told anecdotes that, as one contemporary recalled, produced "a spasmotic [*sic*] shaking of the fat sides of the old law functionary." But soon he came to recognize that Lincoln had not merely a sense of humor but a strong, logical mind. Presently neighbors began to rely on him for legal advice, and, following a book of forms, he was able to draft simple legal documents, like deeds and receipts.

In the spring of 1832, Green, James Rutledge, the president of the debating club, and several other residents suggested that Lincoln run for the state legislature. Their choice was not as extraordinary as it might initially appear. The future of New Salem was linked to the Sangamon River, which swirled under the bluff on which the town was located. Down the river went the surplus bacon, corn, and wheat of the area—just the commodities that Lincoln's flatboat had carried—and if the sluggish stream was improved,

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steamboats could bring up the river manufactured goods, salt, iron, and the dozens of other commodities that residents required. But the prospect that New Salem might become a commercial entrepôt for central Illinois was threatened by a plan to build a railroad from the readily navigable Illinois River to Jacksonville and Springfield, bypassing New Salem altogether. New Salem needed a man in the legislature to represent its interests, and nobody could do that better than Lincoln, with his practical experience as a river-boat man.

At his friends' urging, Lincoln in March 1832 announced himself a candidate for the state legislature. The move was another demonstration of the young man's supreme self-confidence, his belief that he was at least the equal, if not the superior, of any man he ever met. To be sure, the post he was seeking was not an elevated one. No special qualifications were required of state legislators, who dealt mostly with such issues as whether cattle had to be fenced in or could enjoy free range. Previous legislative experience was not a necessity and, indeed, might be considered a disadvantage. Nor did candidates have to have the backing of a strong political party or powerful patrons. As yet, Illinois politics was in a state of flux. While many residents strongly admired Andrew Jackson, who was seeking a second term as President, others, including Lincoln, almost worshiped Henry Clay, the rival candidate for that office. Differences between these two leaders over a national bank, the protective tariff, and federal support for "internal improvements"—meaning improvement of roads, canals, and rivers—would soon lead to the formation of Democratic and Whig parties, but in 1832 these national issues had not yet spilled over into Illinois local politics, which remained a matter of voters choosing their personal favorites for office.

Nevertheless, Lincoln's decision to announce himself a candidate for the state legislature in March 1832 was a revealing one. Less than a year earlier he had been, in his own words, a "friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flatboat—at ten dollars per month." He was now settled in New Salem, but, at the age of twenty-three, he was only a clerk in a small country store, a young man with less than a year of formal education and with no experience in the workings of government. As one contemporary remarked, "Lincoln *had nothing only plenty of friends.*" Hardly known outside of his little community, he would have to compete for votes in the entire county, contesting with men of far greater age and experience.

Other candidates had influential politicians present their names to the electorate, but Lincoln, lacking such support, appealed directly to the public in an announcement published in Springfield's *Sangamo Journal.* In drafting and revising it, he probably had some assistance from John McNeil, the storekeeper, and possibly from schoolmaster Mentor Graham, and they may have been responsible for its somewhat orotund quality. Lincoln began by challenging the proposed railroad project. "However high our imaginations may be heated at thoughts of it," he warned there was "a heart appalling

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shock accompanying the account of its cost." As an alternative he urged the improvement of the Sangamon River, which would be "vastly important and highly desirable to the people of this county," and he vouched for the practicability of this project by adducing his experience on the river, which was as extensive as that of "any other person in the country."

On other issues as well Lincoln spoke for the New Salem community. Chronically short of cash and needing credit, its businessmen were obliged to borrow at very high rates of interest, and Lincoln pledged to support a law against such usury, "this baneful and corroding system." But even as a very young man he recognized the limits of the possible. Usury legislation might have a useful symbolic effect, but, he noted wryly, it would not materially injure anyone because "in cases of extreme necessity there could always be means found to cheat the law." Like other New Salem residents, he favored improving education, "the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in," though he offered no plan or program.

In a concluding paragraph Lincoln spoke for himself, rather than for his community, and here he employed his distinctive style, avoiding highfalutin language in favor of simplicity and directness. He declared that his only object was "that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem." How well he would succeed "is yet to be developed." "I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life," he reminded voters, in what was to become part of his standard appeal; on at least thirty-five other public occasions before 1860 he referred to himself as "humble" Abraham Lincoln. If elected, he would work hard for the people. But defeat would not be unbearable, because he was "too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined."

II

Lincoln's announcement was timely, because within days of its publication news spread that "the splendid, upper cabin steamer *Talisman*" had left Cincinnati on a voyage to demonstrate the navigability of the Sangamon River. After traveling down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and Illinois rivers to Beardstown, the vessel would push up the Sangamon to Portland Landing, about six miles from both New Salem and Springfield. The whole region was overjoyed.

Lincoln, along with several other residents of Springfield and New Salem, went to Beardstown and worked hard for several days cutting back the brush that overhung the river and removing obstructions where it flowed into the Illinois. When the *Talisman* arrived at Beardstown, he took charge, because, as he had said in his political announcement, he knew the Sangamon River better than anyone else, and he triumphantly piloted the steamer upstream to Portland Landing on March 24. Probably he joined in the celebration at the Springfield courthouse two days later.

News that the Sangamon was rapidly dropping put an end to the celebra-

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tions, and within a week the *Talisman,* with Lincoln again at the helm, beat a hasty retreat down the river. The water level was so low that a portion of the milldam at New Salem had to be destroyed to allow the vessel to pass through on its way back to Beardstown. The whole *Talisman* adventure impressively boosted Lincoln's reputation; it both demonstrated his skill as a river pilot and proved his political sagacity in urging that if the Sangamon was going to be navigable it would have to be improved with state support.

But Lincoln's promising political career was interrupted by the collapse of Offutt's business ventures. Offutt was, as one New Salem resident characterized him, "a gasy—windy—brain rattling man," full of visionary plans. On the verge of bankruptcy, he asked Lincoln to split enough rails to build a pen, at the base of the New Salem bluff, for a thousand hogs, which he was confident he would sell down the river. Even when his funds were exhausted, Offutt announced to the farmers of the Sangamon region that he was importing 3,000 or 4,000 bushels of seed corn, which he would sell for a dollar a bushel, along with cottonseed brought up from Tennessee. Undercapitalized and overextended, Offutt's enterprises faltered in the spring of 1832 and then, as Lincoln said later, "petered out."

Left without a job, Lincoln was saved by the outbreak of the Black Hawk War. The Sauk and Fox Indians, who had been tricked into moving west of the Mississippi River, ceding their vast tribal lands in northwestern Illinois, repudiated their treaty with the federal government, and in May one of their leaders, Black Hawk, returned to Illinois with about 450 warriors and 1,500 women and children, to reclaim their tribal homeland. Immediately the frontier was ablaze with alarm. When Governor John Reynolds called for volunteers to assist the federal troops in repelling the invasion, men rushed to offer their services, some out of patriotism, some out of long-cherished animosity toward Indians, and some who knew that military service would aid their political careers. In Lincoln's case all these motives were at work —with the added inducement that the pay of a militiaman would be very welcome to a man with no other means of support.

On April 21 he and other volunteers from the New Salem neighborhood met near Richland and were sworn in to service. As was customary, the men of the company elected their own officers. William Kirkpatrick, the owner of a sawmill, announced his candidacy, but some of the Clary's Grove boys proposed Lincoln. Both candidates stepped out in front, on the village green, and the men formed a line behind their favorite. To Lincoln's delight, two-thirds of the groups fell in line behind him, and most of the others presently deserted Kirkpatrick and joined them. The election was one of the proudest moments of his life. Many years later, after he had served four terms in the state legislature, had been elected to Congress, and had twice been nominated for the United States Senate, Lincoln said this election as militia captain was "a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since."

Lincoln tried with moderate success to secure some discipline in his

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company, and his task was made easier because Jack Armstrong was his first sergeant. He learned a little about close-order drill, but not enough to master the more complicated commands. Once when he found his company marching directly into a fence, he could not remember how to order them to pass through the narrow gate. With considerable presence of mind he called a halt, dismissed the company for two minutes, and ordered them to re-form on the other side of the fence. He did not hesitate to use physical strength to preserve order. When an old Indian, bearing a certificate of good character from American authorities, stumbled into camp, Lincoln's men talked of killing him, saying, "The Indian is a damned spy" and "We have come out to fight the Indian and by God we intend to do so." Drawing himself up to his full height, Lincoln stepped in front of the shivering Indian and offered to fight anyone who wanted to hurt the old man. Grumbling, the soldiers let the Indian slip away.

His service in the Black Hawk War was neither particularly dangerous nor heroic. Later, for political reasons, he used to poke fun at his military record. In 1848, when the Democrats nominated Lewis Cass, of Michigan, for President, emphasizing his alleged military record in the War of 1812, Lincoln reminded listeners that he, too, was a military hero. "Yes sir," he declared; "in the days of the Black Hawk war, I fought, bled, and came away." He invited comparison of his martial efforts with those of the Michigan governor. If Cass, as alleged, broke his sword in anger after Detroit was needlessly surrendered to the British, Lincoln joked, "It is quite certain I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion." "If he saw any live, fighting indians, it was more than I did," Lincoln conceded; "but I had a good many bloody struggles with the musquetoes; and, although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry."

