

THE GRIGSBYS OF INDIANA

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS OF LINCOLN

One branch of the Grigsby family migrated from Kentucky to Indiana. Camelia Denys of Utah feels that they are descended from Charles Grigsby II, the brother of "Soldier John." They settled in Spencer County, Indiana, and became neighbors of the Lincoln's when Abe's parents moved to the same area. This period is well covered in Van Natter's book, Lincoln's Boyhood, a Chronicle of his Indiana Years.

Reuben Davis Grigsby, Sr. - Indian Prisoner

The patriarch of this branch, Reuben Davis Grigsby, Sr., was captured by Indians when he was a little boy. His abductors killed his mother and the other children, but allowed Reuben to live.

This incident is referred to in The Monongalia Story, a Bicentennial History, by Earl L. Core, (McClain Printing Co., Parsons, West Virginia, 1976.)

Tragedy on Rooting Creek. During the summer the Indians attacked the cabin of Charles Grigsby, on Rooting Creek, a tributary of Elk Creek. (EMN: This seems to be in the area of the Penn.-W. Va. boundary line.) James Booth, at "Koon Fort" reported the raid on August 2, 1777 in a letter to Captain Zadock Springer, at Prickett's Fort: "By certain and satisfactory intelligence from the upper garrisons, we learn that on the 31st of last month a certain Charles Grigsby's wife and child were killed and scalped, and one missing supposed to be captivated. He was living on the waters of Elk Creek... went out in the morning after his cows, and on his return found not his family... which convinced him they were taken. And when the news spread, a company pursued them about 4 miles and found her as above. The number of the enemy is supposed to be 13 or 14. Our men intended to pursue them 5 days - on their return will be able to satisfy you more."

According to the family records, Charles Grigsby's wife was a Welsh woman, Elizabeth (Bettie) Lytle, and the family lived on Grigsby Run, a

tributary of Rooting Creek. Reuben, the son, "captivated" by the Indians, about four years old at the time, was held by the Indians for seven or eight years and eventually returned to the settlements.

Charles Grigsby served 174 days under Captain Zackquill Morgan and is shown on the Fort Pitt payroll as being paid thirteen pounds one shilling, on October 4, 1775. He remarried after his first wife's death, and land records indicate her first name was Mary.

Douglas Blue of California tells us that his family remembers that the Indians used to "tease" young Reuben before they would take him along hunting...they would force him to drink a quantity of bear oil. When the Indians finally released him after seven years, he came floating down the Ohio River with an iron pot on his head and a ring in his ear. Douglas Blue was told by his father that when their branch of the family offered Reuben a bed to sleep on, he got down and slept on the floor. Also, in later life he walked with a limp, wore a feather in his cap, and would occasionally, in solitude, greet the rising sun in the manner of an Indian.

Despite these rugged early years, Reuben did well. He married, had seven sons, and settled in Indiana. It was his son, Aaron, who later married Abe Lincoln's sister, Sarah.

The "Lincoln Stories"

We have heard from several people who are either direct descendants of this line, or whose families have passed down "Lincoln stories." For example, Elizabeth Decker of Arizona remembers what her great grandfather used to say about the Lincolns. (Her great grandfather was William E. Grigsby who lived to be 103. Please see the article, "A Grigsby Odyssey.") The story in their family was that Reuben Grigsby's son Aaron - who married Sarah Lincoln - was mean to her, and that when she was expecting a child she had no care. She was to die in childbirth.

William E. Grigsby also recalled that in those days a family was judged as "hardworking," or "no account." Lincoln's father was judged "no account."

Mrs. Naida Upchurch of Illinois wrote that her great grandfather, William R. Grigsby, was once asked if he knew

Lincoln. She is not proud of his reply which was, "Yes, I knew him, and what's more, I didn't like him!"

Hazel and Leonard Grigsby of Attica, Kansas have sent us a great deal of interesting information, including a profile for Leonard's great grandfather, Nathaniel Grigsby, one of Reuben's seven sons.

