

Book I is a narrative study of Abraham Lincoln's intellectual and emotional growth from childhood to adulthood that shaped his character. Book II profiles key New Salem mentors who encouraged and helped Abe to become a legislator and lawyer.

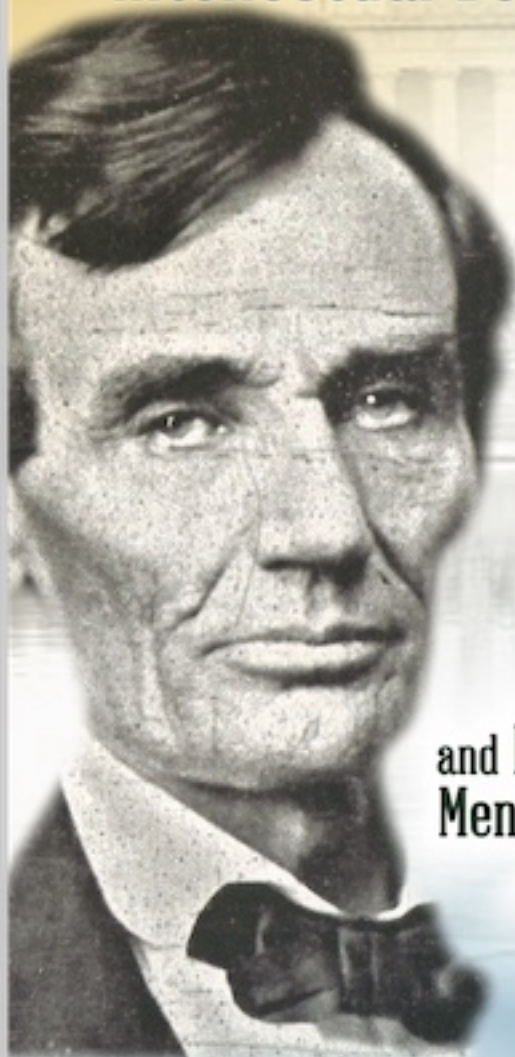
**Abraham Lincoln's Intellectual Development  
and His New Salem Mentors  
1809 – 1837  
A NEW EDITION**  
by Vito N. Silvestri, Ph.D. and Alfred P. Lairro

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# ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S Intellectual Development



and His New Salem  
Mentors 1809-1837

A New Edition

Vito N. Silvestri, Ph.D. and Alfred P. Laird

*Abraham Lincoln's Intellectual Development, 1809 – 1837*, reprinted as  
part of *Abraham Lincoln's Intellectual Development and His New  
Salem Mentors*

A New Edition

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# **BOOK ONE**

**Abraham Lincoln's Intellectual  
Development 1809 – 1837**

# **PART ONE:**

## **Introduction:**

### **Initiating Self-Learning During His Growing-Up Years; Kentucky and Indiana, 1809-1830**

“Abe was diligent for knowledge. [He] wished to know and if pains and labor would get it he was sure to get it.... He read all the books he could lay his hands on....

Got up early and then read.... when he came across a passage that struck him he would write it down on boards if he had no paper and keep it until he did get paper.”

-Sarah Bush Lincoln, Interview by William H. Herndon, *HI.*,  
Sept.1865, pp. 1206-107.

*Lincoln on his education:* (About frontier life) “There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three.... What little advance I have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.”

-Abraham Lincoln; taken from his autobiographical statement for the 1860 campaign.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **Frontier Life Dispositions**

From his rudimentary beginnings in a log cabin on the frontier to his achievement of the Presidency, Abraham Lincoln's life embodied the true American experience of his times. Lincoln experienced all levels of society, including, as he explained it, a temporary "slave" existence. "There is a profound correspondence," wrote Arnold Gesell, "between his peculiar genius and the pioneer culture in which he grew."<sup>1</sup>

For twenty-eight years, Lincoln knew what it meant to eke out a living on a frontier-farm-subsistence-economy; to work on a riverboat; to become a land surveyor; to operate a post office; to serve as a Captain in the militia; to read law and work as a law clerk; to practice law in settled communities and to make the law a reality in rural and quasi-frontier areas. Eventually, he became a state legislator, a practicing lawyer, a Representative to the United States Congress, and ultimately, the President of the United States.

Lincoln achieved this with a meager education and with a strong sense of his own mind. He used his life experiences, his limited formal education amounting to no more than one year, and the tools at his disposal: his native intelligence, a disciplined and retentive mind to develop an extraordinary ability to master content by reading, writing and speaking.

These abilities became his means to gain work beyond the physical labor of the frontier. Very early in his young life, he discovered that he could nurture his abilities and see positive results as he learned to function as a speaker, a reader and a writer.



## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **A Fundamental Change of Environment**

Between the age of eight and ten years, Lincoln experienced two profound changes in his life: (1) a change in his living environment, and (2) the devastating loss of his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln. Ultimately these events taught him that he needed to rely solely on himself. These were excruciating developments and they became overriding premises that informed other aspects of his life.

Born on February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln was the first son and the second child of Nancy and Thomas Lincoln. His sister Sarah was two years older. He was born into a life of subsistence farming at Nolin Creek, Hardin County, Kentucky. Two years later the family moved to Knob Creek and to better farmland. His father owned about 348 acres.<sup>2</sup> They lived on the fruits of their farming, hunting and other labor. They made their own clothes, furniture, shoes, and daily faced the harsh tasks of survival as they settled onto their land and into their lives. They bartered with their neighbors and traded with merchants for whatever else they needed. All members of the family engaged in subsistence activities to maintain themselves and to prepare for the coming winters and springs.<sup>3</sup>

#### **A Change in his Environment**

After seven years of a relatively stable and safe environment in the frontier settlement of Knob Creek, Kentucky, the Lincoln family moved to the frontier wilderness of southern Indiana. Kentucky's lax regulations on property ownership caused a number of settlers, including Tom Lincoln, to lose their land and the homes that they had claimed, paid for and settled. Tom Lincoln lost his claims to three farms in Hardin County, Kentucky. Unable to afford an extended legal battle, Tom moved his family to southern Indiana and that met two legal criteria: (1) the land was surveyed by the US government, and (2)

slavery was excluded because it was part of the Northwest Ordinance area.<sup>4</sup>

Abe Lincoln remembered the move to the wilderness of Indiana as one in which they had to cut their way through three miles of thickly-entangled woods to get to their site.<sup>5</sup> At first they lived in a three-sided cabin, or “camp,” consisting of poles, brush and tree branches. The fourth side of the camp was a roaring fire. They listened to the cries of the wolves, panthers and bears at night until they could erect a log cabin.<sup>6</sup>

In 1816, the unsettled land was rampant with wild animals and in this part of southern Indiana; there were no settlements within a three-mile radius of their home. The Lincolns arrived on the day Indiana gained statehood, December 7, 1816, and began a fierce struggle to survive the winter. Although a log cabin was built within a few weeks, they were unable to mortar the spaces between the logs because the ground was frozen. A compound of clay and grass could not be made until early spring. The cabin was drafty and dark; they walked on a dirt floor; there were no windows and a temporary door served as an entrance.<sup>7</sup>

Starting over again, Thomas Lincoln and his family survived by subsisting on hunting wild animals and game. Slowly, as the weather permitted, they began to clear enough land to plant crops in the spring. Clearing the land became a continual effort for the next fourteen years. They had moved to the most chaotic, wildest and dangerous environment they had ever known. Within a few years this area became known as the Pigeon Creek Settlement of Perry County (later Spenser County). Lincoln remembered his fears in this rhyme (c.1846):

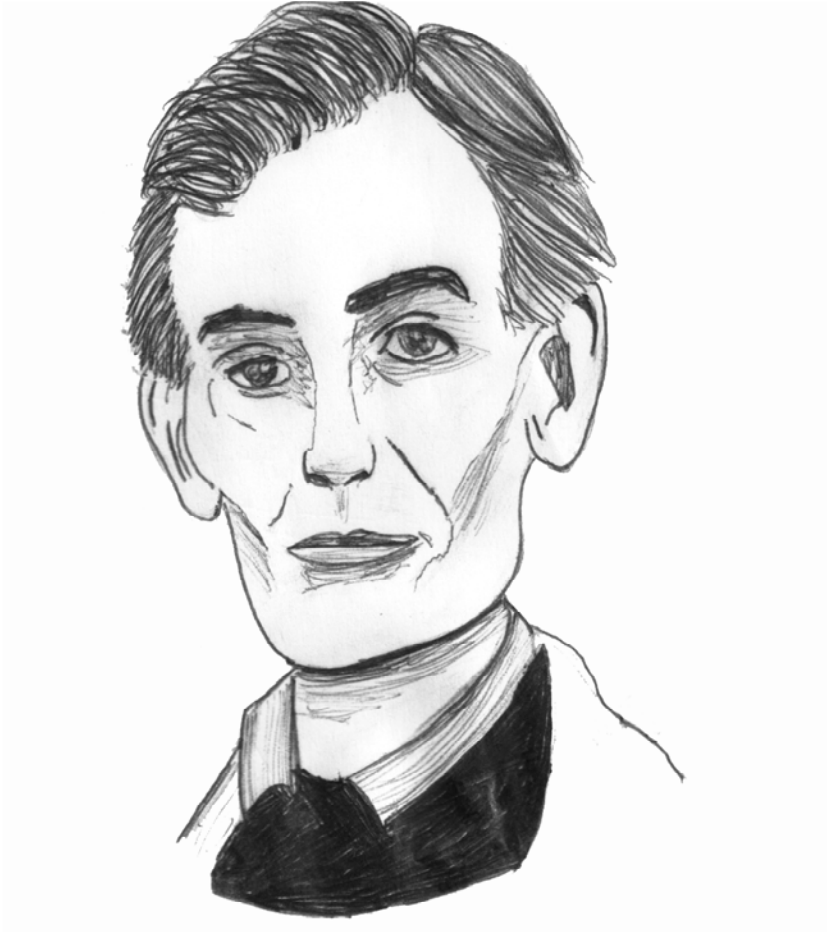
*When first my father settled here,  
'Twas then the frontier line:  
The panther's scream, filled the night with fear  
And bears preyed on the swine.*<sup>8</sup>