At the time, however, Lincoln was proud of his military service, and he enjoyed the hearty comradeship of men-at-arms. When his first month's enlistment expired, he, along with several other members of his company, signed up for another twenty days, this time serving as a private, and at the end of that period he reenlisted for another month. "I was out of work . . . and there being no danger of more fighting, I could do nothing better than enlist again," he explained afterward. He served until July 10, when he was honorably discharged.

His service in the Black Hawk War gave him some acquaintance with military life and his first experience as a leader of men. Meeting volunteers from different parts of the state was useful to him politically, for it extended his reputation. While he was in the army, he came into contact with a number of the rising young political leaders of the state, like Orville Hickman Browning, a cautious, conservative Quincy lawyer, who would become one of his most influential and critical friends. More important was his acquaintance with John Todd Stuart, a Springfield lawyer, who served as

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major in the same battalion as Lincoln. Handsome, polished, and well educated, Stuart was apparently the opposite of Lincoln in every way, but he saw great promise in his New Salem friend.

The most immediate benefit Lincoln derived from his brief military service was his compensation of about $110, plus the $14 bounty he received for enlisting. This was the total extent of his resources as he returned to New Salem, in time for a brief campaign before the election for the state legislature on August 6. The canvass was an informal one, and Lincoln, like the other twelve candidates, traveled about Sangamon County, introducing himself and soliciting votes. He was an odd-looking figure, his swarthy complexion now deeply sunburned, so that, as he told his listeners, he was "almost as red as those men I have been chasing through the prairies and forests on the Rivers of Illinois." On the campaign trail, as one observer remembered, "he wore a mixed jeans coat, clawhammer style, short in the sleeves and bob-tail—in fact it was so short in the tail he could not sit on it; flax and towlinen pantaloons, and a straw hat."

When he attended political rallies, members of the Clary's Grove gang, who had recently been his companions in arms, often accompanied him. At his maiden speech, in Pappsville, a village eleven miles west of Springfield, a fight broke out in the crowd, and Lincoln saw one of his supporters attacked. Quitting the platform, he strode into the audience, seized the assailant by the neck and the seat of his trousers, and, as one witness recalled, threw him twelve feet away. As usual, memory is elastic, but there is no doubt that Lincoln, who now stood six feet and four inches tall, was strong enough to intimidate any rival.

In his speeches the candidate made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was, as he said, "a stanch anti-Jackson, or Clay, man." But for the most part he discussed local issues, like the need to improve the Sangamon River, and avoided larger questions by announcing, "My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance."

When the votes were counted, Lincoln ran eighth in a field of thirteen candidates, the top four of whom were elected. He was, of course, disappointed, and years later he made a point of noting that this election was the only time he "was ever beaten on a direct vote of the people." He could take comfort, however, from the returns from his own New Salem precinct, where he received 277 of 300 votes cast.

III

Consoling as that expression of neighborly support was, it did little to solve his acute financial problems. As he noted in an autobiographical statement: "He was now without means and out of business, but was anxious to remain with his friends who had treated him with so much generosity, especially as he had nothing elsewhere to go to." He began looking about for a job, and

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for a future. He considered becoming a blacksmith, but he wanted to avoid a life of physical labor. He thought of studying law. The profession had interested him even as a boy in Indiana, when, according to much later recollections, he attended sessions of local courts at Rockport and Boonville and supposedly read the copy of the *Revised Laws of Indiana* owned by the local constable, David Turnham. But on reflection he concluded that he needed a better education to succeed.

Opportunity came his way when James and J. Rowan Herndon decided to sell the general store they owned in New Salem. William F. Berry, who had been a corporal in Lincoln's company during the Black Hawk War, arranged to buy James Herndon's interest in the store, and J. Rowan Herndon offered the other half interest to Lincoln, who was boarding with him. No money passed hands; Lincoln signed a note for his share. "I believed he was thoroughly honest," Rowan Herndon explained, "and that impression was so strong in me I accepted his note in payment of the whole."

Lincoln and Berry now owned one of the three stores in New Salem, competing with the well-managed establishment of Samuel Hill and John McNeil and a newer business owned by Reuben Radford. In January 1833, Radford managed to offend the Clary's Grove boys, who retaliated by trashing his store—knocking out the windows, breaking the crockery, and turning the goods topsy-turvy. In despair, he decided to sell out. Canny young William Greene, Jr., bought his store and his damaged stock of goods for $400 and immediately sold both to Lincoln and Berry, making a profit of $250. Once again, the partners signed notes to cover most of their new purchase.

Moving their meager stock into Radford's building, Lincoln and Berry were ready for business. Like most other country stores, they supplied customers with tea and coffee, sugar and salt, and a few other commodities that could not be produced in the village. In addition, the store carried blue calico, brown muslin, men and women's hats, and a small selection of shoes.

There was rarely enough business to keep the partners occupied, and Lincoln was able to spend much of his time reading. Indeed, during his New Salem years he probably read more than at any other time in his life. Fiction did not interest him. He made one unsuccessful attempt at *Ivanhoe,* but he had no other acquaintance with the great British and American novelists. He did not care much for most history and biography, which he thought untrustworthy. Some poetry deeply moved him, and he memorized long passages from Shakespeare's plays. Jack Kelso probably introduced him to Robert Burns, whose "generous heart, and transcendent genius" he praised many years later, while President, and he was soon able to recite "Tam o'Shanter," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and other long poems. He developed a liking for the melancholy, sentimental verse that was so popular during the era, and he thought Oliver Wendell Holmes's "The Last Leaf"

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"inexpressibly touching." When Dr. Jason Duncan showed him a poem called "Mortality," he was moved by its mournful message:

> 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.

Lincoln memorized all fifty-six lines, each more doleful than the last, and recited it so often that people began to think he was the author. Not until many years later did he learn that the poem was the work of William Knox, a Scotsman, who was a contemporary of Sir Walter Scott.

Lincoln's real interest was in the structure and use of language, and he decided that he needed to learn grammar. Samuel Kirkham's *English Grammar* was considered the best guide, and when Lincoln learned that a farmer named John C. Vance had a copy, he willingly walked six miles into the country to get it. He set himself systematically to master this detailed text, committing large segments to memory. Then he asked his friends to test his mastery, and when challenged to provide a definition of a verb, could recite, "A VERB is a word which signifies to BE, to DO, or to SUFFER; as I *am;* I *rule;* I *am ruled.*" Some of those who participated in this drill—like Mentor Graham, the semiliterate schoolmaster, who did not himself own a grammar—later came to consider themselves Lincoln's instructors, but in fact he was, in grammar as in other subjects, essentially self-taught. He took pride in his mastery of Kirkham, and he thought it sufficiently important to mention in his 1860 autobiographical sketch that he had "studied English grammar, imperfectly of course, but so as to speak and write as well as he now does."

Lincoln's autobiography did not mention another kind of reading. Though New Salem had no churches, it was an intensely religious community. Baptists held services in the schoolhouse, and other denominations met regularly in private homes. In the summer the circuit-riding evangelist Peter Cartwright often conducted a revival meeting. There were no Catholic or Jewish residents, but Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were constantly engaged in hairsplitting doctrinal controversies. A young Yale Divinity School graduate who came to teach in this central Illinois region found that he "was plunged without warning and preparation into a sea of sectarian rivalries, which was kept in constant agitation." Inevitably these religious wars attracted Lincoln's attention, though, like his father, he was reluctant to accept any creed. His parents' Baptist belief in predestination was deeply ingrained in his mind, though he felt more comfortable in thinking that events were foreordained by immutable natural laws than by a personal deity. To his cool, analytical mind the ideas of the evangelists were less persuasive than those of the few local freethinkers, who gathered about the

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store cracker barrel and, when there were no customers in sight, engaged in speculation about the literal accuracy of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, the divinity of Christ, and the possibility of miracles.

These conversations introduced Lincoln to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason,* that classic rationalist attack on revealed religion, and he probably also read some of Constantin de Volney's *Ruins of Civilizations,* which argued that morality was the only essential, demonstrable part of religion. Discussion of such issues was heresy in this rigidly orthodox frontier community, and inevitably reports of Lincoln's participation in these conversations leaked out. So damaging was the allegation that he was "an open scoffer at Christianity" that in his race for Congress in 1846 he was obliged to issue a formal denial: "That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular." He went on to explain with characteristic clarity his religious views: "It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what I understand is called the 'Doctrine of Necessity'—that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument."

There was time for endless abstract discussions in the Lincoln and Berry store, because it was clear from almost the beginning the enterprise was not going to be a success. It would be easy to blame the partners. Berry may well have been a heavy drinker, as tradition reports, and even the usually charitable Lincoln agreed that he was "a thriftless soul." Doubtless Lincoln was more interested in reading or in telling anecdotes than he was in selling his wares. But the basic reason for the failure was that by 1833 New Salem had ceased to grow. Forced to maintain what was essentially a barter economy because the Sangamon River was not adequate to carry their surplus produce to the market and there were no roads or railroads, its residents had no money to pay for even the meager goods offered by Lincoln and Berry.

