



## *Is 2009 really the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth?*

*Or, was he here in North Carolina a few years earlier?*

*By Michael E.C. Gery*

Serious scholars say it's just a bunch of hokey, but the rest of us still wonder if Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, might have been born this month in 1804 here in Rutherford County, N.C.

While Carolina Country did not start this ball rolling—that most likely was James H. Cathey, a state legislator, who alleged Lincoln's Tar Heel roots in an 1899 book—we certainly have kept it rolling along, mainly because it seems like good sport. Also, it doesn't do any harm to determine for sure where Lincoln was born.

The possibility that Abraham Lincoln was born in Rutherford County has become somewhat of a cottage industry—or, we might say, a log cabin industry. In March 2008, proponents opened their own Lincoln Center in the old Bostic, N.C., train depot, only months after the area's leading proponent, Tom Melton, died. Tom Melton, a World War II veteran and educator, collected all he could about Abe Lincoln's connection to North Carolina, and he had a marker placed about a mile from Puzzle Creek, where lie the first pieces of the puzzle of Lincoln's birth. The Bostic Lincoln Center is formally petitioning for DNA to help solve the puzzle.

A recent Lincoln Center event had Jerry Goodnight signing his new book "Looking For Lincoln Amid the Rumors, Legends and Lies" and career Navy man and aircraft electrician Don Norris signing his new one, "Abraham Enloe of Western North Carolina, the Natural Father of Abraham Lincoln."

Norris' self-published book sketches the origin and selected adventures of the gentleman farmer who Mr. Norris and others claim fathered Abraham here on Puzzle Creek. More recently, Alleghany County resident Annis Ward Jackson published "Into the Twilight: A Disavowed Beginning," described as "a story of ill-fated love" based on the lore surrounding Lincoln's North Carolina connections.

We should point out that The Lincoln Museum in Kentucky is located in Hodgenville, three miles from the alleged Kentucky log cabin birthplace on a farm called Sinking Spring, where documents show Thomas Lincoln lived with Abraham's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, in 1809, which is when some people, including Honest Abe himself, say Abraham was born. And that the North Carolina Office of Archives and History on Feb. 12 will host "The Lincoln Bicentennial: A Symposium" at the Museum of History in Raleigh, at which it's unlikely any serious scholarship on Lincoln's birth in our state will be presented.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of people who assert in all seriousness that Abraham Lincoln was born to Nancy Hanks in February 1804, two years and four months before the recorded marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks in Washington County, Ky. They say that the toddler Abraham was nearby during that wedding, and that his mother had been carried by Mr. Lincoln, a muleskinner, to Kentucky because she was unwanted in the North Carolina household where, as a bondservant, she had romanced the well-off businessman, cattle dealer and slave trader Abraham Enloe.

Evidently there were records (since disappeared) of Nancy Hanks attending Concord Baptist Church in Rutherford County. Even though

scholars say there were lots of women named Nancy Hanks around at the time, this Nancy seems to have been transported along with her young son out to Swain County, where Abraham Enloe had recently moved to set up a new farm with his family. This Nancy had been living with the Enloes on Puzzle Creek as a servant since she was about 12. When she was about 17, the story goes, she and the tall, lanky Mr. Enloe became intimately involved. Nancy accompanied the large family to their new place in Swain County, not far from Waynesville, until Nancy's pregnancy became obvious. Mr. Enloe then arranged for his friend Felix Walker, of Buncombe County, to take Nancy back to the Puzzle Creek homestead which was occupied by tenants. Nancy gave birth to Abraham there.

What happened next is just as unclear as what happened earlier, but the story says Mr. Enloe arranged to bring Nancy and Abraham back to Swain County. But Mrs. Enloe wanted them out. So Mr. Enloe arranged for them to go 300 miles away to Kentucky, a place where he had established a grist mill, and that he paid a short, stocky, shiftless millworker named Tom Lincoln to marry Nancy and care for the family. The story continues that at some point Mr. Enloe heard that Mr. Lincoln was mistreating Nancy, so he visited the household, consoled Nancy, was caught by a drunken Mr. Lincoln who then tussled with Mr. Enloe and bit his nose pretty hard.

R. Vincent Enlow, of New Jersey, published not long ago a lengthy examination of the story. He's distantly related to Abraham Enloe, like a few other people in western North Carolina who look an awful lot like Abraham Lincoln.

Anyway, for more information, start at [www.bosticlincolncenter.com](http://www.bosticlincolncenter.com). 