



**Nancy Hanks Lincoln
(1784-1818)**

Nancy Hanks was born on February 5, 1784, in Campbell County, Virginia. By the time she was nine years old, she was orphaned and living in what would become the Commonwealth of Kentucky. She was taken in by an apparent uncle, Richard Berry, and his family, being accepted as one of their own in a stable, nurturing home environment.

It was while living with the Berry family that Nancy met Thomas Lincoln. He lived on a neighboring farm, and over the years, their friendship grew into marriage. The ceremony was performed on June 12, 1806. The union would produce three children, Sarah, born on February 10, 1807, Abraham, born on

February 12, 1809, and Thomas Jr., who died in infancy.

The Lincolns lived on three different Kentucky farms in the first ten years of their marriage. Title disputes caused the loss of all three, and Thomas finally decided to move to Indiana. Here land could be purchased under the provisions of the Northwest Land Ordinance. The Lincolns settled in the Little Pigeon community of present-day Spencer County, Indiana, in the winter of 1816. After spending the winter in temporary quarters, Thomas, aided by Abraham, built a log cabin. Nancy did her share by helping to clear the land, tend the crops, and care for her two children.

Tragedy struck the Lincolns in the autumn of 1818 when neighbors became ill with milk sickness, a disease caused from consuming dairy products produced from cows that eat the snakeroot plant. Settlers of the period were unfamiliar with the cause of milk sickness. In helping to care for the sick neighbors, Nancy also consumed the contaminated milk products, fell gravely ill, and died October 5, 1818.

Accounts report that Nancy Hanks Lincoln was a fine and loving mother. It is certain she left her mark on her son in the many ways that mothers and sons bond. Her unexpected death when Abraham was only nine years of age helped to prepare him to face the tragedy and loss that is a part of life.

Composite portrait of Nancy Hanks Lincoln (1784-1818), by Lloyd Ostendorf, 1963
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