The only branch of the business that showed any profit was the sale of whiskey, which Illinois law permitted the partners to sell, without license, in quantities of one quart or more for hard liquor or two gallons for beer and cider. On January 4, 1833, as business was clearly slipping, Berry first applied for a license to sell liquor by the drink—whiskey at 12½ cents, rum at 18¾ cents, and so on. The license was issued in the name of Berry & Lincoln, but Lincoln's signature was not in his own handwriting. Berry may have acted against his partner's will in converting the store, now nearly empty of other goods, into a "grocery." In later years memories would sharply differ over whether Lincoln himself ever sold liquor by the dram. Stephen A. Douglas called him "a flourishing grocery keeper in the town of New Salem," but the preponderance of the evidence supports Lincoln's own

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statement that he "never kept a grocery any where in the world." At any rate, the tavern license failed to save the Berry & Lincoln store, which, as Lincoln said, shortly afterward "winked out."

With the failure of the store, Lincoln was out of a job, and he had no money. Once more he did day labor, like splitting rails, and he said he worked the latter part of the winter "in a little still house at the head of a hollow." He picked up a few dollars serving on juries, clerking at elections, and carrying poll sheets to Springfield. But it grew obvious that without regular employment he would soon have to leave New Salem. Fortunately he had good friends, who wanted to make it possible for him to stay. Several of them rallied to procure for him the appointment as village postmaster. The incumbent, Samuel Hill, the storekeeper, apparently did not want the job very badly, because he neglected women standing in line for mail in favor of men desiring to purchase liquor. With a little pressure he was persuaded to resign, and on May 7 Lincoln received the place.

It was a very modest appointment—so modest that the Jackson administration overlooked his strong support of Henry Clay, considering, as Lincoln speculated, the office "too insignificant to make his politics an objection." But he was overjoyed by it. I "never saw a man better pleased," Dr. John Allen reported. As postmaster, he would "have access to all the News papers —never yet being able to get the half that he wanted before."

The duties of his new job were not onerous. Carried on horseback, the mails were supposed to arrive twice a week—when they were not delayed by snow, rain, floods, and other accidents. The recipient of a letter, rather than the sender, usually paid the postage, and it was the postmaster's job not merely to deliver the mail but to collect the fee. The charge varied with the weight of the letter and the distance it had traveled; for instance, it cost 6¢ to receive a letter consisting of a single sheet that had traveled thirty miles, and double that amount for a two-page letter. Newspapers paid a lower rate. The postmaster received a percentage of all receipts, but in New Salem the amount was small. In 1834–1835, the only full year of Lincoln's tenure for which records have been preserved, he received $55.70. The best estimate is that his compensation for the three years he served as postmaster was between $150 and $175.

Lincoln seems to have had the unusual notion that a public servant's first duty is to help people, rather than to follow bureaucratic regulations. If residents did not pick up their mail at the post office in Samuel Hill's store, he would often put the letters in his hat and deliver them in person, sometimes walking several miles to do so. He liberally interpreted the Post Office Department's rule that he could send and receive personal mail without charge but would be subject to a fine if he franked anyone else's letters. In a letter dated September 17, 1835, Mathew S. Marsh described the way Lincoln conducted the post office: "The Post Master (Mr. Lincoln) is very careless about leaving his office open and unlocked during the day—half the time I go in and get my papers, etc., without anyone being there as

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was the case yesterday. The letter was only marked twenty-five [cents] and even if he had been there and known it was double, he would not have charged me any more—luckily he is a clever fellow and a particular friend of mine. If he is there when I carry this to the office—I will get him to 'Frank' it." Risking a $10 fine, Lincoln wrote on the back: "Free, A. Lincoln, P.M., New Salem, Ill., Sept. 22."

At the same time, he was scrupulous in keeping financial records, and he fiercely resented any imputation of irregularity. When George C. Spears requested a receipt for the postage he had paid on his newspaper, Lincoln responded sharply: "I am some what surprised at your request. I will however comply with it. The law requires News paper postage to be paid in advance and now that I have waited a full year you choose to wound my feelings by insinuating that unless you get a receipt I will probably make you pay it again." More than a year after the New Salem office had been discontinued and after he moved to Springfield, he turned over to the Post Office Department the precise balance of his receipts, $248.63.

Though appointment as postmaster gave Lincoln a position in the community, an occasion to talk and visit with the residents of the town, and an opportunity to read all newspapers that came into the office, it did not provide a livelihood, and his friends looked for ways for him to supplement his income. One of them learned that John Calhoun, recently appointed county surveyor, was looking for an assistant and strongly recommended Lincoln. Before accepting, Lincoln hesitated because Calhoun was a very active Democratic politician, but he was assured that he would not be expected to compromise his principles. Knowing nothing of surveying, he secured copies of Abel Flint's *System of Geometry and Trigonometry with a Treatise on Surveying* and Robert Gibson's *Treatise on Practical Surveying,* scraped together enough money to procure a compass and chain, and, as he said, "went at it." Setting himself to learn the principles of trigonometry and their practical application to surveying, he studied very hard, and he was soon able to take to the field.

Surveying was difficult work. On a typical survey Lincoln, accompanied by two chainmen, had to push into briar patches, slog through swamps, and cut through wilderness undergrowth in order to set their markers and measure their angles. At the end of a day's work he would often come in with his clothes torn and his legs scratched up from the briars. When friends tried to commiserate with him, he would just laugh and say "that was a poore [sic] man's lot." But after one of his early surveys, for a farmer named Russell Godbey who lived six miles north of New Salem, he accepted as payment two buckskins, which Hannah Armstrong, Jack Armstrong's wife, used to "fox" his pants to protect him from briars. Ordinarily, however, he received payment in cash, according to a scale set up by the state, which allowed him $2.50 for each quarter section surveyed.

As Lincoln gained experience, he undertook increasingly complicated surveys. He was the principal surveyor in locating a road from the Sangamon

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River, through New Salem, and on in the direction of Jacksonville. New Boston, Bath, Petersburg, and Huron were among the towns that he laid out. All his work was careful and meticulously accurate. As a resident of Athens, Illinois, recalled: "Mr Lincoln had the monopoly of finding the lines, and when any dispute arose among the Settlers Mr Lincolns Compass and chain always settled the matter satisfactorily."

When his surveying fees were added to his post office commission, he began to have enough to live on. Then the notes that he had so freely signed to finance the Berry & Lincoln store began to come due.

IV

This financial pressure gave special urgency to Lincoln's second race for the state legislature in 1834. Apart from all other reasons, he wanted to be elected because of the salary. Though party lines were by this time more sharply defined, with Democrats strongly backing their hero, Andrew Jackson, in his decision to kill the Bank of the United States, and their opponents, now known as Whigs, as fiercely loyal to Jackson's archenemy, Henry Clay, Lincoln made no mention of his support for Clay's American System. Indeed, he issued no statement of principles and published no speeches. Instead, he conducted a handshaking campaign, stopping to greet and talk with voters in every part of the county where his work as deputy surveyor brought him. Reaching Rowan Herndon's house near Island Grove, he went out into the field where some thirty men were at work harvesting grain. When some of them grumbled that they would never vote for a man who could not hold his own in the field, he responded, "Boys if that is all I am shure [sic] of your votes." Taking hold of the cradle with perfect ease, he led the harvesters on one full round of the field. "The Boys was satisfied," Herndon recalled, "and I don't think he Lost a vote in the Croud."

Behind Lincoln's silence on the issues lay political calculation. The village of New Salem was as strongly in favor of Whig policies as Lincoln himself; it needed the roads, commerce, and economic expansion that the Whig party promised. But the self-subsisting farmers in the countryside were Democrats, ardent supporters of President Jackson. Many of these, like the Clary's Grove boys, favored Lincoln on purely personal grounds and, according to Stephen T. Logan, his future law partner, "they told their democratic brethren in the other parts of the county that they must help elect Lincoln, or else they wouldn't support the other democratic candidates." As a result, Democratic leaders approached Lincoln with a deal. There were, again, thirteen candidates for the state legislature, only four of whom would be elected. Democrats especially feared John Todd Stuart, who was not only a leader of the Whig party but a likely candidate for the next United States Congress. They offered to drop their support of two Democratic candidates and to concentrate their votes on Lincoln, in the hope of electing him rather than Stuart.

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Lincoln immediately put their proposition before Stuart, who was so confident of his own strength that he urged him to accept the Democrats' support. The election returns on August 4 justified Stuart's course. Lincoln received 1,376 votes—the second-highest number of any candidate—and was elected. So was Stuart, who narrowly edged out the strongest Democratic contender.

