

DROWNING INCIDENT
(Austin Gollagher)

DRAWER 3 BIRTH - KENTUCKY

712009.085,03655

Abraham Lincoln before 1860

Knob Creek Drowning Incident

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

DROWNING INCIDENT
(Austin Golliver)

DRAWER 3 BIRTH - KENTUCKY

2 Columbia Mo. 2/23/'35-
+
3 Lincoln Life Ins. Co.,
H. Wayne, Ind.

Dear Sirs:- I continue to receive the Lincoln literature and I deeply appreciate it.

There is a certain man here Mr. R. E. Gollaher, a friend of mine.

Mr. Gollaher is a ~~grandson~~ grandson of Austin Gollaher. The latter, as you are well aware of the fact, was a playmate of Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Gollaher has a daguerrestype picture of his grandfather, Austin Gollaher. It is in excellent condition.

=2=
Mr. Gallaher would gladly donate the picture to any Lincoln museum.

In the event that the ~~picture~~ picture is accepted the only charge Mr. Gallaher would ask for would be a reproduction of the picture.

Mr. Gallaher can substantiate the fact that the picture is genuine.

Yours Respt'

A. J. McMillen,
Box 179.

P. S. — I would not miss getting the Lincoln literature, I keep it intact.

A. J. McMillen.

February 26, 1935

Mr. A. T. McMillen
Box 179
Columbia, Missouri

Dear Mr. McMillen:

We appreciate the fact that you have brought to our attention the picture of Mr. Austin Gollaher, who was a playmate of Lincoln in Kentucky. We of course would be very glad to receive this picture and I shall be very glad to contact Mr. R. E. Gollaher. In your recent letter you failed to give us Mr. Gollaher's address; however, we assume that we can reach him by addressing him at Columbia, Missouri.

We are very glad to know that you like our bulletin Lincoln Lore and appreciate your interest in our Foundation.

Yours very truly,

RGM:EB
R. G. McMurtry

Librarian
Lincoln National Life Foundation

February 20, 1862

My dear Mr. Lincoln
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th inst. in relation to the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States. I am glad to hear that you are so deeply interested in the subject, and I am sure that your views will be of great value to the country.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Abraham Lincoln

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I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Abraham Lincoln

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Abraham Lincoln

February 26, 1935

Mr. R. E. Gollaher
Columbia, Missouri

Dear Sir:

We have been advised by a citizen of Columbia, Missouri that you have a photograph of your grandfather, Mr. Austin Gollaher. We are very much interested in acquiring a photograph of this character, and we have been told that you would be very glad to donate this picture to a Lincoln collection that would appreciate same. May I assure you that we would be very glad to receive a photograph of this type.

In the event that you might send us the original, we would be very glad to send you some photographic reproductions of the picture.

We shall be very glad to receive a letter from you concerning this photograph.

Yours very truly,

RGM:EB
R. G. McMurtry

Librarian
Lincoln National Life Foundation

Columbia Mo 3.1, 35

R. H. McMurtry & Son Sir
Yours of 26 ult. To hand in reply
to which am sending tin type picture
of my Grandfather Austin Gallacher
which I gladly contribute and if
found worthy according to your
terms you may rest assured I
am very much pleased to help
in any small way to perpetuate
the Great Name of the Immortal
Abraham Lincoln

Respy Submitted
R. E. Gallacher
1505 Windsor St.

Parents Want
'Fighting' Son

Lincoln Said to Be
Peace-Loving Boy

March 5, 1935

Mr. R.E. Gollaher
1505 Windsor St.
Columbia, Mo.

Dear Mr. Gollaher:

Your tin type photograph of Austin Gollaher arrived in good condition. We are very glad to have this picture to place in our collection. Please know that we appreciate your interest in our foundation.

You will find enclosed a copy of the photograph you sent us.

Yours Very Truly

R. Gerald McMurtry Librarian
Lincoln National Life Foundation

March 2, 1925

Mr. E. H. Bell
1800 Walnut St.
Columbia, Mo.

