

9-1988

Historical Commentary: Mr. Lincoln's Bridgewater Connections

Jordan Fiore
Bridgewater State College

Jean Stonehouse
Bridgewater State College, jstonehouse@bridgew.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

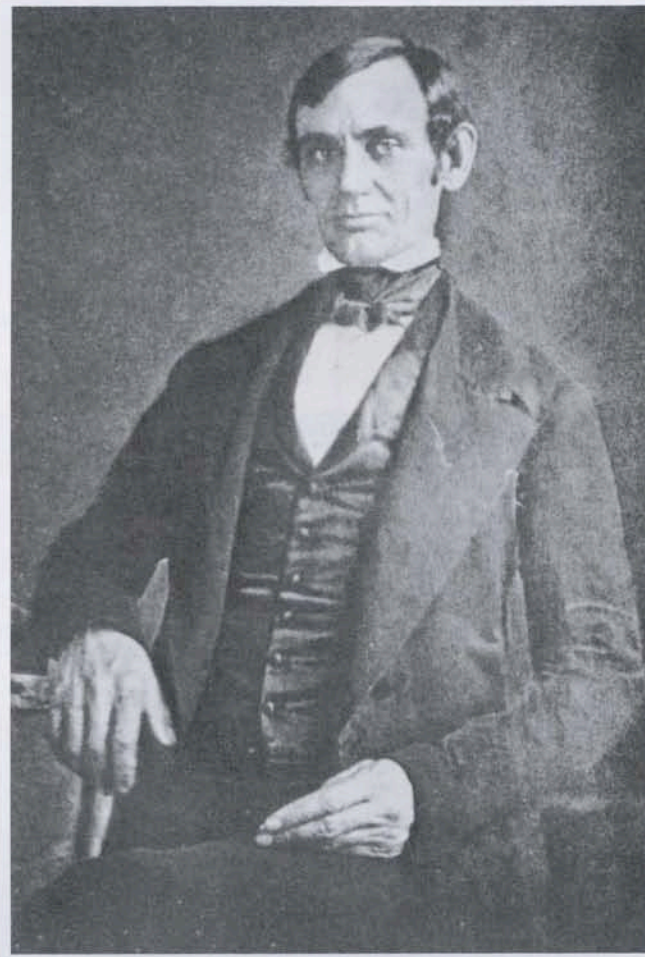
Fiore, Jordan and Stonehouse, Jean (1988). Historical Commentary: Mr. Lincoln's Bridgewater Connections. *Bridgewater Review*, 6(1), 21-24.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol6/iss1/11

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Bridgewater was a small town slowly changing from a rural farming community to a typical New England manufacturing town. Although growing slowly, Bridgewater was not isolated. With roots reaching back in Old Colony history to a land grant that made it a plantation of the town of Duxbury, the town was firmly connected to the world around it. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, ships used the Taunton River to gain access to the inland port of Taunton, and from 1790 until the twentieth century, New Englanders built ships on the river in the Titicut section of Bridgewater. Bridgewater people advocated the development of a highway connecting Boston and New Bedford, and Bridgewater became a half-way stop on the highway. By 1846, the Old Colony Line and its Abington Branch connected Bridgewater to Boston, Plymouth and Fall River by rail.

By the 1840's when the state normal school (later to become Bridgewater State College) was established there and the subjects of this paper were establishing themselves as town leaders, Bridgewater's population was between two and three thousand, and it could boast of several boot and shoe factories, two air and cupola furnaces which cast over 400 tons of iron a year, two forges, two nail manufacturers, a tack factory and two companies that manufactured cotton gins.

In the same decade Abraham Lincoln was advancing in Illinois politics and the profession of the law. He was a Whig leader in the Illinois legislature and a politician whose views were listened to in the whirl of Illinois politics. By the middle of the decade, Abraham Lincoln, then in his middle 30's, was destined for service in the United States House of Representatives and



N.H. Shepherd

MR. LINCOLN'S BRIDGEWATER CONNECTIONS

by Jordan Fiore and Jean Stonehouse

perhaps beyond. In 1846, he was elected to Congress and went to Washington the following year.

In the fifteen years preceding his election to the American Presidency, Lincoln's path would cross the paths of two of Bridgewater's successful businessmen several times, and the contacts affected all three men. Both of the Bridgewater men, Artemas Hale and Joshua Eddy Crane, were locally well-respected, and each treasured his rela-

tionship with Lincoln — brief as it was — as long as he lived.

