



Lincoln in Indiana

Brian R. Dirck

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Abraham Lincoln, born in Kentucky in 1809, moved with his parents, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, and his older sister, Sarah, to the Pigeon Creek area of southern Indiana in 1816. There Lincoln spent more than a quarter of his life. It was in Indiana that he developed a complicated and often troubled relationship with his father, exhibited his now-famous penchant for self-education, and formed a restless ambition to rise above his origins. Although some questions about these years are unanswerable due to a scarcity of reliable sources, Brian R. Dirck's fascinating account of Lincoln's boyhood sets what is known about the relationships, values, and environment that fundamentally shaped Lincoln's character within the context of frontier and farm life in early nineteenth-century midwestern America.

Lincoln in Indiana tells the story of Lincoln's life in Indiana, from his family's arrival to their departure. Dirck explains the Lincoln family's ancestry and how they and their relatives came to settle near Pigeon Creek. He shows how frontier families like the Lincolns created complex farms out of wooded areas, fashioned rough livelihoods, and developed tight-knit communities in the unforgiving Indiana wilderness. With evocative prose, he describes the youthful Lincoln's relationship with members of his immediate and extended family. Dirck illuminates Thomas Lincoln by setting him into his era, revealing the concept of frontier manhood, and showing the increasingly strained relationship between father and son. He illustrates how pioneer women faced difficulties as he explores Nancy Lincoln's work and her death from milk sickness; how Lincoln's stepmother, Sarah Bush, fit into the family; and how Lincoln's sister died in childbirth. Dirck examines Abraham's education and reading habits, showing how a farming community could see him as lazy for preferring book learning over farmwork. While explaining how he was both similar to and different from his peers, Dirck includes stories of Lincoln's occasional rash behavior toward those who offended him. As Lincoln grew up, his ambitions led him away from the family farm, and Dirck tells how Lincoln chafed at his father's restrictions, why the Lincolns decided to leave Indiana in 1830, and how Lincoln eventually broke away from his family.

In a triumph of research, Dirck cuts through the myths about Lincoln's early life, and along the way he explores the social, cultural, and economic issues of early nineteenth-century Indiana. The result is a realistic portrait of the youthful Lincoln set against the backdrop of American frontier culture.

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