Dear Mr. Bell:

Your fine photograph of Indian Bell
arrived in good condition. It was very glad to have
this picture so placed in our collection. Please note
that we maintain your interest in our collection.
You will find enclosed a copy of the photograph.
Yours very truly,

James H. Bell

E. H. Bell
1800 Walnut St.
Columbia, Mo.

Omaha World-Herald
Feb. 24
54

our Child—

Parents Want 'Fighting' Son

Lincoln Said to Be Peace-Loving Boy

By Gladys Bevans

More letters have been received from mothers of boys who do not want to fight as a way of settling disputes or avenging their wrongs.

I've made suggestions to parents with the express purpose of hoping to change their attitude somewhat toward their sons—not expecting them to fight if they're just not fighters.

I want to recount something I recently read about one American whose courage could never be questioned, who stands out in our minds and hearts for his moral bravery, his humaneness and his humanness, his all-encompassing passion and his unquestioned greatness—Abraham Lincoln.

Ancestors Traced

At the time of Lincoln's birthday this year I read an interesting article by Oscar Shisgall, who had been eager to trace the origin of a remark Lincoln once made to a visitor during the first year of his Presidency: "I wouldn't be here today if Austin Gollaher hadn't fished me out of Knob Creek. I was 8 at the time and Austin was 11. I must have been three-quarters drowned when he dragged me up on the bank."

Mr. Gollaher's grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been traced, and since Austin later felt tremendous pride in his boyhood association with the young Abe, he talked much about those early years. One or two things which emerged will interest many parents.

Biography Revealing

Austin Gollaher described himself as tough and squat and always ready for a fight, while Abe, being long and skinny, hated fighting. Gollaher characterized his friend as being the quietest, gentlest boy he ever knew.

Abe was always trying to get Austin to study reading, and Austin would try to get Abe to go hunting, apparently without much success. Often in the woods, he would find Abe sitting on a log, listening to the bird-music around him. This boy became a man among men.

Haven't you noticed how illuminating the lives of really big or great men are? Biography makes revealing reading.

PUBLIC LETTER BOX

'Man Who Saved Lincoln's Life'

To the Editor: Several interested persons have asked if the recent and widely publicized story, "The Man Who Saved Abraham Lincoln's Life," was new to me. My answer was that the story is at least as old as Herndon's "Lincoln," published in 1889.

In Volume One of this three-volume work, Herndon writes: "Austin Gollaher of Hodgenville claims to have saved Lincoln from drowning one day as they were trying to 'coon' it across Knob Creek on a log."

It is truly remarkable that Mr. Gollaher held back this important information until after Mr. Lincoln's death. I don't know a single careful scholar in the Lincoln field who takes this story at its face value.

In 1926, Dr. Louis A. Warren of Fort Wayne, Indiana, one of the distinguished authors in the Lincoln field, published his "Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood." On page 148, after repeating the story as told by Austin Gollaher of saving his playmate, Abraham Lincoln, from drowning, Dr. Warren says, "It is to be regretted that already some biographers have used this highly colored story as a historical source."

I suggest that those interested should read Dr. Warren's book: "Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood," which is procurable in any well stocked public library.

EDGAR DEWITT JONES.

177 2 18 50

How Abe Lincoln Was Rescued From Knob Creek

(Ky. Dept. of Public Relations)

Two boys, Austin Gollaher and Abraham Lincoln, were playmates in Hardin (now Larue County).

One became immortal as President of the United States, leader of his nation during the War Between the States and the Great Emancipator. The other remained in Kentucky and brought hushed silence upon many an audience as he told how he had saved President Lincoln from drowning when Gollaher was nine years old and Lincoln younger.

The incident took place in 1815, the year before the Lincolns moved from Kentucky to Indiana. The family lived on the Knob Creek farm. The Gollahers lived up the creek a short distance. The boys' mothers had warned them not to get their clothes dirty or to cross the creek.

But the youngsters had never seen things look so beautiful on the other

side. They reached a spot where a footlog lay across a deep hole in the creek.

Young Lincoln feared that he could not walk the log, but Gollaher insisted it was easy. A moment later he was sorry, for he saw Lincoln on the log swaying back and forth. Abe finally slipped off the log and disappeared in the whirling green water.

