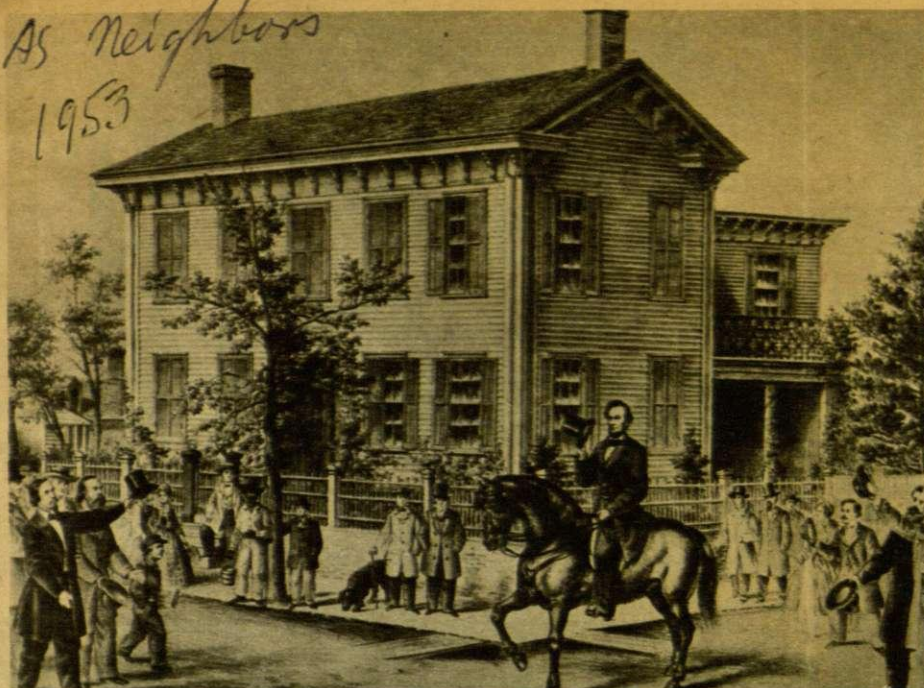


As Neighbors  
1953



"Mr. Lincoln, Residence and Horse."—This print (1865) depicts the President's Illinois days with more artistic license than accuracy; for example, he wore no beard in Springfield.



Street scene of the Springfield the Lincolns knew.—In the first year of their marriage they lived in the Globe Tavern (first building on left), where their son, Robert, was born.

## The Lincolns Were Good Neighbors

Their warm, sociable Springfield life is noted in recollections of contemporaries.

By RUTH PAINTER RANDALL

THE Lincolns lived for almost seventeen years in the home on Eighth Street in Springfield which is now a national shrine. They were a typical American family in a small town in the middle Eighteen Hundreds surrounded by other families like themselves. From the recollections of the old-timers who lived near them one can get intimate glimpses of the couple as they appeared to neighbors next door or down the street.

This Springfield period was a time of growth and development for Lincoln. He traveled the judicial circuit learning about men and politics. He grew steadily in law practice till he became one of the most distinguished members of the Illinois bar. He went to Washington as a Whig member of the House of Representatives in 1847-49, and about ten years later the clear, logical thinking of his speeches in the well-dramatized Lincoln-Douglas debates began to make the nation aware of this man—until victory at the 1860 Republican National Convention in Chicago brought an end to his peaceful Springfield days.

The recollections of this time startle one with their pointing up of century-past conditions: a neighbor remembered a tall man in shirt sleeves and slippers with a shovel in his hand crossing the street one summer morning to borrow live coals for the kitchen fire. Mr. Lincoln had evidently been careless about banking his fire the night before and those newfangled

matches were a luxury that he had not thought of.

The raw little town of Springfield was not far removed from frontier circumstances under which neighborly help was a vital thing. People were more dependent upon each other; they shared intimate troubles and joys in a way and under a need which is now lost. About the time that Tad, the fourth Lincoln son, was born, a baby arrived also at the Charles Dallman home near by. Mrs. Dallman was very ill and unable to nurse her child. Formulas were a thing of the future and babies in such cases often died. Mary Lincoln offered her help. Many years later when Mrs. Dallman was a dainty little old lady she told the story: "How the tall, gaunt figure of Abraham Lincoln came across the street from the Lincoln home, knocked at her door, entered with gentle step so as not to disturb the sick mother, and then gathered up the little mite of a newborn child into his big, brawny hands, formed like a basket for that purpose, and carried the infant across the street." Mary nursed the baby at her breast, along with her own child.

BOTH the Lincolns had a signal love for children and their parental instinct extended itself to the youngsters around them. Lincoln seems to have assumed some of the duties of a Scoutmaster. The neighborhood was well provided with boys and they all flocked to this lovable man who took so much interest in them. They understood, as one of them said, that when he "walked along with his hands behind him, gazing upward and noticing nobody," he



The law office of Lincoln and Herndon (second story of building in center) and the surrounding buildings were draped in mourning for his funeral in 1865.

was merely lost in thought and they had only to hail him or touch him to see his face light up with friendliness.