Clearly the Lincolns had begun a life more impoverished than any they had experienced as a family in Kentucky.

# **BOOK TWO**

**Abraham Lincoln's  
New Salem Mentors  
1831 – 1837**

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S NEW  
SALEM MENTORS, 1831-1837**



**VITO N. SILVESTRI, PH.D.  
and  
ALFRED P. LAIRO**



**BookLocker.com, Inc.,**  
St. Petersburg, Florida USA

***Abraham Lincoln and His Intellectual Development  
and his New Salem Mentors, 1809 – 1837***

A New Edition  
by Vito N. Silvestri, Ph.D. and Alfred P. Lairó

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Map of New Salem:  
Megan M. DeRosear and Mason McGuire

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**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**William Mentor Graham**  
**1800-1883**  
**Director of the Next Level in Lincoln's Education**

Henry B. Rankin, who knew William Mentor Graham and Lincoln well during these years, succinctly summarized the importance of Mentor Graham's role in Lincoln's development in New Salem.

It was Mentor Graham who gave Lincoln, while living in Salem, private lessons in surveying, geometry, and English grammar, and who first opened to him the way to an acquaintance with the best English writers; for though Graham's library was small, fewer than fifty volumes. It contained some of the best of English literature as well as choice translations from the best writers of past literary ages.<sup>1</sup>

**Background**

In 1800, when William Mentor Graham was born in Kentucky to Mary and Jeremiah Graham, Mentor's father wanted him to become a teacher.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah had a brother who was a doctor and there were others in his family who were educated. Early in his childhood, Jeremiah and Mary discovered that Mentor had a hearing loss in one ear.<sup>3</sup> His parents encouraged him to read books and study hard, but they also taught him farming, brick making, carpentering and surveying. Mentor performed all of these roles in his life, but his most consistent endeavor was as a teacher.

Mary and Jeremiah knew the Lincoln family. They lived in Brush Creek, a neighboring area to the Lincoln's homestead. Like the Lincolns, the Grahams were Baptists, and they were faced with a religious practice problem, the slavery issue. Mary Graham, returning home from a visit to Elizabethtown, stopped at the Lincolns' cabin and learned that the South Fork Nolynn Baptist Church had split over the slavery issue, among them, the Lincolns. The Grahams, also anti-

slavery, later broke from their congregation for another church that excluded pro-slavery views, revival meetings and hell-fire-forever preaching.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mentor Meets the Lincolns**

When Mentor was ten years old, his Uncle Robert Graham, a doctor, requested that he live with him for a year or two so that he could tutor him. Frederick Borum, Mentor's subscription schoolteacher, had announced that Graham was the most scholarly student he had taught. Robert Graham, hearing of Mentor's scholarly achievements, wanted to add to his learning and to make his library resources available to his nephew. He and his wife Frances had no children and for the first time in his life, Mentor was the center of attention in the household when he lived with his Aunt and Uncle. So Mentor left his parents, brothers and sisters, to live with Robert and Frances Graham, twenty miles away.<sup>5</sup>

Robert was a doctor who made four tours a year to minister to his patients in rural Kentucky. Mentor accompanied and helped him on these trips, but he also was responsible each day for a specific lesson he had to complete from his reading and from his Uncle's teaching. When his uncle was in residence, Graham had regular chores to do as well as his reading and studying.<sup>6</sup>

One night a severe storm developed when Uncle Robert and 9 year old Mentor were on their way home. They were near the home of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln and decided to stop there for shelter. Mentor read a story from *Aesop's Fables* to 1 year old Abe and his sister Sarah, who was 3 years old. They stayed overnight and left the next morning. Nancy and Tom had given up their bed and slept on the earthen floor that night.<sup>7</sup>

