

**THE LINCOLN WAY:  
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF  
TRUSTEES OF THE ILLINOIS  
STATE HISTORICAL LIBRARY**

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The Lincoln way: Report of the Board of trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library by Msr. C. M. Thompson

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**MSR. C. M. THOMPSON**

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# THE LINCOLN WAY.

REPORT

OF THE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

OF THE

## Illinois State Historical Library

OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

Made by Mr. C. M. Thompson

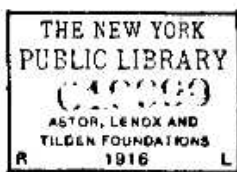
In an attempt to locate the "Lincoln Way."



SPRINGFIELD, ILL.  
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1913

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## REPORT ON "THE LINCOLN WAY."

*To the General Assembly of the State of Illinois:*

GENTLEMEN—The Forty-seventh General Assembly of the State of Illinois by joint resolution directed the Board of Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library "to make the necessary investigations to determine the exact route traveled by Abraham Lincoln in his removal from Kentucky to Illinois, and to report to the General Assembly at as early a date as possible, and make such recommendations as they deem advisable to carry out the purposes of this resolution." The purpose of the resolution and of the investigation, which it requests, is perhaps indicated in one of the introductory clauses of the joint resolution, in which it is stated that "it is the sense of the people of Illinois that a fitting and permanent memorial to the memory of the great emancipator would be the consecration and dedication of the route that he traveled from the place of his birth in Kentucky, through Indiana, and thence to his tomb at Springfield, to be known forever as the "Lincoln Way."

The trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library heartily endorse the purpose of this joint resolution and gladly cooperate to conduct the necessary investigations.

At a meeting, held shortly after the adjournment of the last Legislature, the board of trustees of the historical library appointed its president, Professor Evarts B. Greene, a committee of one to take charge of the investigation of the "Lincoln Way." Professor Greene secured the services of Mr. Charles M. Thompson, of the University of Illinois, to undertake the detailed work of investigating the evidence that may throw light upon the problem. The trustees wish to place on record their high appreciation of the painstaking, thorough work which Mr. Thompson is doing in the effort to solve the many perplexing difficulties connected with the determination of the route taken by the family of Mr. Lincoln through Illinois. Furthermore it is to be added that Mr. Thompson is generously donating his services to the State in this important work.

This report is only a preliminary statement of the investigations undertaken, and of the plans for the future investigations. The trustees will make a final report, with definite recommendations as soon as the subject can be exhaustively investigated, and the actual facts established. We present the report of Mr. Thompson to the trustees of the historical library to show the progress that has thus far been made. It is to be noted that notwithstanding several months of careful investigation, many portions of the route are still far from being definitely

determined. The investigator has been fortunate in securing interviews with several persons, old settlers and members of the families of old settlers, whose testimony is most valuable. Particularly noteworthy is the testimony of Mrs. Harriet Chapman, a surviving member of the party that made the journey from Indiana to Illinois in 1830. Mrs. Chapman is a daughter of Dennis Hanks and was a child of about four years at the time when her parents and the Lincolns made the trip to Illinois.

According to the evidence presented by Mr. Thompson it seems fairly well established that the Lincolns and their relatives crossed from Indiana into Illinois not at Vincennes as is often supposed, but farther north at Russellville. It seems probable that the party travelled northwards from Russellville, but no definite conclusions are at present presented. In the words of Mr. Thompson "those having the investigation in charge deem it advisable to continue the investigation at every point."

The state of Kentucky has already taken action to dedicate the route travelled by the Lincoln family through that state. In Indiana also, considerable interest has been awakened in the proposal to locate and mark the "Lincoln Way." Naturally the attention of the trustees of the historical library is directed first to the route in our own State. Eventually it might be well to suggest some plan of coöperation among the three states interested, but we shall not attempt to make any definite report on this phase of the subject until our final report is presented to your Honorable Body.

The work of investigation is being energetically prosecuted, and as soon as the evidence is all in, a final report will be prepared.

CHARLES H. RAMMELKAMP,  
OTTO L. SCHMIDT.

Springfield, Illinois, December 23, 1912.



TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY.

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GENTLEMEN—In compliance with your request I herewith submit a report of progress made in locating the "Lincoln Way," together with a discussion of methods of investigation used and plans for further investigation. During the year in which the investigation has been carried on, those in charge of the work have had correspondence and personal interviews with hundreds of people in the states of Illinois and Indiana, and to all of these people the investigators have expressed the appreciation of the library board for their disinterested assistance in the matter. A few, however, deserve special mention. They have given invaluable aid in the investigation, and at this particular time the opportunity is taken to express to them in a public manner the sincere thanks of those having the investigation in charge. The apparently successful investigation in Indiana was made possible through the untiring efforts of Mr. James Wade Emison of Vincennes. In Illinois, Byron R. Lewis of Bridgeport, Judge E. Callahan of Robinson, E. S. Clayton, James Nichols and John F. Lafferty of Martinsville, W. O. Bennett and Joseph W. Thompson of Charleston, have given freely their time in making maps, searching local records for evidence or interviewing old citizens. Miss Caroline M. McIlvaine of the Chicago Historical Library, and Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber of the Illinois State Historical Library have put at the disposal of the investigators all the material of their respective libraries. Officials of all the counties in which the investigation has been carried on, have uniformly given every assistance in their power to expedite the search in their respective county archives. The officials and attaches of the Secretary of State's office at Springfield have likewise lent their assistance by heartily cooperating in the investigation. To Dr. Solon J. Buck of the University of Illinois special thanks are due for his advice as to methods of procedure and tabulation of results.