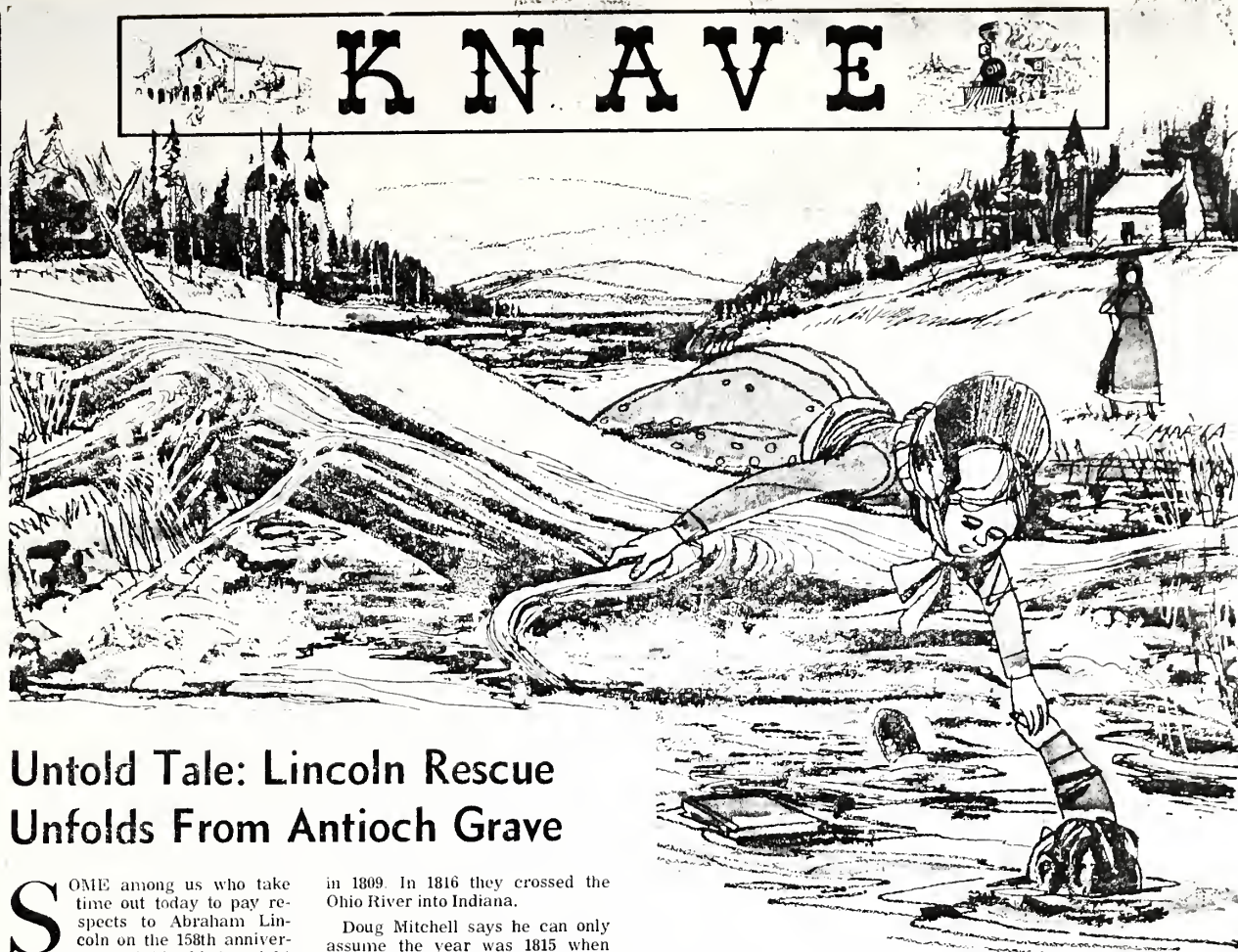
Gollaher, bearing a long pole, ran into the water up to his shoulders. As Abe bobbed to the surface he was able to grasp the pole and Gollaher pulled him to the bank. Abe was limber and his eyes half closed. Gollaher thought he was dead and flung him around by the heels until young Lincoln was spitting water.

Years later, two Larue County men were in Washington and called upon President Lincoln.

"How is my old friend, Austin Gollaher?" Lincoln asked them. "Tell him that I would like to send money to pay

his fare here to visit me."