After two years with Uncle Robert, Mentor was encouraged to attend Brush Creek Academy, a school that was established in the home of his Aunt Nancy and her husband, Nathaniel Owens, a judge. The Judge was wealthy, owned a plantation and slaves. Mentor studied Latin, read Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, learned about European history, English poetry, and studied a book on surveying. Every day he witnessed the practice of slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, Mentor was able to get “money-pay” jobs making bricks, helping with surveying gangs, and performing apprentice work with a carpenter. His father allowed him to use some of his money to buy books. Thus, Mentor began a life-long habit of buying books when he had extra money not needed for subsistence.<sup>9</sup>

At seventeen years old, Mentor married his thirteen-year-old sweetheart, Sarah Rafferty. He had informally taught his siblings to read and write, and at this stage of life he began a subscription school. He taught three subscription schools a year, and made and laid bricks for large houses. When he could afford the fifteen dollars for a six-week course, he took advanced classes at the Brush Creek Academy, choosing from a curriculum of geometry, trigonometry, navigation, algebra and astronomy.

### **Mentor and Sarah Graham Move to New Salem**

In 1826, Sarah and Mentor moved to Illinois and traveled with a caravan of disaffected families who found that life in Kentucky was increasingly unstable because of legal disputes about land ownership. Mentor and Sarah made the move because they learned that Illinois voted against becoming a slave state. This fact plus the promise of the canals and internal improvements that Henry Clay advocated, and the possibility that Illinois would adopt a public school system were encouraging factors. They settled about a half-mile outside of the New Salem area, and Mentor established a subscription school. He brought to the New Salem location his experience of having taught twenty-seven school terms, and his library which included Kirkham’s *Grammar*, Murray’s *English Reader*, an encyclopedic dictionary, a set of Kentucky and federal laws, works by Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, Hume, Volney, Shelley, Keats, books on plants and a botanical analysis, volumes on medicine, books on commentaries about the Bible, and a variety of schoolbooks, a surveyor’s manual, files of Kentucky newspapers and antislavery publications.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mentor and Abe Lincoln Meet in New Salem**

Twenty-one years later, in 1831, Mentor met a mature Abraham Lincoln whose boat was stranded on the Rutledge-Cameron milldam on



the Sangamon River. The boat was carrying a load of cargo for the New Orleans market. Lincoln, his stepbrother John Johnston and his cousin John Hanks were delivering a load of produce and other goods owned by Denton Offutt, an entrepreneur, to New Orleans. The boat incident was a major event for the small log cabin community of New Salem because the settlers placed great economic emphasis on commerce by way of the Sangamon River. Lincoln and his crew managed to protect and unload the cargo from the boat. Accounts indicate that Mentor Graham may have helped him to borrow an auger from Henry Onstott to make a hole in the boat to release water and then tip it forward to make it ready to navigate beyond the impasse of the dam.<sup>11</sup>

After his trip to New Orleans, Lincoln returned to New Salem because Offutt wanted to establish a store in New Salem and he wanted to use the New Salem area to locate and establish one thousand pigs. They would be fed there, fattened and loaded onto a boat for the New Orleans market. This stockyard plan was another indication of New Salem's economic potential. Offutt hired Lincoln to operate the store, as well as to build a fence to quarter the pigs.<sup>12</sup>

Abe and Mentor visited and discovered that they shared anti-slavery and pro-temperance views and were followers of Henry Clay. They also were supportive of legal rights for women, and both men enjoyed attending courthouse trials.

Mentor gave Lincoln his first public job when he hired him as an election clerk because he was literate and had clear penmanship.<sup>13</sup> Mentor also introduced Lincoln to the Debating Society. Its members were also his intellectual friends: John Rutledge, co-founder of New Salem, Squire Bowling Green, lawyer and Justice of the Peace, Dr. John Allen, M.D., graduate of Dartmouth College, and Rev. John Berry, Minister, who co-founded the debating society with Rutledge.

Early on, New Salem citizens knew Lincoln for his storytelling, good humor and handy-man skills as well as one who spent his spare time reading books and newspapers. When he debated for the first time, its members expected Lincoln to begin with his usual stories and humor. Instead he impressed them with his analysis of and depth of thinking on the issue.<sup>14</sup>

The Debate Society considered such issues as the future of New Salem, and such topical questions as, “Are pioneers entitled to pensions?”; “Should the United States forgive France’s indemnity or compel her to pay by force of arms?”; “Fire or Water? Which is the best mode of eternal punishment?”; “If Negroes should be freed, should they be educated here or colonized elsewhere?” This became a forum for Lincoln to practice and test his oral arguments and presentations of evidence.<sup>15</sup>

Lincoln began to study *Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England* during his first year in New Salem. He expressed some interest in the law to Graham and Mentor lent him an old book on Kentucky Laws, and one on Illinois law. Bowling Green helped Lincoln by clarifying difficult passages in the reading. Lincoln also made an attempt to run for the state legislature at the suggestion of John Rutledge who was impressed with Lincoln’s debating skills.<sup>16</sup> His campaign was interrupted by the Black Hawk War and although he lost the election, he gained substantial support from the New Salem community, 277 out of the 300 votes.