—I—

Like Abraham Lincoln, Artemas Hale came from a humble background. He was born in Winchendon, a town in north central Massachusetts near the New Hampshire border, on October 20, 1783. His father was a farmer who had served as a captain in the American Revolution. Hale attended the district school in Winchendon, worked on the family farm, studied on his

own and was proficient enough to become a surveyor in the town and then a teacher at nineteen.

In 1813 he went to Hingham, where he taught school for several years. The war of 1812 had begun, and he witnessed the battle between the *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon* in Massachusetts Bay. He also served as an officer in the local militia company organized to respond to any land attack by the British. Fortunately, the unit was never called to active duty.

His students in Hingham included many men who were destined to become important in the town and in the Commonwealth. Here, too, he met and wooed Deborah Lincoln, a descendant of Samuel Lincoln. They were married in Hingham in 1815.

Artemas Hale's talent was too great to be spent on the duties of a country schoolmaster, and at the end of the War of 1812, the Hales moved to East Bridgewater where he entered the mercantile business. A few years later, in 1819, he became a clerk for Lazell Perkins & Co., the leading iron manufacturers of the area, and then moved to the firm of Carver, Wasburn & Co., one of the country's leading manufacturers of cotton gins, where he became clerk and then agent and treasurer of the rapidly growing firm.

It was a propitious time to become involved in the manufacture and sale of cotton gins. Thanks to the large number of cotton manufacturing firms that were established in Massachusetts from Lowell south to Fall River and New Bedford in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a steady supply of cotton was needed. The gin, which merely separated the seed from the cotton ball without damaging the cotton, allows for the use of short-fibred cotton in making cotton thread for manufacture into cloth. Cotton-growing in

the South and cotton-manufacturing in the North and in Europe flourished.

It was also a propitious time to become actively involved in local social and political affairs. In addition to his business career, Hale took part in the social and political life of the town. He joined the First Church in Bridgewater, served on several church committees and was involved in the expansion of the church and in the erection of a new church building in 1845. He was raised in the Friendship Lodge of Masons in Bridgewater, served in several posts, and finally became Worshipful Master in 1823.

Always public spirited, he was an officer and trustee of the Bridgewater Academy, which had been established in 1799, and was its treasurer for years. When the Commonwealth proposed that state normal schools should be established, he served with the Rev. Charles Brooks, former President John Quincy Adams and Senator Daniel Webster on a committee to ask that one of the schools be established in Plymouth County. He headed the committee that raised funds for the school, and he argued successfully that the school should be established in Bridgewater. He collected funds from individuals and towns and contributed a great part of his own time and pledged his own funds to insure the success of the school. He was the school's best friend for forty years.

His record in public service was outstanding. One local historian wrote that "his sterling integrity and ability attracted the attention of his townsmen, and he was called to various offices of trust and responsibility which he filled with rare acceptance."

He served as town clerk and town treasurer in 1822, 1823, 1825, 1827 and 1828, as state representative in 1826, 1827, 1828, 1829, and 1831 and as a state senator for

three years. In addition, he was a moderator for town meetings for five years. He also found time to serve in the local fire department, and when that agency was reorganized and obtained new equipment, Artemas Hale, though sixty-one years of age at the time, was chosen chief engineer.

In his early years he had been a Federalist and later a National Republican and a

cended from the same Samuel Lincoln of Hingham who was Abraham Lincoln's first American ancestor. From the study of consanguinity charts we know that Deborah Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln were fourth cousins twice removed.

Solomon Lincoln lived in Hingham, Massachusetts. A polished and urbane lawyer and civic leader, Lincoln was the author of an excellent history



ARTEMAS HALE

H.N. Robinson

supporter of John Quincy Adams. When the Whig party was organized, he joined it, and in 1844 he was supported for United States Representative by his party's caucus. In the election that followed, although he attained a plurality, he could not gain the required majority and no one was elected. The following year he was elected.

