

## DAILY LIFE IN LINCOLN'S TIME

### ▪ **The number of States in the Union**

- 17 – when Lincoln is born (18 – 60 days later)
- 19 – shortly after the Lincolns move to Indiana (24 – by the time the Lincolns leave)
- 34 – by Lincoln's first inauguration (36 – by Lincoln's assassination)

### ▪ **Population**

During Lincoln's life the population of the United States grew from 7.25 million to 34 million, increasing 4.5 times.

The concentration of population remained rural during most of Lincoln's lifetime and was steadily shifting westward.

By the time of the Civil War and in the years following, the population concentration shifted toward the urban at an accelerating pace.

As the nation expanded, the frontier moved further west. At the time of Lewis and Clark, the frontier included lands that at the time were parts of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas, starting at their present westernmost borders and extending to the Mississippi. By the time of Lincoln's Presidency, the frontier was receding westward from the Mississippi and eastward from California.

The mobility of the American public began to rise as the railroads spread across the country and as Civil War veterans began to bring back stories of parts of the country they had not seen before the war.

Concentration of wealth in 1860  
In the seven major urban centers - \$3000 per family  
In the plantation South - \$12,000 per family

### ▪ **Life expectancy**

Life expectancy for Americans born in 1800 was about thirty-five years.  
By 1900, it had increased to forty-seven years.

The average life expectancy of a man Lincoln's age in 1850 was 71-72 years.

### ▪ **Marriage and family life**

Couples became freed from chaperones and many other restrictions, allowing them to interact socially.

The principal role of married women was child rearing.

The principal role of married men was to earn income to support the family.

The nuclear family model – father, mother, and minor children, emerged, but the extended family continued to thrive throughout the century.

Despite their poverty, the Sarah and Abraham Lincoln contradicted the trend of sons attending school while daughters worked to pay for their brothers' schooling.

Still, low wages during the era of Lincoln's boyhood and young adulthood sent many children to work instead of being sheltered at home.

Men, women, and children living on farms all worked to maintain the house and property and to produce income.

By the time of Lincoln's adulthood, men-only organizations flourished for those in the upper and middle classes. Men met in taverns to discuss politics, formed organizations to pursue literary and scientific interests, and leagues to organize athletic competitions. Men engaged in activities from labor unions to Bible studies and more.

Middle and upper class women also gathered in social groups that included literary societies and social reform organizations. The latter included causes ranging from women's suffrage to temperance unions to campaigns against child labor.

#### ▪ **Medicine**

Because doctors generally regarded the body's parts as all connected to one another, they generally did treat causes – since the germ theory of disease had not been widely accepted at the beginning of the century. Instead, they sought to maintain “balance” in the body as a whole.

To achieve equilibrium, doctors continued the practice of bleeding patients, applied substances such as camphor to induce sweating, administered emetics, diuretics and laxatives – all to restore equilibrium.

Experts believed that sicknesses arose from the environment. They advised patients to avoid miasmas, areas of disease-causing foul air.

People generally employed home remedies before consulting a physician.

Consequently, doctors did not enjoy the high level of prestige they enjoy today.

Physicians made house calls more often than they saw patients in an office setting.

Hospitals continued to be refuges for those who could not afford medical treatment.

#### ▪ **Religion**

Evangelical Protestants (including Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) enjoyed the largest numbers, greatest wealth, and most significant influence.

Non-evangelical Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, and others also vied with those dominant Christian denominations.

Predominance among the denominations shifted throughout the century.

At Lincoln's birth the heirs of the Puritans – the Congregationalists - in held the greatest influence, but within a generation, that influence was slipping significantly. The Presbyterians and Baptists maintained their status, closely followed by the Episcopalians, far ahead of either Roman Catholics or Methodists.

By the time of Lincoln's Presidency, the Roman Catholics and Methodists were vying for the top rating. The Baptists remained third in total numbers but Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Christian Church/Disciples of Christ were closing in on them.

These Bible-based denominations promoted Bible literacy in particular through 700,000 Sunday Schools and fueled social reform movements including, temperance, women's rights, anti-slavery, and asylum reform movements.

- **Fashion**

In the Civil War Era, men of the upper and middle classes wore black suits, white shirts, bow ties, low cut boots, and top hat or derbies.

Work clothing typically included trousers, wool shirts, and boots.

Women wore hoop skirts, crinolines, and tight bodices for formal occasions.

Plain long skirts, blouses and bonnets were typical of everyday wear.

Parasols, fans, snoods, and bonnets were major accessories for fashionable ladies.

- **Food**

In the absence of refrigeration, food was eaten fresh or smoked, canned, dried, salted, or pickled.

Fresh foods from gardens included tomatoes, lettuce, beans, corn, cabbage and potatoes.

People ate meat much as today; pork, beef, chicken, lamb, and turkey; that they also ate game birds such as pigeons and partridges.

People drank tea, milk, cider, coffee, lemonade, and sarsaparilla.

Underwood Deviled Ham, Borden's Condensed Milk, and Van Camp's Pork and Beans were all available during the Civil War.

- **Entertainment**

People played card games, board games, and dice games.

They enjoyed boxing and ball games.

They played musical instruments, sang together, and attended balls.

Popular magazines included *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Harpers*.

People attended lectures and exhibitions.

Reading was a widespread pastime.