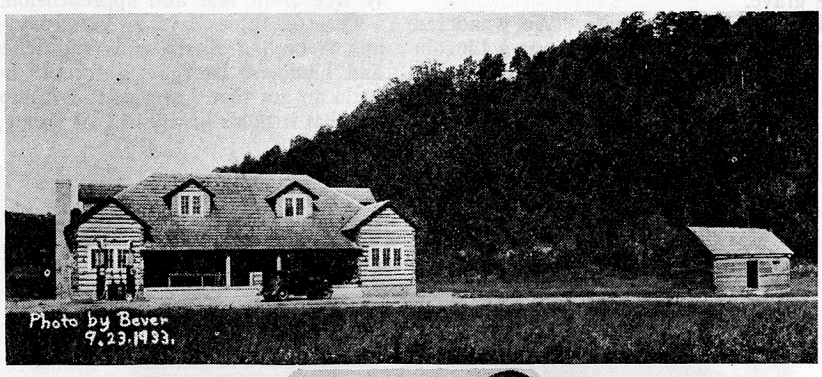
Little Grave on Knob Creek

After a Century the Final Resting Place of Lincoln's Infant Brother Is Discovered Near Site of Emancipator's Early Home in La Rue County, Kentucky

By FRANCIS MARION VAN NATTER

THOMAS LINCOLN, Jr., brother of Abraham, was born in the log-cabin home on Knob Creek, close by where the old Louisville-Nashville turnpike crossed the creek. That point is in Larue County, half way between Hodgenville and New Haven, Kentucky. This Lincoln home was a hardy pioneer home. It contained, among other things, a loom and a split-log sugar trough. Jane Dunn, grandmother of the late Wesley Ballenger of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, was a friend and neighbor of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. According to Dr. D. E. McClure, of Elizabethtown, Mr. Ballenger told him that the two women "swapped loom fixtures" and that Jane Dunn saw Nancy Hanks Lincoln rocking a Lincoln baby in the sugar trough. Since Abraham was beyond the cradle stage when he lived on Knob Creek, the child Jane Dunn saw rocked must have been Baby Tom.

When death stalked into an early Kentucky pioneer home, neighbors immediately offered to do everything possible to alleviate the family's sorrow. Someone made the coffin; someone dug the grave. So when Baby Thomas Lincoln died, it is only natural to suppose, neighbors took charge of the burial. Dr. Louis A. Warren, a Lincoln authority, writing about Thomas, Jr., states, "The year 1811 is usually given as the time of both his birth and death, although no record of either event is available." Abraham Lincoln, writing in the third person, briefly stated, "A brother younger than himself who died in infancy." Since in Kentucky Baby Thomas' father was better known as a millwright than as a cabinet-maker, many people in the Knob Creek country today believe that Thomas Lincoln, Sr., was away from the home when the infant died. Apparently the child was buried on the top of Muldrauch's Hill—a benchland 400 feet in the air—overlooking the Lincoln log-cabin home down in the valley. The hilltop graveyard was being used at that time by the Redmon family.



Mr. John J. Barry, editor of *Rolling Fork Echo,* New Haven, Kentucky, for fifty years a diligent student of the early life of Abraham Lincoln, explained to me, "Some think Tom Lincoln made that baby's coffin, but I think George Redmon made it. Mr. Redmon lived on top of the hill about three quarters of a mile away. He had been overseer of the road and had resigned in favor of Thomas Lincoln. Living as close to the Lincolns as he did, George Redmon knew about the child and was sure to be down there to do anything he could. The child had to be buried. So Mr. Redmon took the body up to the Redmon graveyard."

Following the pioneer custom someone chisled on a flat piece of limestone the letters "T L." This was placed at the head of Baby Tom's grave. A plain stone was placed at the foot.