Although this estimate must be based on conjecture, it is not difficult to determine why Hale was attracted to Lincoln. His wife was a Lincoln, and Hale wondered if she and Abraham Lincoln were related. Lincoln could give him no answers, but the questions did cause a chain reaction for both of them. Deborah Lincoln was des-

of the town and a serious Lincoln genealogist. He wrote to Artemas Hale on March 2, 1948, asking Hale to ask Abraham Lincoln questions about his family background. Hale showed Lincoln the correspondence and on March 6, the Illinois Congressman wrote to Solomon Lincoln as follows:

Dear Sir: Our letter to Mr. Hale, in which you do me the honor of making some kind inquiries concerning me, has been handed me by Mr. Hale, with the request that I should give you the desired information. I was born February 12th, 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky. My father's name is Thomas, my grandfather's was Abraham, - the same name of (sic) my own. My

grandfather went from Rockingham county in Virginia, to Kentucky, about the year 1782; and, two years afterwards, was killed by the Indians. We have a vague tradition, that my great-grandfather went from Pennsylvania to Virginia; and that he was a quaker. Further back then this, I have never heard anything. It may do no harm to say that "Abraham" and "Mordecai" are common names in our family; while the name, "Levi" so common among the Lincolns of New England, I have not known in any instance among us. Owing to my father being left an orphan at the age of six years, in poverty, and in a new country, he became a wholly uneducated man; which I suppose is the reason why I know so little of our family history. I believe I can say nothing more that would at all interest you. If you shall be able to trace any connection between yourself and me, or in fact, whether you shall or not. I should be pleased to have a line from you at any time.

*Very Respectfully,
A. Lincoln*

Abraham Lincoln's letter interested Solomon Lincoln very much, and he wrote on March 12 raising several more questions. The Congressman's letter shows that Solomon Lincoln had piqued Abraham Lincoln's genealogical curiosity. Lincoln replied again and in the next few months made a number of inquiries to people about his background. He wrote Solomon Lincoln on March 24, 1848 as follows:

*Washington,
March 24, 1848*

*Mr. Solomon Lincoln
Dear Sir:*

Yours of the 21st is received. I shall not be able to answer your interrogatories very fully; I will, however, do the best I can. I have mentioned that my grandfather's name was Abraham. He had, as I think I

heard, four brothers, Issac, Jacob, Thomas, and John. He had three sons, Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas, the last my father. My Uncle Mordecai, had three sons, Abraham, James, and Mordecai. Uncle Josiah had several daughters, and only one son, Thomas. My father has an only child, myself, of course.

This is all I know certainly on the subject of names; it is, however, my father's understanding that, Abraham (,) Mordecai, and Thomas are old family names of ours. The reason I did not mention Thomas as a family name in my other letter was because it is so very common a name, as to prove but little, if anything, in the way of identification.

Since I wrote you, it occurred to me to enquire of Gov. McDowell, who represents the district in Virginia, including Rockingham, whether he knew persons of our name there. He informs me he does; though none very intimately except one, an old man by the Christian name of David. That he is of our family I have no doubt. I now address him a letter, making such enquiries as suggest themselves; and when I shall receive an answer, I will communicate to you, anything that may seem pertinent to your object.

*Very truly yours,
A. Lincoln*

Abraham Lincoln then wrote to David Lincoln and the Lincolns asking for information about his family. These inquiries are the subject of another paper.

Abraham Lincoln was in Massachusetts in September 1848, but he did not visit Bridgewater and, unless Hale attended the Whig state convention in Worcester, the chances are they did not meet. His term completed, Abraham Lincoln went home and for several years practiced law and prepared himself for later political action.

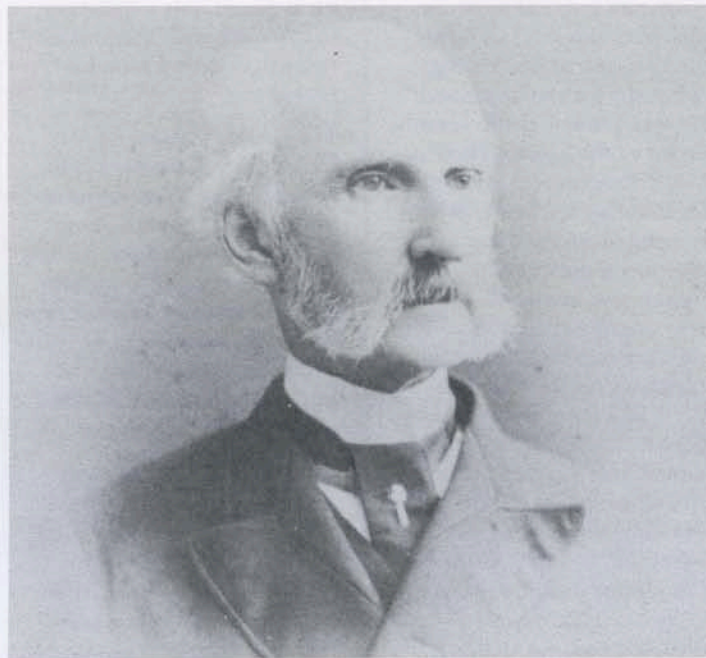
After two terms Artemas

Hale retired and returned home and established his farm. He had served well and was greatly respected. Like Lincoln he was a Clay Whig and his stands on the protective tariff and internal improvements were in the mainstream or his constituency's thinking.