Nathaniel Grigsby

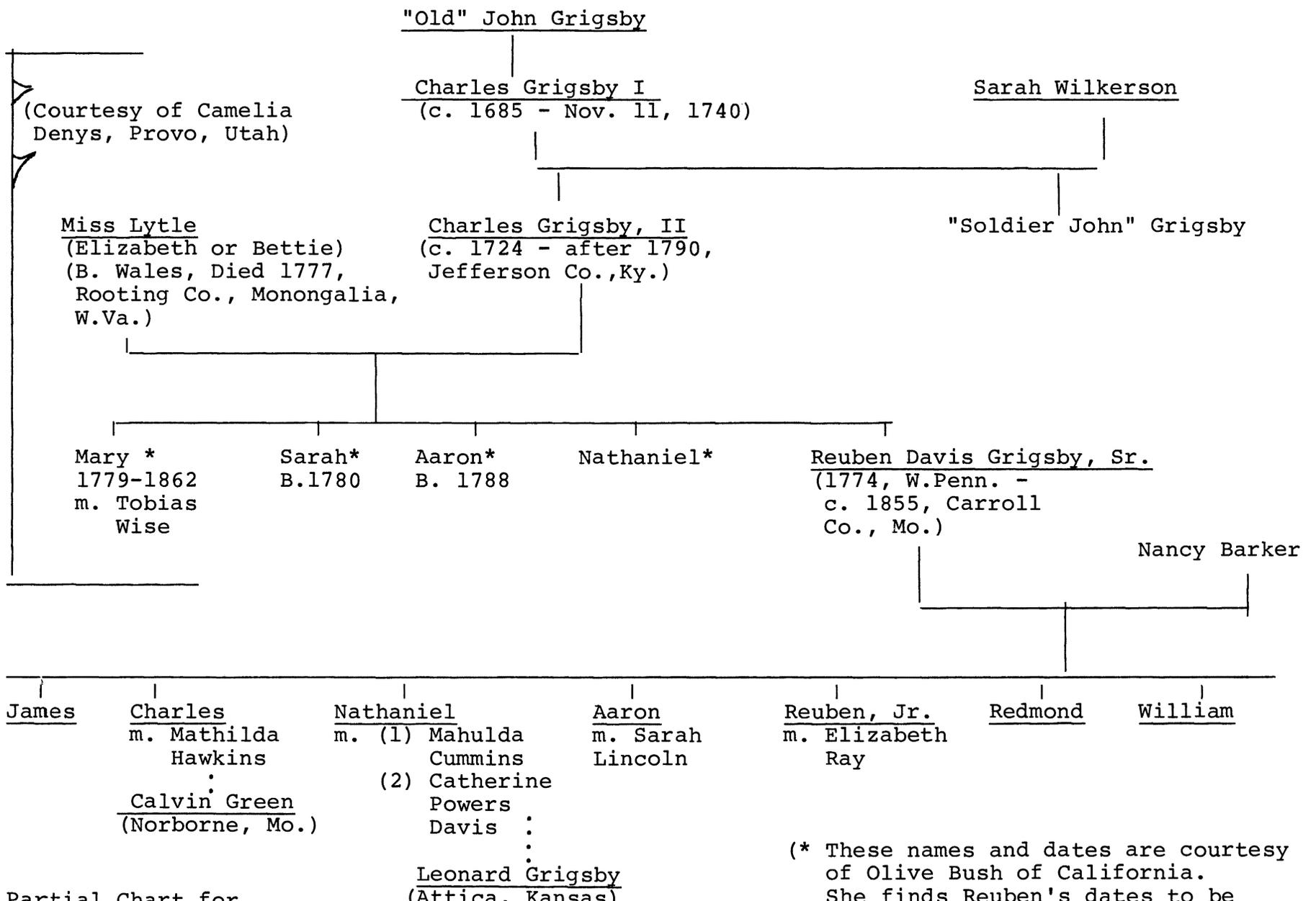
Nathaniel Grigsby was born October 11, 1811 in Nelson County, Kentucky; moved to Spencer County, Indiana in 1815 with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Davis Grigsby, Sr., where he resided until 1855. It was to the Grigsby home that Thomas Lincoln (father of Abraham Lincoln) came and stayed while looking for a new home in the fall of 1816. Mr. Lincoln chose a farm just north of the Grigsby farm, and here the Lincolns resided until they moved on to Illinois in 1830. Thus Nathaniel Grigsby and Abe Lincoln were boyhood pals. Nathaniel's brother, Aaron Grigsby, was the only son of Reuben Grigsby to receive a college education. He later taught Abe Lincoln several terms of school, and Abe stated later in life that he received more help from Aaron's teaching than all others combined. Aaron subsequently married Abe's sister, Sarah Lincoln. The Grigsby and Lincoln families worked together several years hauling timber down to the Ohio River for flat boat construction.