Lincoln was also in demand as a scribe by some of settlers, a role he had played in the Pigeon Creek community in southern Indiana. Mentor, who had written a number of legal documents for people in New Salem, gave Lincoln his book of legal forms so that he could record deeds, contracts, letters of agreement, financial bonds, etc. for the townspeople. Neither Mentor nor Lincoln charged the citizens for this service.<sup>17</sup> For Lincoln it gave him a clearer understanding of the basic rudiments of drawing up consensual agreements. It taught him how to write legal documents.

Lincoln also recognized that he needed further schooling. Mentor recalled the dialogue between them: Lincoln said, “I have a notion to study grammar.” Mentor replied, “If you ever expect to go to the public in any capacity I think it the best thing you can do.”<sup>18</sup> Lincoln said that if he had a book he could start immediately. Graham told him that John Vance had a grammar book and maybe he could lend it to him. Lincoln walked six miles to John Vance’s home and returned with Samuel Kirkham’s *A Compendium of English Grammar, Accompanied by an Appendix of familiar Lectures*;

*Containing a Systematic Mode of Parsing; Likewise Exercises in false Syntax and a key to Exercises; Designed for the use of Private Learners and Schools.*

Lincoln studied from that book daily, meeting with Mentor in the evenings after the Graham children went to bed. Lincoln would recite his assignments. Graham used this opportunity to improve Lincoln's speech, to refine not only his grammar, but also his pronunciation, and to eliminate his backwoods drawl.<sup>19</sup> Graham also did this for other adults and advanced students.

Since Lincoln visited the Graham household almost every night to present his homework, Graham suggested that he live there for a while. Graham refused payment from Lincoln because he was pleased with Lincoln's ability and stated that he was the most outstanding student he had ever taught. Many years later, after a lifetime of teaching, Mentor still maintained that "no one ever surpassed him in rapidity, quickly and well, acquiring the rudiments and rules of English grammar."<sup>20</sup> Mentor's daily life was full with teaching children, returning home to help with his own children, tend to the farm or supplies, prepare lessons for the next day, and often midnight sessions with Lincoln. When Mentor needed some respite from this demanding schedule, he would go for a walk in the forest. Since his childhood, he loved trees and he found that walking and musing through a wooded forest or glade of trees had a calming effect.

Lincoln lived with the Grahams for six months. The first one to awake in the morning, he started the fire, chopped wood, helped with the chores outside and inside the house, took care of the children to relieve Sarah, and was available to Mentor and Sarah for other chores.

Mentor had other adult learners, notably Ann Rutledge and William G. Greene. He suggested that they attend his Friday classes in recitation and spelling at his subscription school. Lincoln and others attended when work permitted.<sup>21</sup>

With Lincoln, Mentor was trying to make a "straight clean line" of Lincoln's "spotty" education. "He knew many things well, but not their interrelations."<sup>22</sup> Lincoln also studied natural philosophy, astronomy and chemistry.<sup>23</sup>

Lincoln's study of Kirkham's *Grammar* was not easy. It was a matter of progressing through a series of set tasks, lectures, reading material and exercises that described the English language, its parts of speech, the relationship of words to each other, the structure (syntax) of sentences, and the etymology (history) of words and development of grammatical rules. Essentially the student was expected to learn to parse the language as it was used to create meaning. It seemed to be a "fits and starts" operation at times. If Lincoln was reciting a passage, Graham would stop and correct his posture, his pronunciation, and general demeanor. Graham, through his assignments of lessons, used what he called an "add tire to tire, and at it again" approach. For example, once the meaning of a statement was understood, then the next step was to express that meaning in the voice, i.e., with emphasis on key words. After that, then one had to advance on inflecting the statement with pitch variation in order to add further significance to expressing the statement. Such repetition reached laborious dimensions by repeating a sentence over and over again but it helped to cement the learning.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of Graham's adding dimension to learning came in the study of logic. As Lincoln and Ann Rutledge advanced in their studies (they shared the same grammar book), Graham assigned them the task of parsing Thomas Paine's sentences in his *Age of Reason*. Once that was completed, he directed them to analyze Paine's reasoning. They had to identify how Paine's logic developed, and subsequently, they were to find ways of arguing for and against his thoughts.<sup>25</sup> In other words, what was the logic? What was the structure of the reasoning? And what were its strengths and weaknesses? Graham taught Lincoln to study the use of language, a preliminary measure for anyone who wanted to learn the law. Law is written in language that has to be clear, precise and exacting in its meaning; once written, the language of the law has to function as permanent communication for all who refer to and use legal strictures.

