

At the request of Chester County attorney Jesse Fell, Abraham Lincoln, 51, wrote the following sketch of his life in early 1860.

"I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Ky. My parents were born in Virginia, of undistinguished families -second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams and others in Macon Counties, Ill.

"My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Va., to Kentucky, about 1781 or '82, where, a year or two later, he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pa. An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham and the like.

"My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Ind., in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin' and cipherin'" to the Rule of Three¹. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.

"Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the Rule of Three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

"I was raised to farm-work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, and passed the first year in Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard, County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk War, and I was elected captain of volunteers - a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went through the campaign, ran for the Legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten - the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the Legislature. I was not a candidate afterwards. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield² to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the Lower House of Congress, but was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849-1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig³ in politics, and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvases. I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise⁴ aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

"If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said, I am, in height, six feet four inches nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on an average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected."

Yours very truly,



Chester County COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Chester County Community Foundation leads, inspires and encourages all individuals and organizations to create or contribute to lasting philanthropic charitable legacies, to improve the quality of life primarily in Chester County.

One of more than 500 community foundations across the country, CCCF serves as a philanthropic agent for local donors, manages endowments for donors and nonprofit agencies, and distributes hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants annually, to support local causes.

Increasingly, county residents are turning to the community foundation to manage their bequests for local causes, thereby ensuring that the intent of their gifts will be permanently honored. The foundation is also often used to establish funds in honor or memory of others, and as a cost-effective alternative to establishing a private foundation.

For more information, contact CCCF
at the Lincoln Building
in West Chester, Pennsylvania 610-696-8211.



- 1 The old name for that process in arithmetic known as proportion.
- 2 When Lincoln came to Springfield, it was hardly more than a frontier town. He was only beginning to be known as a lawyer; his reputation was greater as an excellent talker, a story-teller of the first order, a good-natured, friendly fellow, liked and trusted by all. Early in 1837, he put himself on written record (Illinois State Journal, March 3) as opposed to slavery.
- 3 With Clay's death in 1852, the Whig party dissolved, to be eventually succeeded by the Republican party.
- 4 In 1854, U.S. Sen. Stephen Douglas brought about the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, thus reopening the question of slavery in newly acquired territory, or newly admitted states, north of 36°30'. This roused all the North to instant protest, including Squire William Everhart, who was then serving as a member of the 33rd Congress. Lincoln later debated Douglas on the slavery issue when he ran against him for the Senate in 1858. While he won the debates, Lincoln lost that election, only to subsequently defeat Douglas for the presidency two years later.

Text provided to the Community Foundation by Baldwin's Books, West Chester, and confirmed by the archives of David Kirby.

THE LINCOLN BUILDING

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THE LINCOLN BIOGRAPHY BUILDING



In 1829, Everhart purchased the 99-acre Wollerton farm, which is today the southeastern part of the heart of West Chester. (His wife's grandfather, "old" Isaiah Matlack, owned most of the northern part of the borough.) On this property, Everhart constructed more than 100 brick buildings and laid out four streets named for his friends, Isaac Wayne, Gen. Isaac Barnard, Charles Miner, and Dr. William Darlington, all former congressmen. Some historians believe that the Lincoln Building was West Chester's first "office building," constructed specifically to be rented as offices for various businesses.

In 1860, space in the building was being rented from Squire Everhart by the *Chester County Times*, an early weekly Republican newspaper. The *Times* was owned by Samuel Downing, printer and publisher, and edited by E.W. Capron. Also leasing an office in the Lincoln building was Joseph J. Lewis, an attorney well known for his opposition to slavery.

Early that year, Downing and Lewis were provided with a three-page, handwritten biographical sketch from Abraham Lincoln, which he had prepared at the urging of a friend, Jesse Fell, who was a native of Toughkenamon, New Garden Township, and the person behind the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

Fell and Lewis' brother, Edward, also a newspaper publisher in Illinois, had realized Lincoln's need for publicity in the East to introduce him as a prospective presidential candidate. They urged Lincoln to prepare and submit his sketch to the *Times* in order to favorably position him with Pennsylvania's large number of electoral delegates.

The short, humble sketch constituted all that was known at the time of Lincoln's life. Of it, Lincoln said, "There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me." The sketch ran in the *Times* on February 11, 1860, and was later republished in some of the leading newspapers on the East coast and country-wide. That simple account of his life was, according to Lincoln, instrumental in securing his nomination for the presidency on May 16, and his eventual election on November 7, 1860. Joseph Lewis was subsequently rewarded by President Lincoln by being named Director of the Internal Revenue during his administration.

The Lincoln Building remained in the Everhart family until 1905. Over the years, it was occupied by many prominent borough residents, including Norris Smith, printer; Downing and Pinkerton, editors and publishers; M.S. Way and Son, real estate and insurance; and Wayne McVeagh, Esq., who later became attorney general in President Garfield's cabinet.

Through the 1900s, the Lincoln Building was attached to the famous Mansion House Hotel on the corner of Market and Church (also built by Everhart) by a series of small shops. The Mansion House was known far and wide for its caged collection of wild monkeys in the lobby, and was frequently used to sequester jury members. True to its political past, during this period, the Lincoln Building often served as campaign headquarters for various political aspirants.

The Lincoln Building was purchased by West Chester businessman David Kirby in 1977, in order to save it from proposed demolition along with the Mansion House, at the time of construction of the adjacent commercial building. That construction left 28 W. Market Street as a stand-alone structure. Mr. Kirby undertook a meticulous restoration of the building and successfully petitioned for it to be added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. He used the building for his personal offices for several years until 1991.

In 1997, Mr. Kirby agreed to sell the Lincoln Building to the Chester County Community Foundation, which had been formed in 1994, for them to use as their headquarters. From this building, the foundation will undertake numerous activities, in cooperation with local citizens and organizations, to maintain and enhance the quality of life in Chester County, Pennsylvania.



The Federal-style building at 28 W. Market Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania, is widely known as the "Lincoln Biography Building."

Built in 1833 by William Everhart (1785-1868), a former Congressman, philanthropist and prominent borough resident, the building was initially numbered 14 W. Market and was first referred to as the "Everhart Building."

Squire Everhart was born in West Vincent Township, the son of a Revolutionary War soldier. He fathered eight children and, from his home on Gay Street, served as chief Burgess and justice of the peace in West Chester. Everhart was a successful merchant for 60 consecutive years until his retirement, in 1867.