Elated, Lincoln began to prepare for his new job by beginning to study law. A year earlier he had thought about this possibility but had rejected it as being beyond his scope. But since that time he had had several opportunities to observe the proceedings in the Sangamon County Circuit Court in Springfield, where he was called as a witness in two cases and was impaneled as a juror in three small cases. Observing the highly informal procedures of the court and learning that most of the leading lawyers were self-educated doubtless led him to believe that this was a forum in which he could successfully compete. During the 1834 canvass Stuart encouraged him to reconsider his decision and offered to help him. After the election he often rode, or sometimes walked, into Springfield to borrow Stuart's law books. When he first showed up at the office, he was timid and quiet, and Henry E. Dummer, Stuart's law partner, thought him "the most uncouth looking young man I ever saw." On one of these trips to Springfield, he attended an auction, where he picked up a copy of Blackstone's *Commentaries* and then, as he wrote later, he "went at it in good earnest."

In other ways, too, Lincoln began readying himself for his first appearance at Vandalia, the state capital. Shortly after the election, he approached Coleman Smoot, one of the richest men in the New Salem area, asking to borrow some money to carry him over until he began to receive his legislator's salary. Of the $200 Smoot loaned him, Lincoln spent $60 on the first suit of clothes he ever owned. It was, for the time, a large amount—more than half a month's salary of the governor of the state—but Lincoln was determined, as he told Smoot, "to make a decent appearance in the legislature."

Lincoln's first session as an Illinois state legislator (December 1, 1834, to February 13, 1835) was not a memorable one. For the most part, he was a silent observer of the proceedings, exceptionally faithful in his attendance, and generally following the lead of more experienced legislators like Stuart, with whom he roomed. He found it easy enough to get around in Vandalia, which, though the state capital, was only a village of some 800 or 900 inhabitants. Like most of the eighty other legislators, he stayed at one of the boarding taverns, which bore names like the Vandalia Inn and the Sign of the Green Tree. Though he was the next-to-the-youngest member of the legislature, he quickly learned that he was no more inexperienced than most of his colleagues. All but nineteen of the fifty-five House members were, like himself, serving their first term.

The statehouse, where the legislators met, was a badly built, two-story brick building, hastily erected after fire had destroyed an earlier capitol. By 1834 it was already dilapidated, for the walls bulged ominously at points and

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falling chunks of plaster occasionally imperiled speakers. The House of Representatives met in a large, bare room on the ground floor, where members sat three to a table. Furnishings were spare: a pail and two or three tin cups for water; boxes containing sand for tobacco chewers; candles for night work; and a stove. Most of the business of the legislature, like that of any lawmaking assembly, was of a routine nature, like appropriating $2.50 to Marmaduke Vickery "for fixing the stoves for [the] State House," passing a bill to encourage the killing of wolves, and granting permission to Clayborn Bell to change his name to Clayborn Elder Bell.

As the session wore on, Lincoln grew more at home in the legislature. His skill in drawing up legislation, hesitant at first, steadily improved, and his colleagues, impressed by his mastery of the technical language of the law, began asking him to draft bills for them in his firm, legible handwriting. He participated more freely in the debates and apparently convulsed the house in brief remarks on the naming of a surveyor of Schuyler County. In the belief that the incumbent was dead, a new surveyor had been named, who discovered that his predecessor was very much alive. (He "persisted not to die," as Lincoln expressed it.) Legislators were in a quandary until Lincoln urged them to do nothing. If in the future "the old surveyor should hereafter conclude to die, there would be a new one ready made without troubling the legislature." Legislative wit is so rare that, however feeble, it elicits laughs.

V

At the end of the session Lincoln drew his salary warrant for $158—he had already received $100 in December—and returned to New Salem with more money than he had ever had before. He needed it all. Just before he left for Vandalia, the Sangamon County Circuit Court issued a judgment against him and Berry for overdue notes. When they were unable to pay, the sheriff attached their personal possessions, including Lincoln's horse, saddle, bridle, surveying compass, and other equipment. The action deprived Lincoln of his means of livelihood. Then, in January 1835, while Lincoln was still in Vandalia, Berry died, leaving practically no estate. Legally, Lincoln was responsible for only half their debts, but he insisted he would pay them all when he was able. That obligation, which Lincoln and his friends jokingly referred to as his "national debt," weighed heavily on him when he returned from the state capital. Indeed, it would be several years before he could pay it off.

With little else to do during the spring and summer of 1835 except deliver the mail twice a week, he could spend all his time on his law books. To judge from the advice that he later gave other law students, he read Blackstone through twice. As usual, he did not merely memorize the arguments but rephrased them two or three times in his own language until he had mastered them. R. B. Rutledge, whose father owned the inn at New Salem,

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recalled that "his practice was, when he wished to indelibly fix anything he was reading or studying on his mind, to write it down, [I] have known him to write whole pages of books he was reading." Soon he branched out to study the other standard texts of the era: Chitty's *Pleadings,* Greenleaf's *Evidence,* and Joseph Story's *Equity Jurisprudence.* In an 1860 autobiography one four-word sentence summarized how he mastered these difficult works: "He studied with nobody."

Much of the time as he read, he sat, barefoot, propped against a tree, and then, for variety, he would lie on his back and rest his long legs on the tree trunk. One friend noted with amusement that he moved as the sun moved, grinding around the trunk to keep in the shade. Even when he walked, he carried a book with him, and, though he pleasantly responded to interruptions, he promptly went back to reading. "He read so much—was so studious—too[k] so little physical exercise—was so laborious in his studies," Henry McHenry remembered, "that he became emaciated and his best friends were afraid that he would craze himself."

After a month or so, life began to get a little easier for him. In March, when the sheriff put up his belongings for auction, his horse was for some unexplained reason exempt. "Uncle" James Short, one of Lincoln's greatest admirers, bid in the surveying equipment for $120 and immediately returned it to him. By the end of the month he was again in the field, making surveys and earning fees. But, as he noted in an autobiographical statement, he only "mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills."

Behind Lincoln's urgency to become a lawyer there was now a new force: he was romantically involved. From almost the day of his arrival in New Salem, the good women of the village had matrimonial plans for him. They found his awkward clumsiness touching, and they noted how tender he was with small children and how affectionate he was to kittens and other pets. He needed someone to cook for him and feed him, so as to fill out that hollow frame, someone to clean and repair his clothing, which—except for that expensive legislative suit—seemed never to fit and always to be in tatters. In short, he needed a wife.

But he was extremely awkward around women. With the wives of old friends, like Mrs. Hannah Armstrong, he could be courtly, even affectionate, but he froze in the presence of eligible girls. At his store he had been reluctant to wait on them, and at Rutledge Tavern he was unwilling to sit at the table when a well-dressed Virginia woman and her three daughters were guests. Efforts of New Salem matrons to match him with a Miss Short and a Miss Berry failed completely.

But one young woman in the village did interest him greatly. She was Ann Rutledge, the daughter of one of the founders of the village and the owner of the tavern, where he roomed and boarded some of the time. She was a very pretty girl, with fair skin, blue eyes, and auburn hair. Only five feet and three inches tall, she weighed between one hundred and twenty and one hundred and thirty pounds. "Heavy set," Mrs. Samuel Hill called

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her—but in Lincoln's eyes this was no disadvantage, for all of the women he loved were plump. In addition, a villager recalled, she was "good—kind, social—goodhearted." Another rhapsodized that she had "as pure and kind a heart as an angel, full of love—kindness—sympathy."

When Lincoln first came to New Salem, Ann was only a schoolgirl in Mentor Graham's school, and, as always, he found it easy to talk with someone younger than himself. Later he saw more of her when she took over the management of her father's tavern, the largest building in New Salem, a log house with two large rooms on the ground floor and two more upstairs for guests. Pretty, quick, and domestic, she naturally attracted the attention of eligible bachelors, like Samuel Hill, the ugly, crude, but well-to-do storekeeper, whose advances she did not encourage. Hill's partner, John McNeil, a New Yorker, who boarded at Rutledge Tavern, met a warmer reception. Presently it became known throughout the village that they were to be married. Then, toward the fall of 1833, McNeil made a confession to Ann. His real name was John McNamar. (Lincoln already knew this, because he had witnessed land transactions where the man signed his proper name.) His father had fallen on hard times in New York, and he had come West to redeem the family's fortune. He had changed his name because, as Herndon put it, he feared "that if the family in New York had known where he was they would have settled down on him, and before he could have accumulated any property would have sunk him beyond recovery." But now he had saved up, from his store and his farm, some $10,000 or $12,000, a sizable sum, and he was going to return to New York and bring his family back to New Salem with him. Then he and Ann would be married.

After McNamar left, Ann told his story to other members of her family, who received it with skepticism. There was, they thought, something wrong in McNamar's story about deserting his family in order to save them. A man who changed his name must have a lurid past. Probably he had jilted Ann and would never return to New Salem. Such fears, however, were kept very quiet, for in Victorian America, a spurned woman was suspected of having some moral blight.

