

# Sarah Lincoln Grigsby—who was she?

By Matthew Beard

## Vital Data found<sup>1</sup>:

Born: 10 FEB 1807 in Elizabethtown, Kentucky  
Father: Thomas Lincoln  
Mother: Nancy Hanks  
Married: 2 AUG 1826 in Spencer County, Indiana  
Husband: Aaron Grigsby  
Died: 20 JAN 1828 in Spencer County, Indiana due to childbirth complications (infant died also)  
Buried: Pigeon Church Cemetery, Spencer County, Indiana  
Gravesite: now located in Lincoln State Park, Lincoln City, Indiana<sup>3</sup>  
Best known as: Sister to Abraham Lincoln (b. 1809)

## NGFS Database information (can be found at [www.grigsby.org](http://www.grigsby.org))<sup>2</sup>:

Aaron Grigsby — Rin 2290

Sarah Lincoln — Rin 5223

### Aaron's lineage:

- Son of Reuben Davis Grigsby and Nancy Barker
- Grandson of Charles Grigsby and Elizabeth Lyttle
- Great-Grandson of Charles Grigsby and Sarah Wilkerson
- Great-Great-Grandson of John Grigsby and Jane Rosser (conjecture)

## The short life of Sarah Lincoln:

Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married in Washington County, Kentucky on 12 JUN 1806<sup>4</sup>. Sarah and Abraham were both born in Kentucky. The Lincolns moved to Spencer County, Indiana in 1810. After the death of her mother in 1818, Sarah became the woman of the house and performed most of the household work. An aunt and uncle, Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, had also died of the same illness beforehand. Thomas returned to Kentucky in 1819 and married Sarah Bush Johnston who he had courted before marrying Nancy. Thomas brought Sarah and her children back to Indiana with him. From accounts found, the two Sarah's got along good and liked each other. Sarah Lincoln married neighbor Aaron Grigsby in 1826 at age 19 and moved several miles away. Also about the same time, Matilda, Sarah Bush Johnston's youngest daughter who adored Abe, married Squire Hall and moved away<sup>5</sup>. A year and a half later, Sarah and baby dies in childbirth.

## The ongoing quarrel between Abraham Lincoln and the Grigsby's:

The problems seem to be have started with the death of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby. Abe Lincoln seems to believe that Sarah died because the Grigsby's did not send for a doctor when she started having problems in childbirth<sup>5,6</sup>.

In the spring of 1829, Reuben Grigsby, Jr. and Charles Grigsby, two of Aaron's brothers, decided to marry in a double wedding. Because of the quarrel and ongoing problems, Abraham was not invited to the wedding. This lead to a series of "pranks" and fights among Lincoln's "gang" and the Grigsby's.

The first prank was the night of the wedding. Upset with not being invited to the festivities, Lincoln arranged for a friend to have the bridegrooms led up to the wrong rooms after the party was over. In other words, they were shown to the room of their brother's bride. The mix-up was quickly worked out, but it caused a lot of gossip and laughter in the small community. Later, Lincoln even wrote an account of the affair called "The Chronicles of Reuben" in language that was supposed to be "reminiscent of the Scriptures"<sup>5</sup>.

To further promote the quarrel, Lincoln later added an additional verse about another of Aaron's brothers, William who had been courting a girl, but was rejected by her<sup>5</sup>. The verse can be found on the site of the source

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material, but for decency sake, will not be reprinted here. It basically implies that due to his being bald and ugly, William was more attractive to other men. This seems not to go over too well with William.

William then picked a fight with Abe Lincoln's half-brother, John D. Johnston, at a social event. The father of Green B. Taylor, one of Lincoln's friends, acted as the second for Johnston, and a William Whitten acted as the second for William Grigsby. According to Taylor, "They had a terrible fight and it soon became apparent that Grigsby was too much for Lincoln's man, Johnston. After they had fought a long time without interference, it having been agreed not to break the ring, 'Abe' burst through, caught Grigsby, threw him off and some feet away. There Grigsby stood, proud as Lucifer, and, swinging a bottle of liquor over his head, swore he was 'the big buck of the lick'." He also shouted the "If any one doubts it, he has only to come on and whet his horns"<sup>6,7</sup>.

An additional account states that Lincoln challenged Grigsby to a fight, but Grigsby declined using fists and offered to fight a duel instead. Lincoln would not "fool away his life with one shot", so the matter ended<sup>6</sup>.

The quarrels must have been settled at some time, because Nathaniel Grigsby—an additional brother of Aaron, Charles, Reuben Jr., and William—was later asked about his opinion of Abe Lincoln during their school days:

"Between the shoe and sock and his britches—made of buckskin—there was bare and naked 6 or more inches of Abe Lincoln shin bone. He was always at the head of his class. He progressed rapidly in all of his studies."<sup>10</sup>

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>— Statement about Sarah Lincoln, the National Park Service, found online at [www.nps.gov/abli/lincfacj.htm](http://www.nps.gov/abli/lincfacj.htm) .

<sup>2</sup>— National Grigsby Family Society online database accessed via web pages in the member's only section, [www.grigsby.org](http://www.grigsby.org) .

<sup>3</sup>— Lincoln State Park map, Indiana State Government, found online at [www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/maps/lincoln\\_trail.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/maps/lincoln_trail.pdf) .

<sup>4</sup>— Abraham Lincoln Online web site, 2003, found online at [showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/timeline.htm](http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/timeline.htm) .

<sup>5</sup>— Lincoln, Washington Post, by David Herbert Donald, found online at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/lincoln.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/lincoln.htm) .

<sup>6</sup>— Events and Dates in 1828, taken from Beveridge, Albert J., *Abraham Lincoln*, 1809-1858, 4 volumes, "Standard Library Edition" (New York, Boston, 1928), found online at [www.earlyrepublic.net/yr/28.htm](http://www.earlyrepublic.net/yr/28.htm) .

<sup>7</sup>— Challenged All Comers, taken from *Lincoln's Yarns and Stories*, by Colonel Alexander K. McClure, found online at [www.rickwalton.com/lincoln/linc406.htm](http://www.rickwalton.com/lincoln/linc406.htm) .

<sup>8</sup>— Lincoln's Virtues An Ethical Biography, by William Lee Miller, 2002, ISBN: 0-375-40158-X, online excerpt printed by Houston Chronicle dated 12 APR 2002, found online at [www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/ae/books/ch1/1364752](http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/ae/books/ch1/1364752) .