It probably was sometime after the burial of Thomas, Jr., that death again came very near stalking into the Lincoln household on Knob Creek. One hot June day Abraham and his schoolmate, Austin Gollaher, were trying to coon the footlog which lay across the stream. Due to a recent rain the creek was high. Lincoln lost his balance and fell into the water. Neither of the boys could swim. As set forth by Miss Tarbell in her *Life of Lincoln,* Austin Gollaher says, "I got a long pole and held it out to Abe, who grabbed it. Then I pulled him ashore. He was nearly dead, and I was badly scared. I rolled and pounded him in good earnest." Gollaher finally revived Lincoln. Fearing punishment if their mothers should find it out the boys promised never to mention the affair to anyone. "And I never did," says Gollaher, "until after Lincoln's tragic end."

Abraham once wrote that while living on Knob Creek he and his sister Sarah "were sent for short periods to A. B. C. schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney and the second by Caleb Hazel." It was there, too, on Knob Creek, that Abraham Lincoln saw slave dealers, on horseback, whip in hand, driving their negro slaves along the turnpike to be sold "down the river."



Above to the Left, Lincoln Tavern; Right, Replica of Lincoln's Knob Creek Home, Built of Logs from the Austin Gollaher House. It Stands on Exact Spot of Original Lincoln Home. Thomas, Jr., Born and Died Here; Close By Gollaher Pulled Abraham from Knob Creek. Below to the Left, James M. Taylor, Who Found the Grave of Thomas Lincoln, Jr.; Right, Fred Despain, War Veteran, Who Owns the Graveyard

DURING his childhood days in that rugged country of deep gorges and high limestone hills, Abraham Lincoln became, literally, a follower of the naturalist, Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham. Years later Dr. Graham declared he "saw Thomas Lincoln marry Nancy Hanks on the twelfth of June, 1806." Graham was perhaps not only the best informed man on the flora, fauna and geology of Kentucky, but was said to be the best rifle shot in the world. He had blazed trails with Daniel Boone. Following such a man around over the Knob Creek hill country would impress any boy, especially a boy of Abe Lincoln's make-up.

At last, due to bad land titles and the roving disposition of Thomas, Sr., the Lincoln family moved from Kentucky to Indiana, December, 1816. Fourteen years later they moved to Illinois. Years rolled on. Back in the Knob Creek country Baby Tom's grave flattened to the surface of the earth. The headstone dropped over. Underbrush and tangled briars hid all trace of the child's last resting place. Intermittent floods swirled down the Knob Creek valley. General Bragg's Confederate Army marched along the old turnpike. Civil War put a stop to slave dealers selling black men "down the river."

More years rolled past. Automobiles roared along the old highway, now paved.

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World-wide interest in Lincoln's life developed; students untiringly searched for the grave of the Great Emancipator's brother. And all the while Baby Tom, lost to the changing world, slept peacefully on Muldrach's desolate hilltop.

"By'n by hard times comes a-knocking at the door" of many an Old Kentucky Home. Relief workers entered the Redmon cemetery. Said Henry Vernon, one of the workmen, to me, "We were clearing off the graveyard when Jim Taylor picked up a rock and cleaned off the moss and dirt and found "T L" initials on it. I've heard it practically all my life there was a Lincoln buried there. We found the grave the 30th of May, last year (1933). That's Decoration Day; but we don't celebrate that day down here."

STANDING on a bleak hillside, a raw January wind blowing the smoke from the bowl of his briar pipe, James M. Taylor quietly told me, in simple, direct sentences, a story of the greatest interest to Lincoln's millions of admirers. Said Mr. Taylor: "I was foreman of some relief workers doing script work for the government. We got groceries with the money. We were working around in the Redmon burying ground. I was working near a walnut tree that was near the center of the graveyard. I was raking and hoeing—just working around, when I found a gravestone laying down on top of the ground. I couldn't make out the letters very well so I went down in my pocket and got out a nail and scratched out the letters. That made it plainer to see. Then I set the stone back practically where I found it and then mounded-up the grave."