But Gollaher turned down the offer, because he was "scared to death to ride on one of them trains."



Untold Tale: Lincoln Rescue Unfolds From Antioch Grave

SOME among us who take time out today to pay respects to Abraham Lincoln on the 158th anniversary of his birth might also pause at the unmarked grave of Mrs. Mary Head Berry Mitchell in Oak View Cemetery at the eastern edge of Antioch.

It is from this grave that we get today's never-before-told story of a 14-year-old girl's bravery in rescuing young Abe Lincoln from the swirling waters of storm-swollen Knob Creek near the Lincoln cabin. The boy had slipped from a log on his way to his first day at school.

It was the lass Mary Head Berry who saved the floundering boy for future greatness, according to her only living grandson, Frank Leslie Mitchell of Clayton.

Mrs. Mitchell, better known as Aunt Polly even to her grandchildren as well as other kin, was 87 when she died at her Antioch home in 1888. She was born Mary Head Berry at Hodgenville, Ky., in 1801. The boy Abe Lincoln arrived on Feb. 12, 1809 at the cabin of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln on Nolin Creek near Hodgenville's Mill. The Berrys and the Lincolns are said to have been neighbors for 17 years or more. Two years after Abe's birth the Lincolns moved north to farm some property along Knob Creek.

Because Polly Berry was older than Abe and his sister Sarah, she was asked to walk the two Lincoln youngsters to school. The year of this incident isn't exactly certain in the story that was unraveled here. The Lincolns lived in Kentucky only seven years after Abe's birth

in 1809. In 1816 they crossed the Ohio River into Indiana.

Doug Mitchell says he can only assume the year was 1815 when Abe slipped and fell in the creek.

FRANK Leslie Mitchell, better known as Doug among his Clayton neighbors, has resided in a small unpainted cabin on Clayton's main thoroughfare since 1900. The cabin was built in the 1850s by Henry Keller, the town's only butcher in the pioneer days of Contra Costa County.

After Doug Mitchell was prodded into telling the story of his grandmother's rescue of young Abe, he was asked why he hadn't told the story before. "It was talked about among the family," he said, "but nobody else ever asked me. I guess nobody believed it."

Such reticence paints a good picture of Doug Mitchell, who celebrated his 89th birthday only last Thursday. He was born in Oakland in 1878. He doesn't talk much to strangers.

Victor B. Chapman, Clayton's constable for 17 years (1946-1963), is a nephew of the aging Doug Mitchell, and Victor's father, was the town's constable during the 52 years (1894-1946) preceeding Vic's tenure of office. A visitor at the Mitchell cabin on the day Doug was questioned, the retired lawyer said: "The family genealogy is what stamps the truth on Aunt Polly's story."

Doug Mitchell was but a boy of 10 when Grandma Mary Head Berry Mitchell died. His memory of her and her recollections is vivid

in his mind. She was a woman to be reckoned with even unto death; a woman of such trait that left the youngster with a lifelong impression.

GRANDMA Mitchell's story concerning the rescue of young Abe Lincoln was never regarded as a tale of heroism by the Mitchell family. It was only an amusing incident.

"I wasn't even born when she first told her story of the Knob Creek dunking with young Abe," Doug Mitchell relates. "It all came to light during the War between the States, according to my elders, including Aunt Polly."

"Polly, it seems, was extremely sympathetic to the cause of the Confederacy. The Mitchells were already residents of Contra Costa County living in the Alamo neighborhood at the time. Aunt Polly would go about singing the Jeff Davis song and cheer the victories of the South."

Her family's scoldings failed to cool her valor.

"They'll throw you in jail if you don't keep quiet," her family warned.

"I don't care if they do. Ol' Abe will get me out. I pulled him out of the creek once and saved his life. He'll save me."

Doug recalls his grandmother re-

peating the story and all the above account of by-gone days on numerous occasions, long after he was old enough to understand. "But I know she had great admiration for President Lincoln, even though she cheered the Confederacy. It was only natural, she having been so close to the Lincolns down in Kentucky," he says.

Strange to say, the story somehow or other attached itself to the maternal grandmother of Doug Mitchell in its retelling down through the years. In recent times there have been printed reports that it was his grandmother Eliza Nottingham who was the heroine. It was from such reports that our present search started for an answer to the legend from beyond the grave.