He would sometimes gather up the boys of the neighborhood, put them in his carriage and take them out to the Sangamon River for a day of fishing and picnicking. Years later one remembered that after lunch was eaten, "he told us stories and entertained us with his funny comments."

The older boys did their neighborly turn during the long periods when Lincoln was absent on the judicial circuit. Mrs. Lincoln was nervous about being alone and these young financiers received five cents a night for sleeping at the Lincoln home. They soon found that Lincoln tended to be as indulgent with them as he was with his own children but there were limits. Young Joseph Kent once asked Lincoln if he could borrow his carriage. Lincoln, smiling broadly, replied: "No, Joseph, there are two things I will not loan, my wife and my carriage."

Both Abraham and Mary Lincoln had a gift for warm, enduring friendships. With Lincoln this once involved the role of peacemaker. Two of his friends, William Butler and Edward D. Baker, had a misunderstanding and

each wrote the other a hotheaded letter. Lincoln had affection for both men. Before his marriage he boarded at Butler's home where he was treated like one of the family. Baker was so dear to the Lincolns that they were to name their second child for him. In five recently discovered letters of Lincoln one sees how this artist in human relations went about patching up the quarrel.

CALMLY and reasonably he wrote to Butler: "There is no necessity for any bad feeling between Baker & yourself. Your first letter to him was written while you were in a state of high excitement, and therefore ought not to have been construed as an emanation of deliberate malice. Unfortunately however it reached Baker while he was writhing under a severe toothache, and therefore he at that time was incapable of exercising that patience and reflection which the case required. The note he sent you was written while in that state of feeling, and for that reason I think you ought not to pay any serious regard to it. It is always magnanimous [sic] to recant whatever we may have said in passion; and when you and Baker shall have done this, I am sure there (Continued on Page 41)

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RUTH PAINTER RANDALL adapted this article from her book, "Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage," appearing tomorrow.



## Lincolns Were Good Neighbors

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will no difficulty be left between you."

There is a preview here of Lincoln's tempered wisdom in the White House. He added a word as to his own feeling in a final appeal: "nothing would be more painful to me than to see a difficulty between two of my most particular friends."

Mrs. Lincoln's deep affection for her neighbors appears in the letters she wrote back to Springfield from the White House, letters that vibrate with homesickness for the lost sweetness and security of small-town life.

**T**O her former neighbor Mrs. John Sprigg ("Mith Spwigg" as Tad Lincoln called her with his appealing lisp) the President's wife wrote from Washington: "What would I give to see you & talk to you. \* \* \* You were always a good friend & dearly have I loved you." It was Mrs. Sprigg's little daughter Julia who once packed her tiny ruffled muslin nightgown for the adventure of spending a night away from home, with Mrs. Lincoln, whose husband was out of town. Julia was delighted because she had a good time when with Mrs. Lincoln; "she was the kind of a woman that children liked. \* \* \*" The small guest was almost smothered with maternal tenderness. Mary Lincoln, who bore four sons, had wanted a little girl also, and Lincoln once wrote: "I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters."

Across Eighth Street lived the Solomon Wheelocks, whose teen-age Ardelia was a favorite with the Lincolns. "Delie," as Mr. Lincoln called her, used to run in to help Mrs. Lincoln dress for parties. Getting arrayed in hoopskirt splendor evidently required assistance. Years later the Wheelock daughter told about the rather feverish evening when the Lincolns attended a reception at the home of Jesse Dubois.

**D**ELIE was helping Mrs. Lincoln dress when in came Tad and Willie Lincoln from a candy-pull, smeared with molasses candy from head to foot. They at once set up a lively howl because they wanted to go to the reception too. Mrs. Lincoln thought they should stay at home, with Robert, the oldest son, as baby-sitter, but Mr. Lincoln could not stand the kicking and screaming. He told "mother" if she would let the boys go he would take care of them. Mrs. Lincoln pointed out to "father" that the reception was no place for the children. But the lawyer husband countered that argument by saying he would take them in the back way and leave them in the kitchen. Of course, the matter ended by the children attending the reception itself.

The rarest description of Lincoln in Springfield is that

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to tell his neighbors good-  
He was taking the train  
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reat Western Railroad depot  
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of his law partner, William H. Herndon: "Mr. Lincoln sometimes walked our streets cheerily \* \* \* perhaps joyously, and then it was, on meeting a friend, he cried, 'How'dy,' clasping one of his friends in both of his wide, long, big, bony hands, giving his friend a good, hearty soul welcome. On a winter's morning he might be seen stalking and tilting it toward the market house, basket on his arm, his old gray shawl wrapped around his neck, his little Willie or Tad running along at his heels, asking a thousand little quick questions which his father heard not."

