

A night worthy of history books

Len Wells, Southern Illinois correspondent
Sunday, December 23, 2007

I imagine that just about everybody has a story about his grandfather. My grandfather, Bob Wells, was a commercial fisherman in the tiny White County community of Maunie, Ill., and worked at a grain elevator when it was too cold to fish.

While stories about my grandfather are priceless to me, Lorraine Loge has a story about her grandfather from White County that probably belongs in the history books.

Loge, the last of 13 children, is 90 years old. She lives in Evansville with her son, James Loge, a retired school teacher. Her husband, James Loge, and his brother, Floyd, ran the Loge News Co. of Evansville for many years.

The story Loge has to tell is about her grandfather, Tom Ary, who had a remarkable encounter with Abraham Lincoln in 1840.

She had all but forgotten the story of her grandfather's famous Lincoln encounter until one night when she was working as a nurse's aide at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville. "A light went on at the back end of the hall in one of the private rooms," Lorraine said. "The man in there was from Carmi, and we got to talking. When I told him my father, grandfather and great-grandfather were from White County and were all named Tom Ary, he remembered seeing an old picture at the museum in Carmi that was labeled Tom Ary." That picture was Lorraine's grandfather, holding a horse with Abe Lincoln.

"My great-grandfather, Tom Ary, owned a livery stable in Carmi, Ill., and my grandfather, also Tom Ary, worked for him," Lorraine said. "One day, when Abe Lincoln was campaigning in Southern Illinois, he rented a horse and surrey from the Ary stables."

Historical documents reveal Lincoln was in Carmi to give a speech in support of the Whig Party candidates at the time.

As an old man, Tom Ary gave only one interview about his Lincoln encounter, and that was in 1910. Mrs. Loge kept an account of those historical words.

"I was about 16 years old and was feeding and taking care of the horses in the livery barn which I later owned," Ary wrote. "One day, the owner said to me, Mr. Lincoln is to make a political speech here tonight and wants to go to Shawneetown to speak tomorrow night. I want you to drive him down there.

"I had never met Mr. Lincoln and was greatly disappointed, for there in front of the building stood the tallest and ugliest man I had ever seen. When I stopped the team, he picked up his valise and came over to the wagon. To my surprise, he did not use the hub of the front wheel as most people did, but due to his long legs, stepped directly into the wagon.

"Then things began to happen, and I soon forgot about his unusually ugly features and extremely slim proportions. He greeted me cordially and began talking to me not as an important personage to a small boy, but as though I was an individual of equal standing.

"He sang songs of the day, whistled and told jokes and stories, then he would talk to me about the news and political issues of the day in a way that I could understand. It was a long drive, but it was over all too soon, and when we reached Shawneetown, I was convinced that Abraham Lincoln was the wisest and most handsome man I had ever met."

Fortunately, Lorraine Loge's sister-in-law in California helped her piece together her family tree a few years ago, and made sure the Tom Ary interview was preserved for future generations.

Perhaps Mr. Ary summed up his encounter with Abe best when he said, "I am an old man now, and Abraham Lincoln has been dead many years, but I still believe America will never have a president with the wisdom and ability to govern and serve the people that this man possessed."

Additional details of Lincoln's 1840 visit to Carmi and his overnight stay at the Ratcliff Inn are available at the White County Historical Society Museum in downtown Carmi.

Contact Len Wells at (618) 842-2159 or lenwells@wabash.net.



Lorraine Loge Her grandfather had a chance meeting with Abe Lincoln.

STORY TOOLS

E-mail story
Comments
iPod friendly
Printer friendly

MORE LOCAL NEWS

Three stabbed in Christmas Eve fight
Crash sends five to hospital
Man arrested at Subway