Lincoln, of course, knew of the engagement and of McNamar's departure for the East. As postmaster, he was necessarily aware of the letters the engaged couple exchanged—fairly frequently at first, and then more and more rarely, until correspondence from McNamar ceased. But he, like everybody else, thought the couple was still betrothed, and, as Dr. Duncan, one of the two physicians in New Salem, said, he regarded Ann's engagement to McNamar as "an insurmountable bar[r]ier." These circumstances may have fostered rather than blighted his own interest in Ann. Had she remained free, he might well have remained distant and formal, as he was with other unmarried women, because he was always afraid of intimacy. But since Ann was committed to another, he was able to keep up a joking, affectionate relationship with her.

How that friendship developed into a romance cannot be reconstructed

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from the record. No letter from Ann Rutledge is known to exist, and in the thousands of pages of Lincoln's correspondence, there is not one mention of her name. Apart from one highly dubious anecdote about a quilting bee, there are no stories about the courtship, which, because of Ann's ambiguous relationship to McNamar, was intentionally kept very quiet. Lincoln's long, uninterrupted absence in Vandalia, from November through February, suggests an affectionate, rather than a passionate, affair.

Sometime in 1835, Lincoln and Ann came to an understanding. In later years old-time New Salem residents differed as to whether there was a formal engagement, and whether it was "conditional" or "unconditional." Both parties had good reason to hesitate. Lincoln, who had no profession and little money, doubted his ability to support a wife. Ann strongly felt "the propriety of seeing McNamar, [to] inform him of the change in her feelings and seek an honorable releas[e] before consum[m]ating the engagement with Mr. L. by Marriage." According to Ann's cousin, James McCrady Rutledge, they agreed "to wait a year for their marriage after their engagement until Abraham Lincoln was Admitted to the bar." Understandably, Ann hesitated before agreeing to such an indeterminate arrangement, telling her cousin "that engagements made too far a hed [*sic*], sometimes failed, that one had failed, (meaning her engagement with McNamar)."

That terrible summer of 1835, one of the hottest in Illinois history, when it rained every day, was desperately hard on these young people. When Lincoln was not slogging through the water that covered the whole country, completing his surveys, he worked so unceasingly on his law books that friends feared for his health. They had more reason to worry about Ann's, for in August she fell ill with "brain fever"—probably typhoid, caused when the flood contaminated the Rutledge well—and was put to bed. Though her doctor prescribed absolute quiet, she insisted on seeing Lincoln. A few days afterward she became unconscious, and on August 25 she died.

Lincoln was devastated. This terrible blow must have brought to his mind memories of earlier losses: his brother Thomas, his sister Sarah, and, above all, his mother. His nerves, already frayed by overwork and too much study, began to give way, and he fell into a profound depression. He managed to hold himself together for a time, but after the funeral it began to rain again and his melancholy deepened. He told Mrs. Bennett Abell, with whom he was staying, "that he could not bare [*sic*] the idea of its raining on her Grave." So distraught was he that his friends persuaded him to visit his old friend Bowling Green, who lived about a mile south of New Salem. There he found rest and comfort.

By September 24 he was back making surveys, but the memory of Ann Rutledge did not quickly fade. Many years later, after his first election as President, he began talking with an old friend, Isaac Cogdal, about early days in New Salem, asking the present whereabouts of many of the early settlers. When the name of Rutledge came up, Cogdal ventured to ask whether it was true that Lincoln had fallen in love with Ann. "It is true—true indeed I did,"

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Lincoln replied, if Cogdal's memory can be trusted. "I loved the woman dearly and soundly: she was a handsome girl—would have made a good loving wife. . . . I did honestly and truly love the girl and think often—often of her now."

VI

The death of Ann Rutledge may have symbolized for Lincoln the approaching death of New Salem. After an auspicious beginning the village, lacking roads and river transportation for marketing its produce, began to decline. Property values dropped; the lot on which the Berry & Lincoln store stood, once valued at $100, now went at auction for $10. More and more residents moved away, mostly to nearby Petersburg, which Lincoln finished surveying in February 1836. It was clear that he, too, would soon have to leave.

The special session of the legislature, called for the winter of 1835–1836, did much to shape his future course, but Lincoln was not a leader in any of the three major changes it produced. At this session, for the first time, national politics intruded sharply into the proceedings of the legislature. A presidential election was approaching, and Democrats, aware of considerable hostility toward Andrew Jackson's choice of a successor, Martin Van Buren, sought to unite the party by convening a statewide political convention in Vandalia on the first day of the legislative session. In addition to endorsing Van Buren, the convention vigorously condemned all who were "striving by means of false representations, to create divisions and dissentions [*sic*] among the Democratic party." The action infuriated the Whigs, the minority party, who had hitherto been successful in statewide elections only by encouraging factionalism among the Democrats. Angrily Whig legislators, including Lincoln, condemned the convention system as a device of political manipulators to kill off candidates opposed to them, which "ought not to be tolerated in a republican government," because it was "dangerous to the liberties of the people." It took some years for the Whigs to learn that they, too, could benefit from just this same system, and in the future Lincoln's political career would be shaped in party conventions.

More immediately important was the reapportionment legislation of this session. The population of Illinois had been growing rapidly, mainly in the northern and central parts of the state, and the southern counties, which had been settled first, were heavily overrepresented. Lincoln was in favor of only a moderate reallocation of seats and consequently opposed the more drastic measure approved by the legislature, which gave Sangamon County the largest delegation in the House of Representatives—seven, rather than four, members. The change had major consequences for Lincoln's future political success.

In a third major initiative Lincoln was again a follower, not a leader. One of the main purposes for which Governor Joseph Duncan had called the

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special session was to enact legislation to support the building of a canal that, by connecting the Illinois and Chicago rivers, would link Lake Michigan to the Mississippi. This project held for Illinois an importance comparable with that of the Erie Canal for New York, but hitherto the state had been willing only to authorize and encourage the construction of the canal, rather than to assist the enterprise financially. Now, finally, it was clear that more was needed, and Duncan asked the state to give "the most liberal support" to the project. The legislature obliged by authorizing a loan of $500,000 to support the bonds of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. On a crucial vote (28 to 27) Lincoln supported the measure, which opened the way to subsequent state subsidies for the building of roads and canals.

The vote marked a shift in Lincoln's position on internal improvements. He had long been a supporter of improved river transportation, of canals, of better roads, and, eventually, of railroads, all of which were part of his vision of a prosperous society, linked together by a network of commerce and communication. For a time he hoped that the federal government would distribute "the proceeds of the sales of the public lands to the several states, to enable our state, in common with others, to dig canals and construct rail roads, without borrowing money and paying interest on it." But, failing that, he had felt that such improvements should be completed by private capital. Now, however, he was convinced that unless Illinois was to fall far behind other states, it must support internal improvements with the state's credit.

The impact these three changes had on Lincoln's course would not be evident until the 1836 session of the legislature, and before that he had to run for reelection. Announcing his candidacy in June, he explained his position on the suffrage issue, which was currently a subject of controversy. Illinois extended the ballot to all white male citizens who had resided in the state for six months; foreign-born immigrants did not have the franchise until they were naturalized. Large numbers of these were Irish-born workers on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Democrats favored giving them the vote, but most Whigs did not. Lincoln, who shared the standard Whig belief that property holding ought to be a prerequisite for voting, favored "all sharing the privileges of the government, who assist in bearing its burthens." That meant, he explained, "admitting all whites to the right of suffrage, who pay taxes or bear arms"—and then he obfuscated his message by adding "by no means excluding females." Far from being an early advocate of women's suffrage, Lincoln was apparently making a tongue-in-cheek joke, because everybody knew that under Illinois law women neither paid taxes (husbands or guardians paid them for women who owned property) nor served in the militia. Lincoln's announcement revealed incidentally that he, like virtually every other Illinois politician, did not think African-Americans were entitled to the ballot.

The campaign was a strenuous one. Lincoln, along with the sixteen other candidates, traveled by horseback from one village to another, addressing public meetings at hamlets like Salisbury, Allenton, and Cotton Hill. Speak-

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ing began in the morning and often continued until well into the afternoon, and, as party lines were coming to be more clearly defined, candidates gave their views not merely on local issues but on national ones as well. At times tempers flared. Ninian W. Edwards, the aristocratic and wealthy son of a former governor, was so offended by the remarks of one of his competitors that he drew a pistol on him. Even Lincoln, usually genial, lashed back angrily when "Truth Teller" falsely charged he had opposed paying a state loan, branding the author "a *liar* and a *scoundrel*" and promising "to give his proboscis a good wringing." Mostly, though, he managed criticism with more finesse. At a Springfield rally, when a rival named George Forquer, a well-to-do lawyer who had recently changed his allegiance to the Democratic party and had received a lucrative appointment in return, attacked Lincoln in a sarcastic speech, saying that it was time for this presumptuous young man to be taken down, Lincoln calmly waited his turn. Then, remembering that Forquer had recently installed a lightning rod on his house—the first Lincoln had ever seen, and an object of some curiosity—he lashed back: "The gentleman commenced . . . by saying that this young man will have to be taken down. . . . I am not so young in years as I am in the trick and trades of a politician; but . . . I would rather die now, than, like the gentleman, change my politics and simultaneous with the change receive an office worth $3,000 per year, and then have to erect a lightning-rod over my house to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God."