Often Mentor and Lincoln engaged in heavy discussions and when the weather permitted, they moved outside the house for extended discourse. Their discussions often arose out of the reading assignments, or they were extensions of prior conversations and their positions on

political, moral and religious discourse. It was “verbal wrestling,” the dialectic of the thrust and parrying of argument, information and analysis sharpened by their thinking that lent importance to the hard work of daily living and that offered profundity about the extraordinary in life, or significance in the ordinary. It was discourse that further cemented their friendship.

A similar dialogue took place in preparation of Lincoln’s announcement of his candidacy for state legislature that would appear in the *Sangamo Journal*. Lincoln and Graham had debated at length over the phrasing of his statements, and had argued over each phrase. They also asked John McNeil (aka McNamar) who had a college education to review the document. McNeil said that at Lincoln’s request, he only “corrected...some of the grammatical errors in his first address to the voters of Sangamon county.”<sup>26</sup> Abraham Lincoln’s “Communication to the People of Sangamon County” appeared in the *Sangamo Journal*, March 15, 1832.

Lincoln had suffered two failing businesses in New Salem: first, the store Offutt began and then the one Lincoln and William Berry owned and lost. Berry died and left Lincoln with the debt owed on the merchandise and any outstanding debts associated with the store. Lincoln also had a part-time job as a Postmaster. About this time Mentor learned that John Calhoun, the County Surveyor, needed a deputy surveyor to help survey the developing lands and towns in the county. At some point in his studies, Lincoln had expressed some interest in surveying. Mentor knew Calhoun and recommended Lincoln to him, if he was willing to wait six weeks until Abe could learn surveying. Calhoun agreed to this.<sup>27</sup>

Two factors inhibited Lincoln’s ability to learn surveying: (1) Mentor knew that Lincoln had “no training in geometry and trigonometry;” and (2) Lincoln was in the midst of his second campaign for the state legislature, writing speeches and practicing them with Mentor as well as beginning a six-week course of study. Mentor had to begin with geometry and trigonometry. He had learned geometry and trigonometry partly from his father who knew surveying and mostly from his own self-studying. Lincoln won the election and then began in earnest to study the mathematics: Abel Flint’s *Treatise*

on *Geometry, Trigonometry and Rectangular Surveying*, and Robert Gibson's *Theory and Practice of Surveying*.

It was, perhaps, the hardest learning Lincoln had experienced. He was entering a new world of thought and applications. Geometry is the study of properties, measurements and relationships of points, angles, surfaces, and solids. Trigonometry is the study of relationships including lengths and angles, relationships and measurements between the sides and angles of plane or spherical triangles and the calculation based thereon.

Mentor taught in his usual step-by-step fashion and then applied it to surveying. At times, Lincoln labored long past midnight, for several nights in succession, growing paler and thinner in the process, but he was able to learn enough to take a beginning land survey assignment. As the assignments came to him, he would spend his days taking the measurements and identifying the boundaries and then bringing his measurements to Mentor. The two men would spend the night reviewing and calculating the areas surveyed. In effect, this was Lincoln's apprenticeship in surveying, combining the field work with the mathematical concepts. Elizabeth Herndon Bell, Graham's daughter, recollected her mother's account of these sessions, who identified them as the usual midnight sessions with Lincoln which had started with his earlier study of grammar.<sup>28</sup>

Gradually Lincoln became proficient at surveying to the point when he could survey a town and/or develop the layout of the town. There is one town in Illinois that is named for him. It is the first town to be so named, long before he became President. He had performed the survey of the town.<sup>29</sup> Later in life, Lincoln returned to his study of geometry by reading Euclid's *Geometry*. He carried it with him on the law circuit trips he made in Illinois.<sup>30</sup>

### **Mentor Graham's Influence on Lincoln**

Mentor Graham was a teacher and a close friend to Abraham Lincoln. He expanded Lincoln's general education and knowledge. He introduced him to the study of English language and advanced mathematics, necessary areas to enhance his thinking abilities, communication skills, and problem solving ability. Robert Rutledge

believed that Mentor “assisted in laying the foundation of Mr. Lincoln’s greatness. I know of my own knowledge that Mr. Graham contributed more to Mr. Lincoln’s advance while in New Salem than any other man.”<sup>31</sup>

Mentor widened Lincoln’s circle of friends not only within the New Salem community but in surrounding areas. He sent Lincoln to Arminda Rogers’ home to meet her brothers who were college educated in order to give Lincoln the opportunity to talk and socialize with them.