Nathaniel moved to Carroll County, Missouri in 1855 after the death of his wife in 1853 and stayed until the spring of 1861.

Nathaniel was living at Norborne, Carroll County, Missouri in 1860. Nathaniel had written to Lincoln to obtain an appointment to be Republican precinct committee man. He received the appointment and placed Lincoln's name on the 1860 ballot.

All of Nathaniel's neighbors were southern sympathizers. He had been talking about electing Lincoln for president in town. One morning about 2 or 3 a.m. a neighbor rode up to Nathaniel's home and told him not to light any lights. The neighbor wanted to warn him that his neighbors were planning to murder him and he had better be on his way if he wanted to save his life.

After the warning they moved back to Spencer County, Indiana where Nathaniel and his four sons, Ephraim, Dan, Henry and James immediately enlisted in Company C 10th Indiana Cavalry, and he was named 2nd Lieutenant.



Partial Chart for
"The Grigsbys of Indiana -
Friends and Neighbors of Lincoln"

(* These names and dates are courtesy
of Olive Bush of California.
She finds Reuben's dates to be
c. 1773, Va. - 1858, Carroll Co., Mo.)

Nathaniel Grigsby visited with Abe Lincoln several times at the home in Springfield, Illinois after Abe had become a lawyer and a member of the Illinois legislature, and later he visited with Abe in the White House when Abe became President of the United States.

James, youngest son of Nathaniel, joined the army at the age of 14½ years. He put a piece of paper on which he had written the figure 18 into his shoe and when the recruiting sergeant asked his age, he replied he was over 18. James rode through Georgia with General Sherman and was later discharged at Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1865. He walked back to Indiana which took him a month to get home.

The family returned to Carrollton, Missouri where James married and Walter Henry Grigsby was born March 12, 1882 at Norborne, Missouri. In 1885 they came to Harper County, Kansas and settled on a farm in the extreme northwest corner of the county. They lived there until 1890 when they moved into Attica, Kansas.

Walter Henry Grigsby married and had three sons, Leonard, Lester, and Myron, and five daughters, Wava, Maurine, Wilda, Maxine and Anna Mae - all living in Kansas.

Leonard R. Grigsby and Hazel Dee Fix married and have a son, Darrel, and wife, Leona, living in Harper, Kansas, and a daughter, Melinda Kee and Roger Kirk, and children, Diana Sue and John Lawrence living in Wichita, Kansas.

In the closing I might mention that the Grigsbys always took their politics seriously and were rather set in their likes and dislikes. The epitaph on Nathaniel Grigsby's tombstone in the Attica, Kansas cemetery proves the point.

Abraham Lincoln's Song

Hazel Grigsby tells us that this song was written by Abe Lincoln when his only sister, Sarah, married Aaron Grigsby. It was sung by the Lincoln family at the wedding in Spencer County, Indiana, in 1826. Lincoln was 17 years of age at the time.

Hazel Grigsby copied this song from a paper in the family Bible. One the back of the title page in this same Bible is written:

"and upon this act, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of the Almighty God."

