

# Chapter Two: Enloe-Lincoln

## Questions Inspire Museum

Last week your inquiring reporter traveled East to a little town that has converted their old train depot into a museum.

Their museum celebrates the illegitimate birth of Abraham Lincoln nearby and I had wanted to see it for a long time.

It's a tangled tale. We're on one end of the deal, they're on the other. Where to start?

### HARSHAW LEGEND

Two years ago I did a column here with the heading "Was Lincoln Illegitimate? Real Father Buried Here?" Brief summary:

The historic Harshaw Chapel on a knoll in the middle of Murphy was built soon after the Civil War. However, there is a grave near the front door that pre-dates the building itself. A simple white marble shaft maybe four feet tall, it bears only these words: Abram Enloe, 1770-1840. A 70-year-old man buried here three decades before the brick church was built.

Enloe was a wealthy landowner, farmer and investor who fathered 16 children by his long-suffering wife. He first came up from South Carolina into North Carolina and began farming on land he bought in Rutherford County near the border. His household included a servant-girl named Nancy Hanks.

The big Enloe family moved to a large bottomland farm on the Oconaluftee River near Bryson City. Tenants occupied the original holding in Rutherford. And it was soon obvious that the late-teens servant-girl was pregnant. Mrs. Enloe was enraged (one visitor at the time said Abram warned him his wife was on the war path) and reportedly said that although the baby might be her husband's, it was certainly not going to be raised in the Enloe home.

Names and all, it sounds almost Old Testament. So the servant-girl was sent away, had her little son and named him Abraham, apparently his father's name.

## RUTHERFORD CONNECTION

Exactly where the pregnant Nancy Hanks was sent is a good question. The Which is the very heart of the Bostic Lincoln Center.

Bostic is a small town near Forest City and I visited there with great interest. Their museum occupies the old depot's ticket office in the middle of town and is manned by volunteers with great pride. There are a number of displays, one which tells the Enloe-Lincoln story on large panels which cover an entire wall.

They maintain that Nancy Hanks was sent to their area from the Enloe farm in Swain County, back to the original Enloe land on Puzzle Creek near Bostic. They gladly escort walking tours up what they call Lincoln Hill to the stone foundation of the cabin where they believe President Lincoln was born. A tenant-woman, they say, assisted Nancy in the birth.

History books say Abe Lincoln was born in a log cabin in Kentucky, but in Bostic they say he was born in a log cabin right there in Rutherford County, N. C. Nancy Hanks was married to a man named Tom Lincoln in Kentucky. Many say the marriage was arranged by Abram Enloe. The Methodist deacon who performed the marriage, one Jesse Head, recalled that the bride had a small dark-headed son who played around their feet during the brief ceremony.

A Superior Court judge from Waynesville named Cathey wrote a book on the Enloe-Lincoln story in 1899, based on the recollections of the citizens in the Enloe neighborhood. The Charlotte newspaper sent a writer to interview Enloe's youngest son, who would have been a half-brother to Lincoln if the stories were true. Photos of the two still exist today, both long and lanky men, nothing like the short stocky Tom Lincoln.

To me the most telling evidence is the most obvious. Abe Lincoln, recognized by most historians as one of the greatest of all Presidents, attended his mother's funeral. He simply did not show up for Tom Lincoln's funeral.

## KEEPERS OF HISTORY

The volunteers at the Bostic Lincoln Center keep their museum open a few hours each week on Thursday, Friday and Saturdays. They are committed and very serious about preserving their local lore. Financing is a struggle and they have annual yard sales and crafts festivals to raise money. Donations are actively sought for their tax-exempt organization.

Several books have been written about the Enloe-Lincoln connection, recently by authors Jerry Goodnight and Richard Eller, associated with the Bostic museum. *The Tarheel Lincoln*, done by the pair, and Goodnight's *Searching for Lincoln* are on sale at the center and book-signings have been hosted there.

A dig by experts to excavate the ruins at the Bostic cabin site is scheduled for the near future. And they have a committee that is actively trying to arrange a DNA test between Lincoln and Enloe descendants. If positive, it would reinforce the many legends.

#### BOX OFFICE AT THE CEMETERY?

The upkeep and maintenance of the Harshaw Chapel, which was in the hands of the Daughters of the American Revolution for many years, was given back to our First United Methodist Church in Murphy last year. I am a member of the committee looking into ways to finance restoring the old Methodist church before the steeple falls in.

One joker suggested that we put a fence around the cemetery and charge folks to walk in and see Abram Enloe's grave, "the real father of Lincoln." I don't think it's a good idea but can relate my experience in Deadwood, South Dakota.

I went there to see the grave of famed gunfighter Wild Bill Hickok, a childhood hero of mine. Found Mt. Moriah cemetery and saw the City of Deadwood had a box office there, \$1 per head to see the grave. Ticket lady noticed my accent.

"Where you from?" she asked.

"Murphy, North Carolina." And she burst into laughter at my answer.

"I'm from Sylva," she giggled. "Married a local, been here 40 years."

The entry fees go into maintaining the cemetery, she said, and they get lots of visitors each year. Don't think it would work well here, not worth the cost of the fence.

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Photo Caption:

**PRESIDENTIAL BIRTHPLACE** –At the Bostic Lincoln Center, volunteer Guynell Green displays books for sale that support local legend of Lincoln's birth in nearby log cabin.(Wally Avett Photo)