Mentor, the teacher, was fascinated with Lincoln, the learner, which became a mutual relationship of rewards for both men. Lincoln stated that Mentor “had more information, better methods, and knew better how to tell what he knew than any teacher I had met or studied with up to the time.”<sup>32</sup> Mentor followed Lincoln’s career, attended his trials when he had the opportunity to watch him in court, and heard all of his debates with Douglas. In 1861, Mentor went to Washington for Lincoln’s Inauguration and Lincoln paid tribute to him by having him sit on the platform with all the other dignitaries.<sup>33</sup>

Mentor not only taught Lincoln the external factors of improving his speech and voice and physical demeanor, but he also expanded Lincoln’s critical thinking through the analyzation of his reading assignments, the essays, the published speeches, and the current political development as they knew it in New Salem. Mentor gave Lincoln permission to engage in and expand on a behavior of critical thinking not unfamiliar to Lincoln. From his early boyhood, Lincoln frequently had questioned what he could not understand about what the adults thought and said. Mentor gave him method, practice and purpose in logical problem solving that he would use throughout his life.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**John Bowling Green**  
**1786-1842**  
**Benign Father Figure and Legal Mentor**

John Bowling Green, as Justice of the Peace, represented vested legal authority in the budding community of New Salem. The nearest lawyer and courthouse was in Springfield. A Justice of the Peace had wide jurisdiction over actionable wrongs.<sup>34</sup> Bowling Green held “court” over several local disputes, i.e., drunkenness and rowdiness, livestock encroachment, property destruction, boundary disputes, injurious cases, monetary issues, etc., that came under his purview. He had the power to send someone to jail in Springfield, and he brought civic office experience to his position in New Salem. His was the voice of order in the community.

Green’s career seemed to be “at-large” in Illinois with appointments as Doorkeeper of the House of Representatives and then as Commissioner of the Illinois Canal System.<sup>35</sup> He also had held positions such as Jury Foreman, Deputy Sheriff and Sheriff in Washington County before he lived in the New Salem area. Bowling Green knew the judicial system from another perspective, when he was accused but acquitted of drunk and disorderly charges in 1825.<sup>36</sup>

Green evidently used common sense as well as his understanding of the laws. The case of hog ownership was a frequent dispute because many townspeople in New Salem failed to brand their hogs. Geese, pigs, goats, and chickens roamed freely through the streets of New Salem. This random practice inevitably led to arguments over ownership. One case in particular demonstrated Green’s ingenuity in using common sense and a touch of creativity to settle the issue of ownership. “Pick out what you think belongs to you, and keep it, if nobody claims it,” Green declared, and then he ruled that the disputants should “Kill the rest and divide the meat among the claimants.” Since they did not brand their livestock, it was a way the pig-stealers could meet their responsibilities.<sup>37</sup>



A genial, educated man who weighed close to 300 pounds, and who was often referred to as “pot” because of his protruding stomach, Bowling Green owned a small library. He enjoyed the company of Mentor Graham, John Rutledge and Dr. John Allen. These men discoursed on intellectual and practical subjects of their times. Often they traded books with each other from their respective libraries.

Thanks to Mentor Graham, Lincoln became part of that circle of friendship. As he came to know the young Lincoln, Bowling Green took a special interest in him. He enjoyed his humor, his thoughts and his company. Green felt that Lincoln was good material and only lacked education.<sup>38</sup> Lincoln became a frequent guest at the home of Nancy and Bowling Green. Green helped him understand the intricacies of the law, lent him law books to read, and allowed him an unusual amount of freedom at his hearings.<sup>39</sup> He said to others that Lincoln was a man after his own heart.<sup>40</sup>

### **Lincoln Earns a Participating Presence in Green’s Court**

Lincoln attended Green’s court, continuing his habit of attending courthouse disputes from his early years in Indiana. Green’s “court” was the nearest facsimile of a courthouse operation that New Salem had. As Green came to know Lincoln and to appreciate his way of reasoning and thinking through an issue, and as he discerned how well Lincoln was mastering his study of the law, he gave him more latitude in his court than any other spectator. Jason Duncan, a medical doctor who lived in New Salem for a few years, thought that Green allowed it because at first, Lincoln amused him, but then, he also came to “respect...the powers of his [Lincoln’s] mind in a forensic point of view.”<sup>41</sup>

Green made Lincoln the “next friend” of the court.<sup>42</sup> Lincoln had become adept at writing legal agreements in clear, spare language, and he performed some of this for Green’s court, without charge.<sup>43</sup> An 1833 extant document contains Lincoln’s handwriting and Bowling Green’s signature on a summons from a complaint by Nelson Alley to be delivered to Jason Duncan, May 2, 1833.<sup>44</sup>

