

Robbins Family Graveyard Shelters Lincoln Kin

Records Piece Together Story of New Jersey Sojourn by Forebears of Great Emancipator; Twins, 70, Still Care for 200-Year-Old Plot



FIVE miles east of Allentown, on the top of a stony hill, commanding wide views of the winding Shrewsbury Trail and the low hills and fertile valleys of this section of Monmouth County, is a bare windswept acre of ground that has attracted historians, writers and genealogists from all parts of the country. Here, in the little tract of land which for more than two centuries has been the private burying ground of the prominent pioneer Robbins family, is the grave of Deborah Lincoln, infant kinswoman of President Abraham Lincoln. The tiny Deborah, it is believed, was one of the six children of Mordecai Lincoln, great great grandfather of the President, and of Hannah Saltar, his wife.

A weather worn slab of sandstone, on which in bright sunny weather can be distinguished the inscription

Deborah Lincoln
Aged 3 Yrs. 4 Mo.
May 15, 1720

is almost the only remaining evidence that any members of the Lincoln clan once resided in New Jersey. The houses in which they lived have disappeared long since, and their lands have passed to other owners.

Fortunately, old records in the County Court House, at Freehold, and in the office of the Secretary of State, in Trenton, reveal unmistakably their presence in this vicinity. Historians in their researches into the family history of the great President have pieced together the story of their sojourn in New Jersey and the reason for this solitary Lincoln grave in an old burial plot in Monmouth County.

In 1637 one Samuel Lincoln arrived in Massachusetts from Hingham, England. He was probably not quite 20 years when he joined his elder brothers, Thomas and Daniel, in New England. Energetic and ambitious, Samuel prospered, married and became a man of prominence and the father and grandfather of a large number of children. Two of his grandsons, Mordecai, born April 24, 1686, and Abraham, born January 13, 1689, inherited many of Samuel's qualities. He, hating religious and political persecution and eager to make his fortune in a land of greater opportunity, had come to the New World. His grandsons, disliking the prejudice and intolerance of the Puritans and seeking a more hospitable and richer region in which to exercise their ambitions, removed to New Jersey.

The date of the coming is uncertain. However, it was some years previous to 1714, for in that year Captain John Boone, a prosperous resident of Middletown, Monmouth County, and at the time Speaker of the Provin-

cial Assembly, made his will and bequeathed 250 pounds to his niece Hannah Lincoln. Hannah daughter of Richard Saltar, the well-to-do owner of 2,100 acres of land known as Buckhorn Manor and other property, was the wife of Mordecai Lincoln.

To Hannah and Mordecai were born six children, one of them being the infant buried on the lonely hill top. When the child died in 1720 there was not apparently any church nearby, nor other burying ground than that belonging to the Robbins family. Even then Upper Freehold Township was sparsely settled, roads were trails, streams were unbridged and neighbors lived miles apart.

One of the leading pioneer families in the community was that of Daniel Robbins (the original spelling of the name), of Puritan stock, who in 1669-70 had emigrated from New England and settled in the Township of Woodbridge. Under a patent from Philip Carteret, dated March 16, 1669-70, there were conveyed to this Daniel Robbins, yeoman, 173 acres of upland and meadow in and about the town of Woodbridge, where he resided for a quarter of a century.

Then, having purchased 500 acres of land in Monmouth County on November 7, 1695, he removed with his family to this community of Friends. Doubtless he was the pioneer who set aside the hill top plot as the spot in which members of his family should be buried. If so, upon his death in August, 1714, he was probably buried there in a grave above which, in accordance with the custom of the Friends, no marker was erected.

decal Lincoln and his brother Abraham prospered. Mordecai had married well and both brothers were fairly large landowners. But the adventuring spirit and the desire to go ahead more rapidly were beginning as early as 1722 to draw them to other regions. Two years after Deborah's death, Mordecai engaged in an iron making enterprise in the Schuylkill Valley. In 1730, after the death of his wife, Hannah, he purchased land in eastern Pennsylvania and removed there with his surviving children. In time he married again. Of this union, three children were born, the posthumous son Abraham later marrying Ann Boone, a cousin of Daniel Boone. Meanwhile Abraham, Mordecai's brother, had found a better field for his talents in Philadelphia. Thus the Lincoln clan departed forever from New Jersey.

Robbins Family Burying Ground Offered Lincolns

By 1720, when the child Deborah died, the Lincoln and Robbins families were people of importance in Upper Monmouth County and probably close friends. It was natural therefore that the bereaved parents should be offered a place in the Robbins family graveyard in which to bury their daughter. One can picture the sad procession as it moved up the rough rocky hillside. As the mourners listened to the committal service, some comfort may have filled the hearts of the father and mother as they gazed across the rolling fertile country over which Nature had thrown a veil of soft Spring green.