In the election on August 1, Lincoln received more votes than any other candidate. He continued to have the strong support of his neighbors in New Salem, who were Whigs like himself. But the more rural neighborhoods, like Clary's Grove, were Democratic, and even Jack Armstrong, who continued to be a warm personal friend, failed to vote for him. In the minds of some who had previously been his most loyal followers, Lincoln was distancing himself from his rural origins and was already less a part of New Salem than of Springfield.

VII

The Sangamon delegation to the 1836–1837 session of the legislature became known as the "Long Nine," because the two senators and the seven representatives were all unusually tall in an age when six-foot men were rare; some, like Lincoln, were veritable giants. Their collective height, it was said, totaled fifty-four feet. But they were distinguished even more by their enthusiastic support of two objectives: promotion of Springfield, and state support for internal improvements. The delegation looked to Lincoln, now an experienced legislator though the next-to-youngest member of the group, as their floor leader.

They came to Vandalia instructed by a recent county convention to promote internal improvements. At the capital a statewide convention further agitated the question, demanding a comprehensive program backed by $10,000,000 in state bonds. In the House of Representatives the initiative was

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taken by Stephen A. Douglas, the newly elected member from Morgan County (Jacksonville), who instantly assumed leadership of the Democrats. Only five feet four inches tall but with a massive head and a deep baritone voice, Douglas at the age of twenty-three had already mastered the arts of legislative politics, and he was eager to pass laws that would hasten the economic development of the state. Promptly he introduced a plan for the construction of a central railroad, running north and south through the state, connected with two major east-west lines, all underwritten by the state. Connected with this would be the speedy completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

Whigs welcomed Douglas's initiative, for the internal improvements issue was neither sectional nor partisan. As the legislation moved through the House, more and more additions were made, in order to secure the support of those counties untouched by the main rail lines. Without making surveys or calling for expert advice, the legislature provided for loans up to $10,000,000 to construct a central railroad from Cairo to Galena; one major east-west line, the Northern Cross, connecting Jacksonville, Springfield, and Danville; and six spur lines connecting with the Cairo-Galena route. For the improvement of five rivers $400,000 was allotted, and those counties that benefited neither from railroads nor from river improvement were to receive $200,000. (The Illinois and Michigan Canal was funded under separate legislation.) The bill gave something to everybody.

Lincoln and the other members of the Long Nine strongly supported the measure. Though Lincoln was not a member of the committee that shaped the bill, he was frequently present during its deliberations, and on every roll call he and the rest of the Sangamon delegation voted for it and for all amendments expanding its scope. So did an overwhelming majority of all members of the state legislature. The law represented to them an ambitious but sensible program for the economic development of the state. Envying Massachusetts with its 140 miles of railroad in operation and Pennsylvania with its 218 miles of railroads and 914 miles of canals, nearly everyone agreed with the *Alton Telegraph* that the new legislation would be "the means of advancing the prosperity and future greatness of our state, as much as the birth of Washington did that of the United States."

The panic of 1837 put an end to these high hopes and effectively killed the internal improvements plan. Very little construction was ever completed, and the state was littered with unfinished roads and partially dug canals. The state's finances, pledged to support the grandiose plan, suffered, and Illinois bonds fell to 15¢ on the dollar, while annual interest charges were more than eight times the total state revenues. Inevitably there was a search for scapegoats, and questions were raised about Lincoln's role in promoting such a harebrained and disastrous scheme.

Such criticism was misplaced. It was not stupid or irresponsible to support the internal improvements plan. Had prosperity continued, it might have done as much for the prosperity of Illinois as the construction of the Erie Canal did for that of New York. Nor was it fair to blame Lincoln for the

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enactment of the legislation. Certainly he favored and supported it, but he was not a prime mover behind the bill. If any person could claim that role, it was Stephen A. Douglas.

Later some critics opposed to the internal improvements scheme suggested that Lincoln and the other members of the Long Nine supported it only as a means to secure the removal of the state capital to Springfield. In the next session of the legislature General W. L. D. Ewing charged "that the Springfield delegation had sold out to the internal improvement men, and had promised their support to every measure that would gain them a vote to the law removing the seat of government." But neither Lincoln's record nor that of the other members of the Long Nine showed a pattern of logrolling on the internal improvements legislation, and at the time there was no talk of a trade or a bribe.

It was certainly true that the primary objective of the Long Nine was the relocation of the capital to Springfield. The selection of Vandalia, most people felt, had been a mistake; it was too small, too inaccessible, and, most important, too far south in a state where the central and northern regions were growing most rapidly. But Springfield had rivals, for Alton, Jacksonville, Peoria, and other towns also recognized that relocation of the capital meant huge increases in land values, much new construction, and many jobs.

Those opposed to the choice of Springfield tried to whittle down the influence of the Sangamon delegation in the legislature. The leader in this maneuver was Usher F. Linder, the articulate and self-important representative from Coles County, who proposed splitting off the northwestern sections of Sangamon County, which was half the size of the state of Rhode Island, in order to create a new county, named after Martin Van Buren. The maneuver troubled Lincoln and the other members of the Long Nine, because a reduction in the number of Sangamon representatives at just this time would jeopardize Springfield's chances. They countered by proposing that the new county be carved out of Morgan County as well as Sangamon County, knowing that the representatives of Jacksonville, in Morgan County, would oppose it. Referred to a committee of which Lincoln was chairman, the bill passed the house despite his negative report, but it was killed in the senate. That was exactly what Lincoln had hoped.

More serious was Linder's threat to investigate the Illinois State Bank, located in Springfield, which would probably put that institution out of business and at the same time deliver a severe blow to Springfield's chance to become the capital. Linder shared the general Democratic hatred of all banks and also opposed moving the capital to Springfield. Quickly friends of the bank rushed down from Springfield and supplied Lincoln with facts and ideas to defeat Linder's proposal.

Thus armed, Lincoln on January 11, 1837, took the floor to make his first extended speech in the state legislature. A clumsy, poorly organized effort, it was in part an *ad hominem* attack on Linder's haughty airs and entangled rhetoric. Lincoln claimed that the demand for an investigation was "exclusively the work of politicians," whom he defined as "a set of men who have

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interests aside from the interests of the people, and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a mass, at least one long step removed from honest men." Then he tried to remove the sting of his remarks by adding: "I say this with the greater freedom because, being a politician myself, none can regard it as personal."

Clearly not at home in discussing the economic issues involved in banking, Lincoln resorted to demagogy. An investigation of the bank, he claimed, would encourage "that lawless and mobocratic spirit, . . . which is already abroad in the land, and is spreading with rapid and fearful impetuosity, to the ultimate overthrow of every institution, or even moral principle, in which persons and property have hitherto found security."

Despite its imperfections, the speech helped Lincoln's standing, both in the legislature and in the public press. The *Vandalia Free Press* published it in full, and Springfield's *Sangamo Journal* reprinted it, with the editorial comment, "Our friend carries the true Kentucky rifle and when he fires he seldom fails of sending the shot home."

A third legislative initiative may have been only indirectly connected with plans to block the transfer of the capital to Springfield. Since the first publication of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* in 1831, Southern states had been growing increasingly angry over the rise of antislavery in the North, and Southern legislatures began passing resolutions demanding the suppression of abolitionist societies, which they said were circulating incendiary pamphlets among the slaves. These complaints received a generally favorable hearing in most Northern states, and Illinois, with its population largely of Southern birth, was no exception. The legislature passed a set of resolutions condemning abolitionist societies and affirming that slavery was guaranteed by the Constitution. For the most part, support of the resolutions was nonpartisan, though Democrats were more vehement in favoring them than Whigs, and they were adopted by the rousing vote of 77 to 6. The only reason to suspect that the opponents of Springfield had a hand in shaping these resolutions was the major role that Linder played in sponsoring them —the same Linder who had tried to partition Sangamon County and to destroy the Illinois State Bank at Springfield. Doubtless he wanted to show that Springfield, on that line where Southern and Northern settlements in Illinois were beginning to touch, was far less sympathetic to the slave states, which absorbed so much of the produce of Illinois, than Alton or Vandalia.

If this was his plan, it succeeded, because two of the Sangamon delegation, Lincoln and Dan Stone, a Vermonter, voted against the resolutions. Because neither made any public statement at the time, the damage that their votes did to support for Springfield in southern Illinois was kept to a minimum. Only after the removal of the capital and an internal improvements bill were agreed on did Stone and Lincoln present a protest against the resolutions. It was a cautious, limited dissent. Instead of the resolution of the General Assembly declaring that "the right of property in slaves, is sacred to the slave-holding States by the Federal Constitution," Stone and Lincoln suggested, "The Congress of the United States has no power, under

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the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States." Where the General Assembly announced, "we highly disapprove of the formation of abolition societies, and of the doctrines promulgated by them," the two Sangamon legislators voiced their belief "that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy; but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils."