Also, like Lincoln, when the Whig Party collapsed, he moved into the new Republican party which his friend Joshua Eddy Crane had helped

state, beyond dividing strength, and thereby bettering the chances of Buchanan. They know this; and I still hope the bulk of them will think better than to throw away their votes for such an object. Your obt. Servant.

In politics the town of Bridgewater had generally supported the Whig cause and later the Republican, but the Democratic party was reason-



Courtesy of "The Crane History of Bridgewater" by the Bridgewater Historical Collectors

JOSHUA EDDY CRANE

to establish. His interest in politics continued, and in the summer of 1856 he wrote to Abraham Lincoln inquiring about Fremont's chances against Buchanan in Indiana and Illinois. Lincoln advised him correctly about the situation. Pointing out that he was "a Fremont man," he asked Hale to make due allowance for his partiality. He added:

I have no doubt, then that the opposition to Buchanan, are the majority in both these states; but, that opposition being divided between Fremont and Fillmore, places both states in some danger. I think the danger is not great in Indiana; but some greater here. The Fillmore men have no power in either

ably strong. There were some Jacksonians and others who felt that the North should not have antagonized the South. In the 1840's and 1850's several Irish Catholic families moved into Bridgewater, and a Roman Catholic church was organized. Many of these Irish immigrants became American citizens, and since the general pattern among the immigrants here was to vote Democratic, they probably did so. In 1860 Hale supported Lincoln, and he carried Bridgewater handily.

In 1861 the Democratic candidate for governor carried the state, and, despite the townspeople's support of the war effort, the Democrats did well during the war years. In 1864 Artemas Hale was chosen as a presidential elec-

tor for Massachusetts,* and Lincoln won a great victory in Bridgewater and carried Governor John Andrew to victory with him. Hale's name is first on the list of electors on the Republican ballot. His friend Joshua Eddy Crane served as Republican Town Chairman in this period.

Until his death in 1882 in his ninety-ninth year, he continued his work in the town and his interest in political affairs, and at the time of his death he was honored as Bridgewater's first citizen.

—II—

Joshua Eddy Crane, Jr.'s life touched the interests of the Lincoln Group of Boston twice. First, in 1844, he decided to join his maternal uncle in business in the town of Bridgewater, home of Bridgewater State College, a regular Lincoln Group meeting place and the home of the Lincoln Collections contributed to the college library by that organization. Second, his long-term interest in American politics, anti-slavery activity and travel brought him to Springfield, Illinois in 1860 hoping to visit the next President of the United States.

Crane's Lincoln connection barely qualifies as a minor footnote in the Lincoln story. Yet in the two men, Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Crane, we can find two very different yet necessarily complementary approaches to national politics. The ambitious Illinois politician, seeking the destiny would carry him through the crucible of civil war to immortality, faced issues constrained by his realization of what was possible and what was impossible, by the necessary give and take of political life and by the awesome responsibility of high political office. The Bridgewater shopkeeper, living in a smaller world, enjoyed the luxury of building his political life without restraints. Joshua Crane had thousands of counterparts, and, with them, he helped

spur the crusade that ended slavery. Abraham Lincoln, that unique man, made their dreams bear fruit.

Family ties and business opportunity brought Joshua Crane into Bridgewater as a twenty-one year old man in 1844. He had left his native Berkley, Massachusetts to serve a five-year apprenticeship in the New York counting room of Messrs. Griffin and Eddy and was returning to New England to be associated with his maternal uncle, Morton Eddy, in Bridgewater's country general store. He became its sole proprietor in 1848. A general store would bridge the town's manufacturing and farming communities, and townspeople found Crane's store to be a pleasant oasis. A visit to the store meant an opportunity to enjoy Crane's good conversation. Townspeople appreciated his amiability, his hopeful spirit for "he always had something pleasant to say to everyone" and his unwillingness to speak against others. Some patrons had fond memories of the old dog who slept in the store and travelled about the town with Crane.