Today, little Deborah's marker, a common field stone, is the oldest in the plot. The next in age is a badly worn fragment bearing the inscription "M. R. 1723." But innumerable other broken and worn stones, with epitaphs obliterated, dot the field, marking the last resting places of members of the Robbins family. In Monmouth County, Mor-



Pictured at the upper left is a general view of the old Robbins burial ground, showing the many red sandstone markers erected years ago and now fast disappearing, worn away by rain and wind. The tall white stones are those which mark more recent graves. At the upper right is a photograph of the stone which stands at the foot of the hill leading to the burial ground. This was erected by James West and his brother, C. Palmer West, of West Manor Way, Allentown, descendants of the first settlers in that vicinity and of the founder of this graveyard. Below, at the left, is the most famous stone in the cemetery. It marks the spot where little Deborah Lincoln, infant kinswoman of President Abraham Lincoln, lies buried. Standing on a bluff above the Shrewsbury Trail between Allentown and the Robbins Burying Ground is the old Quaker Meeting House, shown at the center right. Below are James and C. Palmer West, who restored the old graveyard recently, erected the monument showing its location and are now taking charge of this tiny God's acre.

Pioneering Spirit Gripped Little Deborah's Brother

At his death in 1735, Mordecai bequeathed his Pennsylvania property to the children of the second marriage, and to Hannah's children his New Jersey holdings, most of which had been acquired originally from their grandfather, Richard Saltar.

John, the eldest brother of little Deborah, received 300 acres in New Jersey where, with the aid of his influential relatives, his land and inherent ability, he might have done well had he chosen to remain. But the blood of pioneers flowed through his veins, and his restlessness made a settled life in a fairly well established community intolerable. Therefore John moved away from this State to Berks County, Pennsylvania, where he married and became a successful man. But at the height of his success, he yielded once more to the call of new places, bought land and settled in Rockingham County, Virginia.

John's eldest son was another Abraham who possessed in full measure the spirit of adventure. In 1782, with his wife and children—Mordecai, Josiah, Thomas and Mary, he forsook Virginia and set his face toward the wilds of Kentucky. A few years later this man, the grandfather of President Lincoln, was killed by an Indian as he was planting corn. Tradition says his son Mordecai kill Abraham's mur-

derer and rescued the eight-year-old Thomas, who when grown to manhood married Nancy Hanks and became the father of the sixteenth president of the United States. Thus, it was little Deborah's brother who carried the Lincoln name to fame.

The Robbins family, friends and neighbors of the Lincolns in New Jersey had no such spirit of wanderlust. They remained in this State, rose to positions of dignity and furnished both Mercer and Monmouth Counties with leaders in agriculture and the professions. Daniel, the first to settle in New Jersey, had six sons, Daniel, Moses, Richard, Aaron, Benjamin and Joseph. Little is known of these men beyond the fact that shortly after the Lincolns departed, the Friends of the community, all of whom belonged to the Chesterfield Monthly Meeting at Crosswicks, began holding religious services in the home of Daniel. The Friends, however, desired a Meeting House of their own. Minutes of the Chesterfield Monthly Meeting reveal that on the Ninth Month, 2d Day (September 2) 1738, "Moses Robbins (probably Daniel's brother) on



Old Structure Torn Down And Replaced in 1816

A month later permission was granted, the Chesterfield Meeting subscribing 13 pounds and the Burlington Meeting 12 pounds for the erection of the new structure. Work on it was begun that same year and completed in 1739. The Robbinses and their neighbors worshipped in this house until 1816 when the old structure was torn down to make way for a new brick Meeting House erected on the same spot. The bricks of which it is built are said to have been made of clay dug on the premises. This house of worship still

stands on high ground above the Shrewsbury Trail a mile and a half west from the Robbins burial ground. It is a severely plain building, lacking in the rustic beauty and charm of setting that characterized so many of the early Friends' Meeting Houses. The interior is as plain as the outside, and it is furnished with the usual straight stiff-backed benches. Today no services are held there except on rare occasions. When the Meeting House was erected, a graveyard was set aside and here lie several generations of the Taylor, Woodward, Folwell, Combs, Wright, Potts, Hendrickson, Field and Tatum families. These Friends, like Quakers everywhere, were deeply interested in education, and it is likely that there was some school

connected with the first Meeting House. The only one of which there is record however, is the "eight square" school built in 1819. It is said that after the second Meeting House was completed, there was a generous supply of bricks left over and it decided to use them in the erection of a new school.

Old Allentown Families Went to Ancient School

Ezekiel Combs, a public-spirited citizen, donated the site, a mile and a half away from the Meeting House. The school was enclosed, 22 feet in diameter, topped with a steep pitched "humped" roof. A great square of one side, and small windows the other seven sides. Within it was laid and plastered and in the center stood a stove. Here three generations of well-to-do families of Allentown and nearby regions were educated. The old school, long a landmark, was demolished about 1890 to make room for a more modern school house which in turn was abandoned and sold as a dwelling.

In the building of the two Meeting Houses, the school and in other civic projects, an important part was played by the Robbins family. For the first Daniel's sons, grandsons and great grandsons were sturdy, prosperous folk who through their community interest have left their impression upon the entire district. Some in time moved to Allentown from the family homesteads, others founded the village of Robbins-

(Continued on Next Page)