After defeating all efforts to undermine the influence of the Sangamon delegation, Lincoln and the other members of the Long Nine shepherded through the legislature the bill to move the capital. The maneuvering required a delicate touch, and Lincoln's political skills were repeatedly tested. Several times it seemed that the bill to relocate the capital would meet certain defeat. On one occasion, in order to eliminate the smaller and poorer towns from the competition to replace Vandalia, Lincoln drafted an amendment requiring that the city selected must donate $50,000 and two acres of land for new state buildings; then, to keep it from being known that this was a move in the interest of Springfield, which could afford such a gift, he allowed the amendment to be introduced by a member from Coles County. Twice the bill was tabled, and it was, as Robert L. Wilson, one of the Long Nine recalled, "to all appearance . . . beyond resussitation [sic]." But Lincoln, Wilson reported, "never for one moment despaired but called his Colleagues to his room for consultation," and gave each an assignment to lobby doubtful members. When debate was renewed, the outcome was still doubtful. To win further support Lincoln accepted two unimportant amendments and added one of his own: "The General Assembly reserves the right to repeal this act at any time hereafter." It was in reality meaningless, for of course the legislature always had a right to repeal laws; but the change gave a plausible excuse to vote for the bill, which passed, 46 to 37. After that came the balloting on the site, and from the initial tally it was clear that Springfield had a strong lead. On the fourth ballot the work of the Long Nine paid off, and on February 28, Springfield received a clear majority of all the votes.

That night the victorious Sangamon delegation had a victory celebration, at Capp's Tavern, to which all members of the legislature were invited. Cigars, oysters, almonds, and raisins disappeared rapidly, as did eighty-one bottles of champagne, for which the wealthy Ninian Edwards paid $223.50. Afterward there were further celebrations in Springfield and other parts of Sangamon County, which the Long Nine attended. At the Athens rally the toast was "Abraham Lincoln one of Natures Noblemen."

When the legislature adjourned, Lincoln returned to New Salem to say good-bye to his old friends. In September two justices of the Illinois Supreme Court had licensed him to practice law, and on March 1 his name was entered on the roll of attorneys in the office of the clerk of the Supreme Court. On April 15, 1837, he removed to Springfield, where Stuart took him into partnership, and the two opened an office at No. 4 Hoffman's Row.

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CHAPTER THREE

Cold, Calculating, Unimpassioned Reason

On April 15, 1837, Lincoln rode into Springfield on a borrowed horse, with all his worldly possessions crammed into the two saddlebags. At the general store of A. Y. Ellis & Company on the west side of the town square, he inquired how much a mattress for a single bed, plus sheets and pillow, would cost. Joshua F. Speed, one of the proprietors, reckoned up the figures and announced a total of $17. Lincoln replied that was doubtless fair enough but that he did not have so much money. Telling Speed that he had come to Springfield to try an "experiment as a lawyer," he asked for credit until Christmas, adding in a sad voice: "If I fail in this, I do not know that I can ever pay you."

Speed, who knew this young man by reputation and had heard him make a political speech, suggested a way he could avoid incurring a debt that clearly troubled him. "I have a large room with a double bed up-stairs, which you are very welcome to share with me," he offered.

"Where is your room?" asked Lincoln.

When Speed pointed to the winding stairs that led from the store to the second floor, Lincoln picked up his saddlebags and went up. Shortly afterward he returned beaming with pleasure and announced, "Well, Speed, I am moved!"

Such a quick alternation from deep despair to blithe confidence was characteristic of Lincoln's early years in the new state capital. He was trying to put together the fragmented pieces of his personality into a coherent pattern. Sometimes he felt he was the prisoner of his passions, but at other times he thought that he could master his world through reason. Often he was profoundly discouraged, and during these years he experienced his

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deepest bouts of depression. But these moods alternated with periods of exuberant self-confidence and almost annoying optimism. In short, he was still a very young man.

I

To Eastern observers, Springfield in the 1830s was a frontier town. Though there were a few brick edifices, many of the residences were still log houses. If the roads were wide, they were unpaved; in the winter wagons struggled through axle-deep mud, and in the summer the dust was suffocating. The town had no sidewalks, and at crossings pedestrians had to leap from one chunk of wood to another. Hogs freely roamed the streets, and there was a powerful stench from manure piled outside the stables. After visiting Springfield, William Cullen Bryant came away with an impression of "dirt and discomfort."

But this was the most cosmopolitan and sophisticated place Lincoln had ever lived. Though Springfield had been in existence only since 1821, it was now a thriving community with 1,500 residents. The Sangamon County Courthouse occupied the center of the town, which was laid out in a regular, rectangular grid. The north-south streets were numbered; those running east-west were named after American presidents. The courthouse—soon to be replaced by the new state capitol—was surrounded by nineteen dry goods stores, seven groceries, four drugstores, two clothing stores, and a bookstore. Four hotels cared for transients. In addition to schools and an "academy" (roughly equivalent to a high school), the town boasted six churches. The professions were represented by eighteen doctors and eleven lawyers. There was a Whig newspaper, the *Sangamo Journal,* edited by Simeon Francis, to whom Lincoln during the previous sessions of the legislature had frequently sent news from Vandalia; and it would shortly be joined by the Democratic organ, the *Illinois Republican,* later rechristened the *Illinois State Register.*

Lincoln had every intention of becoming a part of this bustling community, but, in addition to a lack of education and money, he had a handicap: he was in a sense engaged. After the death of Ann Rutledge, the older women of New Salem urged him to find a wife, as most of the other young men his age were doing. But there were not many eligible young women in the vicinity, and, anyway, he was always awkward in their presence. He had, however, taken a liking to a sister of Mrs. Bennett Abell who visited New Salem in 1833 or 1834. The daughter of a well-to-do Kentucky family, Mary Owens was a handsome young woman with black hair, dark eyes, fair skin, and magnificent white teeth. She impressed everyone with her gay and lively disposition, and the residents of the village considered her "a very intellectual woman—well educated." After she returned to Kentucky, Lincoln is said to have boasted to Mrs. Abell that "if ever that girl comes back to New Salem I am going to marry her."

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On her second visit—about a year after the death of Ann Rutledge—Lincoln began courting Mary Owens, and at first she reciprocated his interest. Then both began to have second thoughts. Granting Lincoln's "goodness of heart," Mary felt that "his training had been different from mine; hence there was not that congeniality which would otherwise have existed." Small events pointed to future difficulties. When she and Lincoln went for a walk with Mrs. Bowling Green, who was struggling to carry a very fat baby, he made no attempt to help her. On another occasion, when several young people were riding horseback to the Greens', she observed that all the other young women were assisted by their escorts in crossing a deep stream, while Lincoln rode ahead, paying her no attention. When she mentioned the neglect to him, he replied oafishly that he reckoned she could take care of herself. Soon she concluded that "Mr. Lincoln was deficient in those little links which make up the chain of woman's happiness."

Lincoln's doubts were even more severe. Maybe Mary had been a little too eager to return to New Salem. He feared "that her coming so readily showed that she was a trifle too willing." He began finding defects in her appearance. From her first visit he remembered that she was pleasingly stout—weighing between 150 and 180 pounds, according to contemporaries—but now she appeared "a fair match for Falstaff." In a burlesque account of the affair, written a few months later, he declared: "Now, when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features, for her skin was too full of fat, to permit its contracting in to wrinkles, but from her want of teeth, weather-beaten appearance in general, and from a kind of notion that ran in my head, that *nothing* could have commenced at the size of infancy, and reached her present bulk in less than thirtyfive or forty years." His reservations were rationalizations. Painfully aware of his humble origins, he was not sure he could make this well-bred young woman happy, and he was too poor to support a wife in comfort. On a deeper level, the problem was that his personality was as yet so incompletely formed that he had great difficulty in reaching out to achieve intimacy with anyone else.

When Lincoln went to Vandalia in December 1836, he and Mary had not reached "any positive understanding," but both felt their informal arrangement might lead to marriage. For the next six months he engaged in an undignified attempt to get out of the liaison without injuring the lady's feelings or violating his sense of honor. Betraying no passion whatever and never mentioning the word "love," his letters to her were, as he admitted, "so dry and stupid" that he was reluctant to send them. His main purpose in writing was to get Mary to take the initiative in breaking off the courtship.

After he moved to Springfield, he grew more than ever convinced that she did not fit in. She would be unhappy, he warned. "There is a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here, which it would be your doom to see without shareing in it," he cautioned. "You would have to be poor without the means of hiding your poverty." "You have not been accustomed to

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hardship," he reminded her, "and it may be more severe than you now immagine."

Apparently neither Lincoln's letters nor the arguments he made when he revisited New Salem in the summer of 1837 convinced Mary that they were incompatible. He began to take a different tack, suggesting that it was for her emotional as well as her physical well-being that she should break off their relationship. "I want in all cases to do right, and most particularly so, in all cases with women," he told her, and he was convinced that it would be best for Mary if he left her alone. "For the purpose of making the matter as plain as possible," he wrote her, "I now say, that you can now drop the subject [of marriage], dismiss your thoughts (if you ever had any) from me forever, and leave this letter unanswered, without calling forth one accusing murmer from me." Indeed, if so doing would add to her peace of mind, "it is my sincere wish that you should." Then, having done his best to persuade her to break their understanding, he manfully announced: "I am willing, and even anxious to bind you faster, if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness."