Respectfully,

CHARLES M. THOMPSON.

## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE "LINCOLN WAY."

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The Lincolns and their relatives left Gentryville, Spencer County, Indiana, on March 1, 1830. The party consisted of thirteen men, women and children. According to the testimony of one of the two surviving members of that historic party, the following persons made the trip: Dennis Hanks, his wife Elizabeth, and four children, Harriet, John, Sarah Jane and Nancy; Squire Hall, his wife Matilda, and child, John; Thomas Lincoln, his wife Sarah, his son Abraham, and step-son John Johnston. The party had, by the same testimony, three covered wagons, of which two were drawn by oxen and one by horses. In addition there were two saddle horses. (See Appendix, C.) On March 15, 1830, the party was in the vicinity of Decatur, having traveled something like two hundred and twenty miles at the rate of approximately fifteen miles per day.

This journey into Illinois was not unlike thousands of others made in the early thirties. The tall youth that afterwards became president, attracted no more attention along the way than did hundreds of others. It would have required a prophetic vision indeed to have seen in him a future president of the United States. A great part of the journey was necessarily made along Indian trails, which were being transformed into wagon roads by the settlers of eastern Illinois. In some of the counties little or no attention had been paid in a public way to laying out and grading highways. The condition of the rivers in the spring of the year must have influenced the travelers in selecting a road to the Sangamon country. On the one hand there would have been the desire to keep far away from the lowlands along the rivers; on the other the possibility of being able to cross at natural fords situated on or near well established trails or roads.

### METHODS OF INVESTIGATION.

In making this investigation several sources of information have been used:

*First*—Authentic printed secondary accounts, including whatever Mr. Lincoln is reported to have said about the journey. This source is meager in the extreme; and if Mr. Lincoln ever told any of his friends in detail about his uneventful entry into Illinois it has failed to be recorded.

*Second*—Data about roads and trails in Illinois from 1818 to 1830, gathered from (a) maps, (b) gazetteers, (c) State laws, (d) county commissioners' records, (e) surveyors' records and field notes, (f) interviews with old settlers, (g) stage routing books and sheets, (h) mail contracts, (i) contemporary newspapers, (j) actual observation of remains of trails. Maps and gazetteers have given little information. The former show only the well established routes, and the latter deal more with conditions of civilization, and trade than with routes of travel. The State laws merely indicate that certain roads were authorized, but the repetition of such authorizations in later laws leaves the impression that the roads may not have been built. Records of the county commissioners' courts as well as those in the surveyors' offices are not satisfactory. In a great many cases the location of a road is indicated by a "stake in the prairie" or "John Smith's cabin." Interviews with old settlers have been satisfactory on the whole, while stage lists and mail contracts, although scanty in number, have thrown considerable light on the question under consideration. Contemporary newspapers have been of little value in the investigation; their columns are too much filled with political matter and public laws to give attention to roads and the condition of the weather at any particular time of the year.

*Third*—Newspapers issued between 1858 and 1861. It has been hoped, but somewhat in vain, that something would be said, after Mr. Lincoln became a national figure, about the route taken by his family in this trip.

*Fourth*—The topography of the country through which the Lincolns may have passed.

*Fifth*—Interviews with Mrs. Harriet Chapman, daughter of Dennis, Hanks, one of the two surviving members of the party.

*Sixth*—Well founded tradition.

Those having the investigation in charge have made every effort to stimulate an interest in the "Lincoln Way," in all the localities through which the party might have passed. To do this the newspapers have been asked to agitate the matter, and in many localities the response has been very satisfactory. Visits have been made to every point where there seemed to be the least likelihood that personal interviews and observations would throw any light on the subject under consideration. Every tradition has been respectfully received, and investigations set on foot regarding its authenticity. The very nature of the sources upon which the investigation must of necessity be based makes the work so far done less satisfactory and certain than had been hoped.

#### PROGRESS OF THE INVESTIGATION.

Obviously the investigation was best begun at the point where the Lincolns crossed the Wabash River. The evidence so far gathered seems to indicate that the party passed through Vincennes. So far as is known there is but one dissent to this opinion. In a very recent article by James K. Rardin, in the Charleston Daily News, November 29, 1912, the statement is made that the crossing was near Mt. Carmel.