A. Lincoln

When Adam was created
He dwelt in Eden's shade
As Moses has recorded,
And soon a bride was made.

Then thousand times ten thousand
Of creatures swarmed around
Before a bride was formed,
And yet no mate was found.

The Lord was not willing
That man should be alone
But caused a sleep upon him
And from him took a bone.

And closed the flesh instead hereof,
And then he took the same
And of it made a woman,
And brought her to the man.

Then Adam he rejoiced
To see his loving bride
A part of his own body
The product of his side.

The woman was not taken
From Adam's feet, we see,
So "He must not abuse her,
The meaning seems to be."

The woman was not taken
From Adam's head, we know,
To show she must not rule him
"Tis evidently so."

The woman she was taken
From under Adam's arm,
So she must be protected,
From injuries and harm.

(EMN: Dr. Kenneth R. Grigsby of 10161 Hutton Dr., Sun City Arizona 85351 is the current owner of the family Bible. He writes that at the time he acquired the Bible, upon his uncle's death, the original song, including the stamps on the original envelope, had been removed. Only typewritten copies remained.)

Nathaniel Grigsby's Tombstone

(EMN: One of our reunion coordinators, Mrs. Leslie Scott of Toledo, Ohio, sent in the following article. It originally appeared in the (Toledo) Blade Sunday Magazine, July 10, 1977, and was written by Sheila Otto, of Toledo.)

Friend of Lincoln...To The End

Nathaniel Grigsby's great-great-granddaughter
traces an inscription
by Sheila Otto

Through this inscription I wish to enter my dying protest against what is called the Democratic party. I have watched it closely since the days of Jackson and know that all the misfortunes of our nation has (sic) come to it through this so called party therefore beware of this party of treason.

"Pious praise or prayer is often found on cemetery memorials. Seldom does political protest originate on the marble platform of a tombstone, but this hand-cut, ungrammatical warning was the vehement final volley fired at the Democratic party by Civil War veteran Nathaniel Grigsby (1811-1890) from the rampart of his Attica, Kan., gravestone.

"Was the inscription merely the bitter barrage of a disappointed campaigner? No, my grandmother recalled her grandfather's political passion as the product of his years as Abraham Lincoln's close boyhood friend. It was, though, a cause of some embarrassment to the family, for below the inscription, in a different script, was added, "Put on in fullfilment (sic) of promise to Deceased." Added even later in machine-cut lettering on another side of the obelisk was the explanation: "Went to school with Lincolns. Brother to Aaron Grigsby who married Abe Lincoln's sister. Visited the White House."

"Although the politics of the marker made some of the Grigsbys uncomfortable, her grandfather's reminiscences made Lincoln yarns a part of the fabric of my grandmother's growing up. The stories date back to 1816 when Tom Lincoln got the urge to move his family from Kentucky across the Ohio River to Indiana. Tom Lincoln, a carpenter and cooper,

leased three acres of timber and farm land from Reuben Grigsby and contracted to make casks for Grigsby's apple-jack. Even my teetotalling grandmother winked with some pride: It was a whisky of such quality that it sold for \$1.25 a gallon, although the market price in nearby Vincennes at that time was only 75 cents a gallon.

"It was next to Grigsby's still house where the apple-jack aged that Tom Lincoln first set up a pole house for his family. Seven-year old Abe easily found playmates among the seven Grigsby boys. It was Nathaniel (Nattie) Grigsby who became his trusted friend during the 14 years the Lincolns lived in the Pigeon Creek region.

"Nattie Grigsby's tombstone political partisanship in 1890 had its roots in the prolific medium of Lincoln and Grigsby family pranks and parties of the 1820's in southern Indiana along the banks of the Ohio and Wabash Rivers.

"Nattie told of attending Andrew Crawford's subscription school with Abe and his sister Sally the year that Mrs. Lincoln died of milk fever (1818). Abe stood out as the spelling bee champion that year.

