



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN E. BRIGGS

THE HARLAN HOME

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At the end of the vista on North Main Street in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, stands an imposing old house with wide verandas and white columns. It is the Harlan Home. Built by Senator James Harlan, it was occupied by him for many years, and during the latter decades of his life it was also the home of the son and grandchildren of Abraham Lincoln.

After the death of Senator Harlan in 1899, the big house became the property of his daughter, who gave it to Iowa Wesleyan College in 1907. Situated just across the street from the campus, it was thought that the home of one of the founders of the college might be appropriately used as the residence of the president. But the plan was not successful. For several years the house stood lonely and forsaken, until the spring of 1931 when the college remodeled the place and made it habitable again.

As the carpenters proceeded with the work of removing several rooms that had been added at the back of the house, they came upon a plain, narrow door. Beneath the layer of accumulated dust could be discerned three oval spots upon the middle board. Why had the door been decorated in this peculiar manner? The ovals were not precisely drawn and they were

placed at irregular intervals. Upon closer scrutiny, penciled writing was revealed in each small panel. Dimly a name, a date, and a measurement could be deciphered. The old brown door was a memorial of days when the Lincoln grandchildren lived in the house and left a record of their height upon the woodwork. A later painter had carefully painted around the writing and thus the intimate chronicle of the Harlan-Lincoln family was preserved.

The discovery of this simple memorial written in pencil on the panel of a door in an obscure corner nearly fifty years ago revives memories and leads to reminiscences. Who built the house and when? What about the people who once lived there?

James Harlan came to Mount Pleasant in 1853 to take charge of the Collegiate Institute. In the summer of the following year he witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of Old Main, the three-story brick building that marked the real beginning of the institution as a permanent college. But Harlan's career as a college president was brief. During his first year of service, he helped organize the Republican party and was selected as United States Senator in 1855.

The first home built by Senator Harlan in Mount Pleasant was erected in 1857 when he was home from Washington during a recess of Congress. This brick house is now part of the Harlan Hotel — the part with the mansard roof. It was later that the frame

building at the end of North Main Street was built and the family residence established there. Servants' cottages were built on the back of the lot. During the years that James Harlan was in the Senate he returned each summer to his Mount Pleasant home.

In the dark days of the Civil War, Harlan was valiantly loyal to the Union. He became one of Lincoln's principal advisors, and proved to be a bulwark of strength to the care-burdened President. Harlan was among those who stood by the bedside of the stricken President in his dying hour, and remained the friend and comforter of the sorrowing family.

The names of Harlan and Lincoln were even more closely united by the marriage of Harlan's only daughter, Mary, with Lincoln's only surviving son, Robert. At the time of this marriage in 1868, Robert T. Lincoln had been admitted to the bar of Illinois. The young couple made their home in Chicago, where Robert was legal counsel for the Pullman Company; but her father's house in Mount Pleasant was always home to Mary Harlan Lincoln, and she spent much time there, especially after her mother's death in 1884. After Senator Harlan's death, she inherited the home.

Robert Lincoln was Secretary of War during the administrations of President Garfield and President Arthur. It was at this time, during a sojourn at the Harlan home in Mount Pleasant, that the memorial of the grandchildren of Abraham Lincoln and James

Harlan was written on the brown wooden panel of the old door. Whose hand held the pencil is not known. Was it father, mother, grandfather, or grandmother? Forty-eight years ago some one brought pencil and ruler and, as the children, one by one, stood straight against the door, their heights were proudly recorded.

In the upper space is written:

1883

Mamie Lincoln Sept. 4

5 ft 4 inches

Mamie, christened Mary, was the oldest daughter of Robert Lincoln and Mary Harlan.

The middle space contains the legend:

Jack Lincoln Sept 4

4 ft 5 inches.

One can almost see little Jack, as he was called, though he was named Abraham for his illustrious grandfather. That was much too formidable a name for such a dear little fellow as Jack. How straight he stood, pressed against that old door, the top of his head just measuring up to the proud height of four feet and five inches! People in Mount Pleasant still remember Jack and his pony cart, and how he loved chocolate cake.

Next came the youngest of them all.

Jessie Lincoln Sept 4

3 ft 10 inches

Just a few words penciled on a door nearly half a century ago. What a train of memories they recall and what speculation as to the present whereabouts of the children who pressed against the door to measure how tall they were!

The first break in the family came the next year when their grandmother, the wife of Senator Harlan, died in Virginia and was laid to rest in Forest Home Cemetery at Mount Pleasant beside her three departed children — two sons and one daughter.

In 1889 Robert T. Lincoln was appointed United States Minister to Great Britain, so with his family he went to live in London. The two daughters, Mary and Jessie, owing to the diplomatic position of their father, were presented at court, to the wonder and admiration of their Mount Pleasant friends. Jack was placed in a school in Paris. While there he was taken ill and died. A chocolate cake, sent to him by a neighbor in Mount Pleasant, arrived too late.

With the death of Robert T. Lincoln in July, 1926, the direct male line of the Lincoln family was ended. The only person now bearing that honored name is Mary Harlan Lincoln, Jack's mother, who lives in a beautiful old red-brick mansion of revolutionary days in Georgetown. From her window, she looks down the valley of the Potomac toward the Lincoln Memorial, the "far-shining monument of remembrance erected in enduring marble to the memory of the

deathless martyr, the consecrated statesman, the ideal American", for whom her son was named. "If Jack had lived," she says, "he would have had too much to live up to."

Mary Lincoln's two other children, Mamie and Jessie are still living. Mamie is Mrs. Charles Isham, the wife of a Chicago lawyer who now lives in New York. She has one son, Lincoln Isham, who is married and also lives in New York.

Jessie, who measured on the old door in 1883 just three feet and ten inches, is now Mrs. Robert J. Randolph, and lives near her mother in Georgetown. She is known in Mount Pleasant as Jessie Lincoln Beckwith, as it was there, against the wishes of her father and grandfather that she married Warren Beckwith, the son of a prominent family in Mount Pleasant. This marriage occurred about the time of the Spanish American War, and the young bridegroom left immediately for the Philippines. Jessie remained with her mother until her husband returned. Their two children were born there, Peggy or Mary, and Buddy, who was christened Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith. When Peggy was a baby, so the story goes, the young father went galloping through town calling out to clear the way for he was taking a bottle of milk to Abraham Lincoln's great granddaughter.

That was long ago, and Peggy Beckwith is now a full-fledged aviator, flying her own airplanes, a Gypsy

Moth and a 300 horse-power Travelair. She learned to fly in Washington, and has her own landing field at the Lincoln summer home at Manchester, Vermont.

Robert Beckwith is married and lives in Washington.

Looking up the vista on North Main Street, the Harlan-Lincoln home looks much as it did forty-eight years ago, when the Lincoln children stood against the panels of the door. Yet time has wrought changes. The green shutters have been removed from the windows; the white picket fence in front and the high paling fence which screened the garden and orchard are gone. Much of the back part of the house has been removed, but the original front part, freshly painted, appears as in former days. The interior has been changed. The enormous rooms have been divided by partitions, yet some of the old features are preserved. Two broad arches connecting the Senator's library with adjoining rooms are not entirely obscured, and some of the old fireplaces still provide good cheer and supplementary heat on cold, stormy days.

MARTHA THOMAS DYALL