

4. ANN RUTLEDGE

Perhaps the most reliable statement extant concerning the relationship of Ann Rutledge and Abraham Lincoln to each other is to be found in the words of her younger brother. One of the most interesting speculations regarding Lincoln's life concerns the effect upon his personality and career of his remembrance of the lovely Ann Rutledge and of her tragic and untimely death. Apparently, Lincoln almost never referred in after years to this episode of his life. The two selections that follow are from letters written to William Herndon by R. B. Rutledge, Ann's brother.

You make some pertinent inquiries concerning my sister and the relations which existed between herself and Mr. Lincoln. My sister Ann was born January 7, 1813, and died August 25, 1835. She was born in Kentucky and died in Menard County, Illinois. In 1830, my sister being then but seventeen years of age, a stranger calling himself John McNeil came to New Salem. He boarded with Mr. Cameron and was keeping a store with a Samuel Hill. A friendship grew up between McNeil and Ann which ripened apace and resulted in an engagement to marry. McNeil's real name was McNamar. It seems that his father had failed in business, and his son, a very young man, had determined to make a fortune, pay off his father's debts and restore him to his former social and financial standing. With this view he left his home clandestinely, and in order to avoid pursuit by his parents changed his name. His conduct was strictly hightoned, honest, and moral, and his object, whatever any may think of the deception which he practiced in changing his name, entirely praiseworthy.

He prospered in business and, pending his engagement with Ann, he revealed his true name, returned to Ohio [actually New York] to relieve his parents from their embarrassments, and to bring the family with him to Illinois. On his return to Ohio, several years having elapsed, he found his father in declining health or dead, and perhaps the circumstances of the family prevented his immediate return to New Salem. At all events he was absent two or three years.

In the meantime Mr. Lincoln paid his addresses to Ann, continued his visits and attentions regularly, and those resulted in an engagement to marry, conditional to an honorable release from the contract with McNamar. There is no kind of doubt as to the

existence of this engagement. David Rutledge urged Ann to consummate it, but she refused until such time as she could see McNamar, inform him of the change in her feelings, and seek an honorable release. Mr. Lincoln lived in the village, McNamar did not return, and in August 1835 Ann sickened and died. The effect upon Mr. Lincoln's mind was terrible; he became plunged in despair, and many of his friends feared that reason would desert her throne. His extraordinary emotions were regarded as strong evidence of the existence of the tenderest relations between himself and the deceased.

My sister was esteemed the brightest mind of the family, was studious, devoted to her duties of whatever character, and possessed a remarkably amiable and lovable disposition. She had light hair and blue eyes.

R. B. RUTLEDGE TO HERNDON, OCTOBER 1866.

The facts are William Berry first courted Ann and was rejected; afterwards Samuel Hill; then John McNamar, which resulted in an engagement to marry at some future time. He, McNamar, left the county on business, was gone some years; in the meantime and during McNamar's absence, Mr. Lincoln courted Ann and engaged to marry her, on the completion of the study of law. In this I am corroborated by James McRutledge, a cousin about her age, and who was in her confidence. He says in a letter to me just received: "Ann told me once in coming from a camp meeting on Rock Creek, that engagements made too far ahead sometimes failed, that one had failed (meaning her engagement with McNamar), and gave me to understand that as soon as certain studies were completed she and Lincoln would be married."

R. B. RUTLEDGE TO HERNDON, NOVEMBER 21, 1866.