In some cases Lincoln also acted as a substitute lawyer or advocate for a citizen appearing before Green. The atmosphere was somewhat informal and Green allowed Lincoln to register his analysis and sometimes humorous observations of a given case. By this time Lincoln's reading of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, and the *Laws of Illinois*, became part of his presentations. Also, Lincoln had read the *Revised Laws of Indiana*, when he was younger.<sup>45</sup>

Lincoln offered his services for a bastardy case while surveying in the vicinity of Concord. He learned from his chain assistants that there was a hearing in the afternoon of a bastardy suit before Squire Samuel Berry, and that the defendant, Samuel, the father of the child, had employed the brother-in-law of Squire Berry, a man named Dickenson who was employed as a census taker but said he understood some law. Lincoln also learned that the woman in question, a young lady named Sarah, was poor and had no representation. Lincoln offered his services to the young lady, stopped his surveying for the day, and presented himself to the court. Lincoln was clad in his surveying suit that had special panels attached to the trousers to avoid prickly nettles as he walked through the fields. There was an examination of witnesses, mostly older women who were timid about testifying. Lincoln called them by their names but addressed each as an aunt, "Aunt Sally" or "Aunt Polly" seemingly out of respect as he was younger than them.<sup>46</sup>

In his address to the court at the close of the examination of the evidence, Lincoln likened the character of the man to a piece of white cloth, which though it is soiled it could be washed and become white again. The character of the young woman who was no more to blame or not nearly as much to blame as the man, was like a broken and shattered bottle or glass vessel which could not be made whole again.<sup>47</sup> Lincoln won a judgment for the girl of one-hundred dollars. The father of the young man said that he had to sell two horses to pay for it.<sup>48</sup>

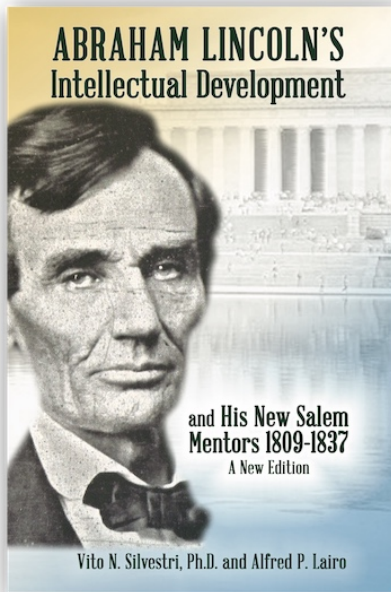
Although Bowling Green was a Democrat and a District Chairman of his party, he urged his followers to vote for Lincoln when he ran for the legislature. Many democrats did support him. In this, his second effort to gain election, Lincoln spent more time campaigning throughout Sangamon County and thus, he became known among a

wider audience of voters. He won the election and began an eight year career in the legislature of Illinois.

### **Lincoln on the Verge of Suicide Over the Death of Ann Rutledge**

Bowling Green and his wife Nancy were of the greatest help to Lincoln when his inconsolable grief over the death of Ann Rutledge caused him to threaten suicide.<sup>49</sup> Ann had been studying and preparing for entrance to the Jacksonville Academy for Women, and she and Lincoln planned to marry once he received his law license.<sup>50</sup> When a malaria-like illness (also thought possibly to be typhoid fever) spread among the community of New Salem, Ann fell victim to it and died, as did many others. Lincoln seemed to have had it in a milder form and was well enough or robust enough to help to take care of Ann and others. He helped Dr. John Allen to minister to a number of townspeople, as well as to make coffins with Mentor Graham when they died.

Ann had called for Lincoln before she died and they had a final visit and parting.<sup>51</sup> Afterward a deeply depressed Lincoln told Mentor Graham that he was thinking of suicide. Lincoln's friends immediately organized a surveillance network over him. Dr. Allen wanted Lincoln to go to Bowling Green's home where he would be watched and cared for, and eventually Lincoln was persuaded to do so. Lincoln spent three weeks at their home. Nancy Green fed and ministered to him; Bowling Green provided counseling, and both Nancy and Bowling offering Abe attentive listening ears. Several observers stated that Lincoln came to revere Bowling Green as a second father, and this seems to be true. When Green died unexpectedly in 1842, Nancy asked Lincoln to deliver the eulogy. Lincoln prepared the eulogy and spoke only a few lines before he began to cry uncontrollably. Later he would tell others that Bowling Green did more to advance him than any other man.<sup>52</sup>



Book I is a narrative study of Abraham Lincoln's intellectual and emotional growth from childhood to adulthood that shaped his character. Book II profiles key New Salem mentors who encouraged and helped Abe to become a legislator and lawyer.

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