Mr. Taylor thoughtfully looked at his pipe. "We wondered whose stone it was," he added. "We all thought it was a Lincoln for we'd all heard that a Lincoln was buried there. My father had said his parents had said that. My father had owned that land back in 1888. My father's mother was a Redmon—Jane Redmon. She was the daugher of George Redmon. She was born right there by that graveyard — and she's buried right there."

Mr. Taylor continued: "About four o'clock that evening Fred Despain come over to the graveyard and we told him about it. Fred owns the cemetery. He works with the maintenance gang over at the Lincoln Farm (the Lincoln birthplace memorial near Hodgenville). Well, nobody after that ever said any more about it."

Down on the old Lincoln Knob Creek farm, a half mile from the cemetery, is the Lincoln Tavern owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Chester F. Howard. There news of the day is discussed. And there, in midsummer, 1933, the finding of a headstone bearing the letters "T L" was related. Several weeks later Mr. John J. Barry, the editor, was having dinner with the Howards. He, too, had often hunted for the grave of Lincoln's infant brother. Said Mr. Barry to me: "Someone mentioned the finding of a rock out there and that it might be some Lincoln child for it had the initials "T L." Immediately it flashed into my mind that it was Abraham Lincoln's brother."

The succeeding days were busy, interesting ones for Mr. Barry. Carefully, logically he pieced together all available records and traditions pertaining to the Lincoln family in the Knob Creek locality. And at last he came to the conclusion that the tiny grave was the final resting place of Thomas Lincoln, Jr., infant brother of the President.

Descendants of the Knob Creek country pioneers will tell you it is fairly certain that George Redmon carried the hand-made coffin along the trail back in the hollow, holding onto the brush and saplings as he climbed the steep and craggy side of Muldrauch's Hill. There is the tradition that Nancy Hanks Lincoln with her nine year old daughter, Sarah, and her seven year old son, Abraham, just before moving to Indiana in 1816, likewise picked her way along that trail and climbed that rugged hillside, seeking out Baby Tom's grave.

For more than a century the tomb was lost. And then James M. Taylor, great-grandson of George Redmon, found the tiny grave on Decoration Day, the day set aside as sacred to the memory of those who answered the call of the Great Emancipator, the revered brother of Baby Tom.







Above Is the Boyhood of Austin Gollaher; In the Center Is the Grave of Thomas Lincoln, Jr., and the Marker Recently Erected; Below Is the Old Burying Ground on Muldrauch's Hill, With Arrow Pointing to the Grave of Thomas Lincoln, Jr. The Illustrations Accompanying This Article Are Through the Courtesy of C. F. Howard, of Hodgenville, Ky., and the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company.

Golden Days

"But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching unto those things which are before."—Phil. 3:13.

THERE are two golden days in the week upon which and about which I do not worry—two care-free days, kept sacredly free from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is yesterday. Yesterday, with its cares and frets, and all its pains and aches, all its faults, its mistakes and blunders, has passed forever beyond my recall. I cannot undo an act that I wrought, I cannot unsay a word that I said. All that it holds of my life, of wrong, regret and sorrow, is in the hands of the mighty Love that can bring honey out of the rock and sweet waters out of the bitterest desert—the Love that can turn weeping into laughter, that can give beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, joy of the morning for the woe of the night.

Save for the beautiful memories, sweet and tender, that linger like the perfume of roses in the heart of the day that is gone, I have nothing to do with yesterday. It was mine. It is God's.

And the other day that I do not worry about is tomorrow. Tomorrow, with all its possible adversities, its burdens, its perils, its large promise and poor performance, its failures and mistakes, is as far beyond my mastery as its dead sister, yesterday. It is a day of God's. Its sun will rise in roseate splendor, or behind a mask of weeping clouds—but it will rise. Until then, the same love and patience that held yesterday, holds tomorrow. Save for the star of hope that gleams forever on the brow of tomorrow, shining with tender promise into the heart of today, I have no possession in that unborn day of grace. All else is in the safe keeping of the infinite Love that holds for me the treasures of yester-

(Cont'd. on page 32)

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