

ABRAHAM LINCOLN – THE MIDDLE YEARS (Part 1)

In 1830, Abe's father moved the family to Illinois following fears of another milk sickness outbreak. After enduring several plagues and one of the worst winters on record, Abe decided to leave his father's homestead and set off on his own at the age of 22. Abe's experience, intelligence, and ingenuity would serve him well. His first job required him to steer a flatboat from Illinois to New Orleans, Louisiana. After leading the construction of the flatboat with two other boys, Abe gained notoriety from the residents of New Salem when he figured out how to float the stuck flatboat over Rutledge's Dam by drilling a hole in the bottom of the boat. After successfully unloading the goods in New Orleans, Abe took a steamer to St. Louis and walked home the remainder of the way. The owner of the flatboat was so impressed with Abe, he hired him to work as a clerk in his store in New Salem.

In New Salem, Abe made many friends, mastered grammar, and gained a reputation as a master storyteller. In August of 1832, he decided to become a candidate for one of four representatives of Sangamon County in the Illinois legislature, despite being a resident in the county for only nine months. His campaign platform centered on improvements to the navigation of the Sangamon River he would initiate. During this time, however, Lincoln was made captain of a company of men from New Salem to volunteer their service in the Black Hawk War. The company would become the Fourth Illinois Mounted Volunteers. Lincoln himself served for about three months in the frontier of Illinois but was never engaged in any real combat. When he returned to New Salem, it was election time. By this time, however, there were thirteen candidates, and he finished eighth on the ballot (though over 90 percent of the residents of New Salem voted for him). Discouraged, Abe decided to enter a partnership to purchase the store he clerked at on credit. Thinking that New Salem was an up-and-coming town, Lincoln believed the purchase would earn him great profits. Unfortunately, his partner abandoned him, subsequent attempts to sell the store were unsuccessful, and Lincoln was saddled with a debt that would take him seventeen years to pay off.

Abe Enters Politics

On May 7, 1833, Abe was appointed postmaster of New Salem. As the population of New Salem declined over the next few years, it became too small for a post office and Abe was out of a job. That same year, Lincoln was hired to survey new lands acquired by Sangamon County, despite the fact he had no training as a surveyor. According to legend, it took Abe only six weeks to learn the trade, and from that point on he was considered an excellent surveyor. In 1834, Abe would campaign again for representative in the Illinois state legislature. Now that he was well-known in a larger portion of Sangamon County, Abe traveled from village to village giving speeches, attending shooting matches, horse races, and other community events. Again, there were thirteen candidates, but this time Abe won.

1.) Why did Abe's father move them to Illinois?

- a.) There was better farming in Illinois.
- b.) He was afraid milk sickness would strike again.
- c.) Abe's grandparents lived in Illinois.
- d.) There was more opportunity in Illinois.

2.) How did Abe Lincoln gain notoriety among the people of New Salem, Illinois?

- a.) They thought he was very funny.
- b.) He was on his way to New Orleans.
- c.) He figured out how to steer a stuck flatboat over a dam.
- d.) He was steering a flatboat at age 19.

3.) In New Salem, Abe... (select all that apply)

- a.) mastered grammar
- b.) gained a reputation as a master storyteller
- c.) made a lot of friends
- d.) ran for president

4.) Which of the following statements best describes Abe's experience in the election for the Illinois legislature?

- a.) A total failure
- b.) A partial success; he gained most of the votes in Sangamon County, but failed to get enough votes in New Salem.
- c.) A total success
- d.) A partial success; he gained most of the votes in New Salem, but failed to get enough votes in other parts of Sangamon County.

5.) Abe was the captain of a group of men who "volunteered" to serve in the Black Hawk War. What is a volunteer in this context?

- a.) Someone who would pay to go to war.
- b.) Someone who goes to war and does not expect to be paid.
- c.) Someone who goes to war and expects to be paid.
- d.) Someone who goes to war.

6.) Why did Abe decide to purchase a store in New Salem?

- a.) He liked his partners.
- b.) He thought it would earn him a lot of money.
- c.) He thought he needed business experience.
- d.) He was bored.

7.) Why did Abe lose his job as postmaster of New Salem?

- a.) The population of New Salem was too small to justify having a post office.
- b.) New Salem didn't like the way Abe represented them.
- c.) Abe became an Illinois state representative.
- d.) Abe decided to enter politics.

8.) What happened first?

- a.) Abe became postmaster of New Salem.
- b.) Abe became surveyor of Sangamon County.
- c.) Abe wins the election for Illinois representative.
- d.) 1832

9.) Which of the following did Abe NOT do as he campaigned for Illinois state representative?

- a.) Went to shooting matches
- b.) Traveled to different villages
- c.) Went to horse races
- d.) Traveled to different states

10.) Why do you think Abe won the second election?

- a.) Because he had more money.
- b.) There were no other good candidates.
- c.) Because he campaigned throughout the county and met a lot of people.
- d.) It was just good luck.