If Mary wrote a reply to this left-handed proposal, it has not been preserved, but Lincoln recorded that she firmly and repeatedly refused his tepid offer of marriage. To his surprise, instead of being relieved, he felt "mortified almost beyond endurance." "My vanity was deeply wounded . . . that she whom I had taught myself to believe no body else would have, had actually rejected me with all my fancied greatness," he reported some months later. Once it was certain that Mary did not return his affections, he even began to suspect that he was "really a little in love with her." Immensely relieved that the whole affair was over, he wrote a farcical account of his failed courtship —carefully not mentioning Mary Owens by name—to amuse Mrs. O. H. Browning, which ended: "I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying; and for this reason; I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me."

II

"This thing of living in Springfield is rather a dull business after all, at least it is so to me," Lincoln lamented to Mary Owens a month after he had moved from New Salem. "I am quite as lonesome here as [I] ever was anywhere in my life." No doubt he did feel isolated during his first few weeks in town, but he was probably exaggerating his feelings to discourage Mary from further thinking about marriage. Indeed, he was presently surrounded by friends and welcomed in Springfield society.

From the beginning Speed was his close companion, and he became perhaps the only intimate friend that Lincoln ever had. Four years younger than Lincoln, Speed was also a Kentuckian. Unlike Lincoln, though, Speed came from a prominent family that owned a prosperous plantation, called Farmington, near Louisville, tilled by seventy slaves. Speed had attended

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private schools in Kentucky and had studied for two years at St. Joseph's College, in Bardstown. Seeking to make his fortune, he came to Springfield and became a part proprietor of Ellis's store. With flashing blue eyes and a mane of dark curly hair, he was a handsome young man, whose vaguely Byronic air of elegance made him especially attractive to Springfield ladies.

For nearly four years Lincoln and Speed shared a double bed, and their most private thoughts, in the room above Speed's store. No one thought that there was anything irregular or unusual about the arrangement. It was rare for a single man to have a private room, and it was customary for two or more to sleep in the same bed. Years later, when Lincoln was a well-known lawyer, he and the other attorneys traveling the judicial circuit regularly shared beds; only Judge David Davis was allowed to sleep alone, not because of his dignified position but because he weighed over three hundred pounds. Much of the time when Lincoln and Speed were sharing a bed, young William H. Herndon, who had recently been withdrawn from Illinois College in Jacksonville and was clerking in Speed's store, slept in the same room, as did Charles R. Hurst, a clerk in another dry-goods store.

Around Lincoln and Speed gathered other young unmarried men of Springfield, like James H. Matheny, who would become the best man at Lincoln's wedding; Milton Hay, then a law student and clerk in the Stuart & Lincoln office; and James C. Conkling, a Princeton graduate who began practicing law in Springfield in 1838. Before the great fireplace in the back room of Speed's store, they met night after night, to talk and swap stories, and Lincoln with his endless repertoire of anecdotes was always the center of the group. Acting as an informal literary and debating society, the young men read each other's poems and other writings, and, as Herndon recalled, they staged debates on politics, religion, and all other subjects.

Lincoln quickly made other friends in town. William Butler, clerk of the Sangamon County Court, greatly liked this unusual young man who had just moved in from the country and, knowing that he was hard up, generously gave him free board at his house. Simeon Francis welcomed Lincoln to Springfield and opened the columns of the *Sangamo Journal* for anything he might care to write. And John Todd Stuart introduced his new partner to the more exclusive social circles of Springfield.

III

Lincoln found easy acceptance in Springfield because he arrived not as an unknown but as the partner of Stuart, one of the most prominent and successful lawyers in town. Unlike most beginning lawyers, who had to hunt around for business or accept cases that no one else would take, Lincoln began with a very full practice, for Stuart was concentrating on winning a seat in the United States House of Representatives and turned over most of the business of the firm to his junior partner.

Their office was a single room on the second floor in a group of brick

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buildings on Fifth Street known as Hoffman's Row, just a block north of the courthouse square. As Herndon remembered, it was furnished only with "a small lounge or bed, a chair containing a buffalo robe, in which the junior member was wont to sit and study, a hard wooden bench, a feeble attempt at a book-case, and a table which answered for a desk." Here Lincoln and Stuart received clients, heard their complaints, and advised what, if any, action was appropriate. If there was a question of legal precedents, the partners could consult their library, which consisted of a couple of volumes of *Illinois Reports* and some miscellaneous congressional documents, legislative proceedings, and law books; it was a meager resource, but at this time probably no law library in Springfield contained as many as one hundred books.

Lincoln had no difficulty in performing the routine work of the office, like drafting wills or writing deeds; he had done a certain amount of this for his neighbors in New Salem even before he was admitted to the bar. Many of the Stuart & Lincoln cases involved only an appearance before a justice of the peace, few of whom were lawyers. Thus when Joel Johnson accused John Grey of forcible detainer, Stuart & Lincoln represented him at Justice Clemment's hearing. Lincoln was thoroughly acquainted with these procedures, since he had regularly attended Bowling Green's court in New Salem.

More complex cases went to trial before the circuit court, where, again, Lincoln had some experience as an observer and as a witness. Indeed, his familiarity with the process, as well as his expertise as a surveyor, had caused the circuit court in Morgan County (Jacksonville) to use him, even before he was admitted to the bar, as what might be called a paralegal in a disputed case over land and timber.

But now, as a licensed attorney, usually operating without his partner or other associates, he had a much greater responsibility fully to master the forms and procedures of litigation, for even a minor, technical error could cause his client to lose his case. In bringing a case before the circuit court, a lawyer had first to decide whether to plead it "in law" or "in chancery"; the first referred to a highly formal set of proceedings and precedents derived from the British common law, while the second, sometimes called "equity" proceedings, followed somewhat more flexible and discretionary rules. In either case the attorney (and for clarity it will be assumed that he was representing the plaintiff) must first draft a praecipe, a brief request to the clerk of the court to issue a summons to the defendant; the praecipe included a brief statement of the nature of the controversy and the amount of the damages alleged. The plaintiff's lawyer then drafted what was called a declaration, indicating the form of action under which the suit was brought and setting forth the facts of the case.

In common law there were eleven major forms of action—trespass, trespass on the case, replevin, assumpsit, ejectment, etc.—each of which applied to different kinds of suits. An action for trespass, for example, rose when a plaintiff alleged that his person had been interfered with by assault or battery

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or that his land or property had been damaged; but an action for trespass on the case involved indirect or accidental damage or damage to intangible property. Thus a man who claimed a neighbor had stolen his cow would bring an action for trespass, while one who asserted that he had been slandered by his neighbor would bring one for trespass on the case. The lawyer who incorrectly identified the action he was bringing might have his case thrown out of court.

The declaration also included a full account of the plaintiff's version of the facts in the case. This had to be prepared with the utmost care. If it alleged facts that could not be proved in a trial, the plaintiff could lose, even if those facts were not necessary to sustain his case. If it alleged facts that differed from those presented at a trial, his case could be thrown out. In one 1859 decision a case was dismissed because the amount of a promissory note stated in the declaration differed by half a cent from the amount of the note as proved in the trial.

In his early cases Lincoln paid close attention to one of the form books that suggested the proper language for declarations, and in his desire to avoid all technical errors his documents often grew excessively legalistic and wordy. For instance in a May 1838 case in Fulton County for the collection of an unpaid note, his declaration alleged: "For that whereas the said defendants by, and under the name, style, and firm of 'John W. Shinn & Co' heretofore, towit, on the twentythird day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirtysix at Philadelphia, towit, at the county and state aforesaid made their certain promissory note in writing bearing date the date and year aforesaid and thereby then and there promised to pay Twelve months after the date thereof the said plaintiffs in their partnership name of 'Atwood & Co' the sum of Seven hundred and sixtytwo dollars and thirtysix hundredths of a dollar, for value received, and there and then delivered the said promissory note to the said plaintiffs. . . ." As he became more experienced, he pared the legalisms and redundancies, and his declarations became models of simplicity and clarity.

After Lincoln filed his declaration with the clerk of the Sangamon County Circuit Court, the lawyer for the defendant would come back with a demurrer, alleging that the plaintiff's allegations were defective as a matter of law, or a traverse, stating his client's version of the disputed facts or events. Lincoln, for the plaintiff, might respond with a replication, taking exception to that counterstatement, and the opposing attorney could submit a rejoinder. All these papers, which might run to many pages, had to be written out in longhand; there were no secretaries and no copying machines.

Fortunately most of the early cases in which Lincoln was engaged required more common sense than mastery of precedents. They concerned such matters as a suit by Speed, on behalf of A. Y. Ellis & Company, for payment of a debt to the store by one Thomas P. Smith. In a slightly more complicated case Lincoln represented Elijah Houghton, who had been swapping some of his land with David Hart for twelve acres or so along Rock

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