

Gentryville Man Tells New Stories
Of Lincoln Handed Down in Family

Eli Grigsby, Descendant of Intimate Friends of Emancipator as Youth

Gentryville, Feb. 11 (Special)

About 116 years ago Thomas Lincoln left his old Kentucky home to come to seek a new home in Indiana. Those now living in the hills of northern Spencer county can almost imagine themselves back in those times and see a tall, gaunt lad who was destined, one day as president, to lead the nation safely through the greatest crisis in its history.

From the time they settled here in 1816 until they moved on to Illinois 14 years later the Lincolns were intimate friends of the Grigsbys. Eli Grigsby, a lineal descendant living in Gentryville, has consented (the first time any Grigsby has spoken for publication) to give some interesting and hitherto unpublished facts which he said were passed on to him by his elders.

Most writers say that Thomas Lincoln and his family belonged to Little Pigeon church and that Sarah Lincoln Grigsby lies buried in the churchyard there. This, Grigsby says, is an error. They belonged to the Old Pigeon Primitive Baptist church and she was buried in the cemetery of that church. The Little Pigeon church, three miles south, according to all accounts, was built years after the Lincolns went to Illinois and has no connection with them Grigsby says.

Tells Own Story

Grigsby's story, as written out by him in his own words, follows:

These are the facts as told me by my grandfather, R. D. Grigsby, and my great uncle, Nathaniel (Uncle Nattie) Grigsby.

Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, came from Kentucky in search of a location for a home. He by chance met my great grandfather, Reuben Grigsby, who also was formerly from Kentucky and who owned a large farm, a part of which is now owned by Ed Roos in Clay township.

Editor's Note: This 1932 newspaper article is courtesy of Julie Pennington of Lamar, Indiana. In 1981 she wrote us that her great, great grandmother's name was Mary Jerusha Grigsby Enghoff and Mrs. Enghoff's father's name was Reuben Grigsby (1800 - 1878). Although Ms. Pennington regretted that she did not have very much information concerning this family line, she did add that Eli Grigsby (interviewed in the following article) was born in 1866 and died in 1941. He was a Mason, and his wife, Carrie (1867 - 1941) belonged to the Eastern Star. She also wrote that she had the names of all the Grigsbys buried in Spencer County, Indiana.

A "tierce", as mentioned below, used to be a measure of liquid capacity equal to 42 gallons.

Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, being a cooper by trade, entered into a contract with Reuben Grigsby to take from him trees, which he would split and rive and make into lard tierces, whisky barrels and kegs for Grigsby, who owned and operated a large still, farmed on a large scale, handled large quantities of whisky, meat and lard, and flatboated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers as far as New Orleans for disposition of his products.

Returns for Family

After the contract was made the pole house (open on the south side with skins hung over the opening) was erected by Lincoln, assisted by the Grigsbys. Lincoln then returned to Kentucky for his family who, in due time, arrived at the Grigsby home and stayed with the Grigsbys until rested from their journey, when they moved into the pole house. Then, when not making tierces, barrels and kegs, he took a lease for two acres on a tract of land adjoining the pole house and raised crops and farmed land when not working for Grigsby. This was near the school site where Abraham and his sister Sarah attended school with the Grigsby boys and girls, of whom there were 14, and other neighborhood children.

In due time the Lincolns moved to a house just northeast one-half mile from Old Pigeon church (now a part of Nancy Hanks Lincoln park). Then, in time, they moved to a home purchased by Thomas Lincoln at what is now Lincoln City and where they lived until they emigrated to Illinois.

During all this time, while the Lincoln's were carrying water and doing their washing at the Grigsby spring (now in the northwest corner of the barn lot on the Ed Roos farm about three miles southeast of Gentryville) the courtship of Sarah Lincoln and Aaron Grigsby was in progress, terminating in a happy marriage. But their happiness was of short duration, when she died January 20, 1828, in childbirth, lacking until February 10 of reaching her twenty-first birthday. Her baby was buried in her arms.

Aaron's Grief Heavy

Aaron never ceased to grieve over his loss and lived less than three years, and was buried by the side of his wife and baby in the old Pigeon cemetery.

Abraham Lincoln and my great uncle Nathaniel Grigsby were great chums, Nathaniel being one year older than Abraham. They attended all the log rollings, apple cuttings, social gathering, prize fights, and church gatherings. Uncle Nathan often told me of times when Abraham would borrow a book, about him gathering dry dogwood and hickory limbs to make light for his reading after night and the running and jumping and trying to go with girls. He told me about the sickness and death of Abraham's mother, and the burial, which he attended, and how he showed the Studebakers her grave when they erected the first marker.

My grandfather, R. D. Grigsby, who was younger than Abraham, often would tell me how he would follow Abraham and the older Grigsby boys to a swimming hole in Buckhorn creek; how he would stay nights with his brother, Aaron and wife, Sarah, and how they would make a pallet down for him and Abraham to sleep on, as he (Abraham) stayed most of his time with his sister after her marriage until her death.

Owns Lincoln Land

I have often thought of the time when I was a small boy riding horseback with my grandfather rounding up his stock, cattle, sheep, hogs, as all stock ran at large. Then there came up a severe rainstorm and he led the horses into the old schoolhouse the Lincolns attended and he impressed on my mind what a great man Abraham Lincoln was -- THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. He told me always to remember "This is where Abraham Lincoln went to school." This land was owned by my grandfather, R. D. Grigsby. When I was a small boy I was in all the buildings the Lincolns lived in and I now own the land the pole house and schoolhouse stood on, and the land Thomas and Abraham cleared and made rails and built a fence around, about eight acres.

Abraham Lincoln, after he became president, often corresponded with my grandfather, offering him any position he might want and could fill. The correspondence continued until the death of Lincoln. And when the news of the death of Abraham Lincoln reached here, my grandfather became very sick from the shock and Uncle Nathaniel Grigsby fainted.

When the Lincolns left for Illinois, two of the Grigsbys, Nathaniel and Charlie, accompanied them the first day, stopping at what used to be Lickskillett, stayed all night there, and returned to their home.

Some 20 years ago, with Otis Tribble, I was going over my land -- the 80 acres where the pole house stood and near the schoolhouse site. I had this fenced and many hogs in this field. In crossing the field, near a large mulberry tree, which is still standing, we found an old homemade butcher knife with a black walnut handle, inlaid with silver mountings and rivets, with the inscription "A. Lincoln" cut in the handle. The blade has the point broken off, but the handle is in a good state of preservation. The hogs had rooted this butcher knife up. I consider this one of my most prized possessions.