"The presidential campaign of 1824 found Lincoln and the Grigsby boys championing the cause of Henry Clay. In fact, they talked politics to the point of "wearing it out," according to Nattie. All of the candidates were of the Jeffersonian Republican-Democrat party. The election was a personality battle that ultimately had to be settled in the House of Representatives. There, John Quincy Adams edged out Andrew Jackson. It was the beginning of Nattie's Jackson-watching mentioned on his gravestone.

"The boys shifted their allegiance to candidate Jackson in the presidential battle of 1828, but within months of the inaugural there was widespread disenchantment. They heard a Fourth of July orator in Vincennes accuse President Jackson of sowing the seeds of disunion. This disenchantment was life-long for Nattie.

"Marriage joined the Grigsby and Lincoln families in a permanent bond when Abe's sister, Sarah, married Nattie's brother, Aaron. Nattie used to love to tell my grandmother and her sister, Clara, about another Grigsby wedding that gave Lincoln his first chance for some literary success.

"Although Abe had had a momentary romantic interest in the spirited Elizabeth Ray from nearby Crooked Hill, it was Nattie's oldest brother, Reuben Grigsby, Jr., who finally

won her hand in marriage. Lincoln was offended that his family wasn't invited when Reuben and Elizabeth were married in a double ceremony with another brother, Charles, in 1829.

"Lincoln had helped his father build the imposing staircase of the Grigsby home. He could easily imagine that it would be a wonderful joke if the two grooms were to walk up those stairs to the wrong bridal chambers. The result of this fantasy was "The Chronicles of Reuben." Using a scriptural style, Abe wrote what purported to be a factual account of the wedding night mix-up between the two brothers and their brides. He made copies of this lampoon and circulated them around Pigeon Creek.

"The neighbors laughed and blushed as they read the account, but Reuben Grigsby, Sr., blushed with anger. He managed to confiscate the original copy, but not until Elizabeth Ray Grigsby had committed it to memory and all of the neighbors had savored Lincoln's style and imagination. Abe enjoyed the joke and discovered the power of his own words.

"Young Lincoln soon found himself powerfully attracted to a dark-eyed Buck County beauty. He set out to visit her on a warm May evening, but arrived at her cabin only to find that Nattie Grigsby shared a similar interest and had beaten him there. Nonplussed for a moment, Abe pondered, then plotted. He quietly slid the outside bolt of the cabin into a locked position. He then waited nonchalantly on a stump across the path for the end of the visit.

"Nattie struggled unsuccessfully to open the door and then tried to crawl through the tiny cabin window, but found it too small for his large frame. Abe, laughing across the way, shouted at him to try the chimney. Despite Nattie's protests, he had no choice but to work his way up the sooty stone, mud, and stick vent. He squeezed out and shook a blackened fist at Abe. He couldn't help but laugh at another Lincoln prank as he jumped off the irregular shingle roof, and the two walked home together, still best friends.

"When the Lincolns moved to Illinois in 1830 Abe sealed his friendship with Nattie by giving him the diary he had kept during those Pigeon Creek years.

"There was a jubilant reunion years later when the president-elect's Washington-bound train passed through southern Indiana on Lincoln's 52nd birthday. Nattie stood in the blowing snow in the front row of Pigeon Creek neighbors

cheering the flag-bedecked train. Nattie could make his grandchildren's eyes bulge when he told of when he and their father had visited the White House before the Civil War disrupted the nation.

"It was a wounded 2nd Lt. Nathaniel Grigsby who wrote from an Alabama field hospital to President Lincoln as "My old friend," telling him of Pigeon Creek friends serving the Union. Nattie wrote too of his own four sons serving with him in the Indiana Volunteers on Sherman's March to the Sea.

"Nathaniel Grigsby had indeed closely watched the party from the days of Jackson, but his partisanship dated from a Hoosier youth shared with the most eminent of Republicans and permanently recalled in a quiet central Kansas cemetery.