Crane's associations indicate that Bridgewater enjoyed a rich community life. As he settled into the community in which he raised a family of seven children, Crane became involved in a wide range of activities. A member of the Central Square Church, he chaired its building committee. The high point of a thirty-year association with the Plymouth County Agricultural Society, located in Bridgewater since 1819, came when he made its 50th Anniversary Address. As vice president of the Bridgewater Reading Society, whose 2,000 volume collection became the foundation of the town library, he would have attended its winter lectures, perhaps to hear Oliver Wendell Holmes or Josiah Quincy, Jr. speak. An interest in scholarship made him a

trustee of the Bridgewater Academy, and he was a good friend and supporter of the Bridgewater State Normal School. He was also a Free Mason, the chairman of the State Workhouse Board of Trustees, an honorary member and contributor to both Taunton's Old Colony Historical Society and the New England Historic Genealogical Society of Boston and an active participant in town and state politics.

Crane's political activities provided him with an opportunity to act on his "strong sympathy for the oppressed." He was present at the organization of the Liberty Party in Massachusetts, and he worked for it during the years "when it required strong moral courage" to support a party "which was in a small and very unpopular minority." He subsequently transferred his allegiance to the Free Soil Party and then to the Republican Party, which he represented in local and state office and which he served through the Republican Town Committee and the State Central Committee. In his writing and in his political life, the *Old Colony Memorial* testified that "he was liberal in all his ideas, a foe to all iniquity and shame, thoroughly loyal and patriotic, and a most earnest worker for the cause of human liberty when the foul blot of slavery cursed our land."

Abraham Lincoln probably would not have approved of Joshua Crane's political stand or of his support of the Liberty Party. The practical politician would regret that party's foolish blindness resulted in siphoning votes away from major party candidates with real opportunities to make progress in the struggle against slavery, but to measure the impact of Joshua Crane and the thousands like him in the Liberty Party and the Free Soil Party in pushing major party candidates into stronger anti-slavery positions is impossible.

By 1860, Joshua Crane and Abraham Lincoln were tied together in the Republican Party and hopeful about its prospects, and Crane travelled to Springfield to join the thousands of people who met with Lincoln in his State House office. The city and the building with its "handsome park in the centre of the city" impressed Crane favorably. Introduced to Lincoln by Mr. Baker, editor of the *Illinois State Journal*, Crane and his party stayed only a half-hour. In common with many other contemporaries, Crane reported that

The various pictures of Mr. Lincoln which we have seen all fail to give a fair representation of his features. He is very tall and muscular, but not ill-proportioned. His appearance and manner bespeak him a man of great energy of character, cheerful, hopeful, and easy of access to all who approach him.

Something in the "over-shadowing mass of hair" on Lincoln's brow and his "quick penetrating eye" reminded Crane of Rufus Choate, the famous Massachusetts lawyer. "Having no political mission," he explained, "we did not press these subjects, but shook hands with great cordiality, and parted with the next President of the United States."

— III —

So you have the story of Lincoln's Bridgewater connections. We admit the story is not earth shattering or unique and you are probably at best quite underwhelmed by this account.

One man knew Lincoln when he was a fledgling congressman, and his part in Lincoln's life, though minor, is important. On their searches through the Lincoln correspondence to 1848, the writers are impressed by the fact that Lincoln, like many Westerners of his generation, knew little about his American ancestors and seemingly

cared less about the matter.

Solomon Lincoln forced him to think about his ancestry, and Abraham Lincoln's newly developed concern for his background began and is worth further study. Lincoln opened correspondence with several distant relatives and inspired Solomon Lincoln to continue his research into a possible relationship with the Congressman and President.

Indeed, in the winter of 1865, less than one year after Abraham Lincoln's death, Solomon Lincoln first published his findings that Abraham Lincoln, like Solomon Lincoln and Deborah Lincoln Hale, was a descendant of Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, and his research has directed and influenced every genealogical study of Abraham Lincoln since 1865.

We know that Abraham Lincoln was visited by many Americans during the summer of 1860, after his nomination for president and in the late fall and winter after his election. One of these visitors was Joshua Eddy Crane, who left us a pleasant note on the impressions of a New England storekeeper, a typical middle-class Yankee of 1860, who touched greatness and knew it at once.

Most of all we see in both men, their reflections and their personal lives, the fact that they recognized the genius that was Abraham Lincoln. That they have shared their experience with posterity places us heavily in their debt. ■

**A ballot is included in the Howard and Carolyn Odell Collection of the Clement C. Maxwell Library, Bridgewater State College.*

This article is from a paper read before the meeting of the Lincoln Group of Boston, Boston University, April 12, 1987

JORDAN D. FIORE
Professor of History

JEAN F. STONEHOUSE
Associate Professor of History