

# Abraham Lincoln of Rutherford County

Despite Kentucky's claim to being the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, there persists a long-standing, well-attested tradition that our 16<sup>th</sup> president was born in Rutherford County, North Carolina around 1804.

For almost two centuries there has subsisted among the honest people of Rutherford County a lively tradition that Abraham Enloe, head of the Enloe family, was Lincoln's father by Nancy Hanks, who occupied the position of servant-girl in the Enloe household.

Numerous county families declare that members of their family several generations back knew "Nance Hanks" personally. Nancy "Grannie" Hollifield, who lived until 1900 and "Aunt Polly" Price, who died in 1890, stated that they were friends of Nancy Hanks and held the child Abe in their arms before Nancy and her baby left for Kentucky.

The Rutherford County tradition maintains that Nancy Hanks, when a child, was taken in as a servant of the well-to-do Abraham Enloe family on Puzzle Creek, about two miles northeast of Bostic. She grew to be a popular and beautiful girl, well-known, and well-like. But one day it became all too apparent that "Nance" had loved unwisely and "appeared to be in the state of increase." The Enloes, along with Nancy, moved to Buncombe (now Swain) County beside the Ocanaluftee River.

When Nancy turned up missing, folks assumed Abe Enloe had killed her, and prepared to lynch him. But news came that Nancy was back in Rutherford County with a baby boy. Believing her husband to be the father of the child, Mrs. Enloe had insisted that he send her away, and Enloe had arranged for her to return to Puzzle Creek, where she could have the baby among friends. Afterwards, Enloe paid Tom Lincoln to take Nancy and the baby to Kentucky. Lincoln married Nancy in 1806 and gave the boy his name.

Many have found it hard to believe that Tom Lincoln, who was stocky, of no more than medium height, low-browed, and no particular intellectual gifts, was the father of Lincoln, with his tall-long-boned body, high forehead, and great intelligence. However, descriptions of Abraham Enloe greatly resembled Lincoln. Members of the family have stated that the Enloes have always been "tall, raw-boned, with high cheeks and immense ears." Nineteenth century observers were struck by the resemblance between Abraham Enloe's sons and Abraham Lincoln. Photographs taken of Wesley Enloe, one of Lincoln's alleged half-brothers, taken when he was a very old man, still show facial resemblances to Lincoln, and an even more striking resemblance in the posture and tall, long-limbed body.

Wesley Enloe, Lincoln's reputed half-brother, said that the tradition of Lincoln's origin in the Abraham Enloe family "no doubt is essentially true." A friend of Lincoln who visited

a Dr. Edgerton in Hendersonville, NC in 1860 said that Lincoln had told him, "My right name is Enloe, but I have always gone by the name of my step-father."  
Several people who knew Lincoln as a boy in Kentucky provided evidence that his "official" birth date of 1809 is several years too late. Austin Gallaher stated that he saved Lincoln from drowning in 1812, and at that time the two boys had been in school together for over a year. He hardly would have been walking to school at the age of two! And residents of Elizabethtown, Kentucky remembered seeing Abe as a toddler – two years before he is supposed to have been born!

On the old Walker Mill Road off Puzzle Creek outside of Bostic is an area which has been known as "Lincoln Hill" since before anyone can remember. There stand the rock foundations of the old Enloe house. If Rutherford County traditions are correct, there is the true birthplace of Abraham Lincoln.

Excerpted from:  
The article "Abraham Lincoln – A Rutherford County Native?" by Tom Melton  
In The Heritage of Rutherford County, published by the Genealogical Society  
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Genesis of Lincoln by James H. Cathey  
Oral History as told by Mrs. Birdie Watson of Westminster Community