**T**HESE friendly greetings knew no class distinction. When the Lincoln Papers were opened in 1947 an appealing letter came to light, a letter William Florville, Lincoln's colored barber in Springfield, sent to Washington in the third year of Lincoln's Presidency. "Billy the Barber" was unawed at the prospect of writing the President of the United States; he was writing only to a kindly friend whose sympathy for "the poor and down trodden of the Nation" he could count on. Of course the Lincolns would want to know how things were at home.

"Tell Taddy that his (and Willy's) Dog is a live and Kicking doing well he stays mostly at John E. Rolls with his Boys who are about the size now that Tad & Willy were when they left for Washington." Recalling doubtless the destructiveness of those two young irrepressibles, he reported on the house on Eighth Street and its tenants: "Your Residence here is kept in good order. Mr. Tilton has no children to ruin things."

From all sources the verdict is the same: "Mrs. & Mr. Lincoln were good neighbors." A minister who lived close by found Lincoln "delightful" and Mrs. Lincoln "a devoted wife, a loving mother, a kind neighbor and a sincere and devoted friend." When the preacher's house overflowed with visitors, as a preacher's house is apt to do, the Lincolns would help out by letting some of the guests "put up" with them, and at times they would lend him their carriage for his church work. (A parson was more to be trusted with a carriage than a small boy.)

**T**HE Lincolns had fun with their friends. Springfield was intensely sociable; there were receptions, dinners, "strawberry parties" and little "family" gatherings of Mrs. Lincoln's relatives which were sometimes "extended" to include fifty or sixty people. Lincoln acquired an imposing array of in-laws when he married Mary Todd.

There was a heartiness, an all-inclusiveness in the parties. For one reception at the Governor's more than 1,000 invitations were issued. It was somewhat humiliating to have

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the cherished new gas illumination break down on that evening, but candles were hastily brought to the rescue.

John Todd Stuart, with a twinkle, described a typical entertainment which he and his wife attended. "We press through the crowd. We push and they push. We tread on their toes and they tread on ours." He told how sweat rolled-down judicial foreheads that would rather argue a case in the Supreme Court than struggle thus. "All the world is here. All the sewing societies broke loose."

This description undoubtedly applies to the occasion in 1857 when the Lincolns entertained 300 of their friends. The house on Eighth Street probably bulged a little that evening, yet Mrs. Lincoln regretted that a heavy rain and the counter-attraction of a wedding "robbed us" of the additional 200 who had been invited.

We can picture Abraham and Mary Lincoln as we do our great-grandparents—an



old-fashioned couple dressed in heavy antiquated clothes, used to going in double harness, quietly understanding each other and the business of life, sharing with their neighbors in a century-past setting their hours of relaxation and laughter. These small-town gatherings were happy events and most of the friends and relatives they met at them were good and lovable people. They understood how "to neighbor," to use that verb in its finest meaning of mutual interest, helpfulness and understanding. (Lincoln later as President knew how "to neighbor" in this nation and in the world.)

**T**HESE Springfield friends cared for each other in times of childbirth and illness; they sat up to watch over each other's dead. When a neighbor family went through the sorrow of losing a child, the Lincolns did what they could. At the dark hour when the parents returned to the house after the funeral, Mary Lincoln prepared food, making it as appetizing as possible with her best silver, placed it on a large tray, and Lincoln carried it to the sad father and mother. The Lincolns had lost their little boy, Eddie, a few years before; they knew only too well the agony of having the loved little body laid to rest in the earth and the return to the empty home.

On Feb. 11, 1861, Lincoln

had to tell his neighbors goodbye. He was taking the train to Washington to be inaugurated as President. It was a depressing morning of gray skies, rain and black mud. But they were all there at the Great Western Railroad depot to see him off, the faithful old neighbors and friends of office, street and home. In the dingy station's waiting room Lincoln stood while they filed by to shake his hand, these fellow-townsmen whose familiar faces were charged with deep feeling. As he passed through the crowd to the train platform hands reached out to touch him again for the last time. Over all there hung the threat of civil war.

**L**INCOLN had announced that he would not make any more speeches before leaving Springfield but as he stood on the platform, out of his deep emotion came a last farewell to these loved people whose lives had been interwoven with his own. It was not only these personal ties which were being pulled apart; a way of life which he had found good was over. No more passing along the simple streets to friendly greetings and interchange of small personal news, no more dropping in for neighborly chats. No more would friends with the understanding that only years can bring come to share their troubles.

To them he owed everything, he said. "Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried."

Mary Lincoln stood in that crowd, comforting herself with the last-minute plan that she would leave that evening with the two younger boys and rejoin her husband at Indianapolis on the morrow. A dispatch had come from Gen. Winfield Scott saying Lincoln would be safer on the journey if he had his family with him and this caused her eleventh-hour decision. Like any good wife, she intended to be at her husband's side in time of danger. Her heart was torn with the pain of farewell even as his.

**S**HE heard that loved voice continue: "I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington." Again to the wife was that chilling suggestion of danger. The rest is like a prayer: "Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well." Lincoln's breast was heaving with emotion and the crowd was in tears as he concluded: "To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

The train began to move. Neighborliness and a peaceful life for the Lincolns were at an end.