Eliza Nottingham went to her grave on Sept. 12, 1880, in what is now the vandalized Alhambra Cemetery at Martinez. Among her children was Luisa Nottingham, first school teacher in Pleasant Hill, who became the bride of Isaac Newton Berry Mitchell. Doug Mitchell is their son.

There were other children of the Mitchell-Nottingham union, but for a matter of conciseness we halt the line with Doug who tells us about the heroine of our story — Mary Head Berry Mitchell, his paternal grandmother.

She Saved Lincoln

The exclusive revelation of a never - before - told story of the rescue of young Abraham Lincoln from a Kentucky creek has set off a search for lost letters from the Civil War president to his rescuer, a Contra Costa County woman pioneer of the 1850s.

The new Lincoln story, covering the near - drowning when Abe was a boy of 6, is told by The Knave in the California Magazine section of today's Tribune.

The woman who received the letters was Mrs. Mary Head Berry Mitchell, who died in 1888 and lies buried in an unmarked grave in Oak View Cemetery at Antioch.

Near tragedies in the life of Abraham Lincoln have been legend for more than 100 years. To discover at this late date a never - before - told thrill when the life of this young Kentucky lad "hung by a thread" is as unusual as the rescue story itself. Equally rewarding is the discovery that the heroine of this newly found bit of Lincolniana was a California pioneer woman.

It was after Lincoln entered the White House in Washington, D.C., that correspondence took place between Mary Head Berry Mitchell and the President.

"There were at least half a dozen letters that she treasured at one time. What happened to them I don't know," reports Doug Mitchell of Clayton, Grandma Mitchell's only living grandson. Doug celebrated his 89th birthday last Thursday.

It was Doug Mitchell who revealed his grandmother's rescue of young Abe Lincoln on a schoolday way back in 1815.

Doug Mitchell thinks the lost Lincoln letters might corroborate his grandmother's rescue story.



Mary Head Berry Mitchell

SAVED LINCOLN'S LIFE.**Austin Gollaher Rescued the Future President from Drowning.**

However poor the Lincoln home may have been, it affected the new child but little, says McClure's Magazine. He was robust and active, and life is full of interest to the child happy enough to be born in the country. He had several companions. There was his sister Nancy, or Sarah—both names are given her—two years his senior; there was a cousin of his mother's, ten years older, Dennis Hanks, an active and ingenious leader in sports and mischief, and there were the neighbors' boys. One of the latter, Austin Gollaher, still tells with pleasure how he hunted coons and ran the woods with young Lincoln and once even saved his life.

"Yes," said Mr. Gollaher, "the story that I once saved Lincoln's life is true, but it is not correct as generally related.

"Abraham Lincoln and I had been going to school together for a year or more and had become greatly attached to each other. Then school disbanded on account of there being so few scholars, and we did not see each other for a long time. One Sunday my mother visited the Lincolns and I was taken along. Abe and I played around all day. Finally we concluded to cross the creek to hunt for some partridges young Lincoln had seen the day before. The creek was swollen by a recent rain, and in crossing on the narrow footing Abe fell in. Neither of us could swim.

I got a long pole and held it out to Abe, who grabbed it. Then I pulled him ashore. He was almost dead and I was badly scared. I rolled and pounded him in good earnest. Then I got him by the arms and shook him, the water meanwhile pouring out of his mouth. By this means I succeeded in bringing him to, and he was soon all right.

"Then a new difficulty confronted us. If our mothers discovered our wet clothes they would whip us. This we dreaded from experience and determined to avoid. It was June, the sun was very warm, and we soon dried our clothing by spreading them on the rocks about us. We promised never to tell the story, and I never mentioned the incident to any one until after Lincoln's tragic end.

"Abraham Lincoln had a sister. Her name was Sallie, and she was a very pretty girl. She went to school when she could, which was not very often.

"Yes, if you must know, Sallie Lincoln was my sweetheart. She was about my age. I loved her, and claimed her, as boys do. I suppose that was one reason of my warm regard for Abe. When the Lincoln family moved to Indiana I was prevented by circumstances from bidding good-by to either of the children, and I never saw them again."

