RESEARCH REPORT ON TRADITIONAL

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BIRTHPLACE CABIN

ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

BY

Benjamin H. Davis

Historical Aide

February 15, 1949

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the assistance given me in this research by Coordinating Superintendent Hoskins. He secured copies of various documents without which the task would have been doubly difficult.

Mr. Carl Howell very generously gave several hours of his valuable time in checking the records of the Davenport farm.

Judge Otis M. Mather served as a fatherly advisor to me in this work and his help was most valuable and is greatly appreciated.

To all three again -- MANY THANKS!

B. H. D.

Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park
February 15, 1949

REPORT OF RESEARCH ON THE

TRADITIONAL ABRAHAM LINCOLN BIRTHPLACE CABIN

On August 29, 1895, an article appeared in the "Larue County Herald" which stated that "a telegram was received yesterday from A. W. Dennett, the owner of the Lincoln Park, to Mr. Harvey Bigham, instructing him to have built at once a log cabin on the Lincoln Farm, exactly where stood the cabin in which Lincoln was born, and the cabin is to be built out of the identical logs that were in the original cabin...."[1]

Very shortly after the receipt of this telegram from A. W. Dennett, Harvey Bigham and his father, Rev. James W. Bigham, agent-in-fact for Mr. Dennett, purchased the house then standing on the old Davenport farm, a mile or so north of the portion of the Lincoln farm which had been purchased previously by Mr. Dennett from the Richard Creal heirs in 1894. Mr. Dennett was the owner of a chain of coffee shops, centered around New York.

The house purchased by Rev. Bigham and his son Harvey was occupied by John A. Davenport who, reportedly, received the sum of two hundred dollars for the house.

The logs from the main room of this house were transported to the farm around the "Sinking Spring" and the sound timbers were used in the construction of the cabin which Dennett desired erected on the Lincoln Farm.

[1] Larue County Herald, August 29, 1895, on file in Herald Office, Hodgenville, Kentucky.

The purchase and the construction of this cabin by Rev. Bigham, presumably, was all part of his plan to have the veterans of the Union Army, who were holding their encampment in Louisville, Kentucky, in September of 1895, visit the birthplace of the Civil War President. The telegram of instructions was received by Rev. Bigham on or shortly before August 29, 1895, and by September 19, 1895, the cabin had been purchased, moved, and re-erected on the Lincoln farm. On or before this date a party of officers visited the Lincoln Park and presented a program inside the cabin, during which program one of the party read a paper, proving that he was related to Abraham Lincoln's mother.[2]

However, the excursion which had been planned for the veterans was a dismal failure. The arrangements made between Bigham and the Illinois Central Railroad which had agreed to transport the men to Hodgenville never were settled definitely. Rev. Bigham wanted to charge fifty cents for admission to the park, which sum, when added to the sum the railroad was to charge, amounted to more than the Veteran's Committee would agree to pay. However, to avert the possibility that the excursion might be called off altogether, Rev. Bigham agreed to cancel the admission charge. But the disagreement between him and the railroad concerning rates, and the belief on the part of the Veteran's Committee that the whole excursion was being promoted as a money-making scheme, so incensed the committee that some of the members actually worked against the excursion plan. Fewer than one hundred veterans made the trip which had been planned for from five to fifteen thousand. The blame for the failure of the excursion was placed

[2]Larue County Herald, September 19, 1895, Hodgenville, Ky.

on Rev. Bigham's insistence on his exorbitant admission charge and on his amateur promotional ineptitude.[3]

This announcement in the Larue County Herald which referred to an "original cabin" is the earliest reference to the cabin this writer has found. It seems that this incident first publicized the cabin moved from the Davenport farm to the Lincoln farm as the "original cabin" in which Abraham Lincoln was born.

However, from the records it is evident that Rev. Bigham gathered corroborative proof that he had purchased from John A. Davenport the actual birthplace cabin of Lincoln. But one point of interest to note here is that his announcement was very sudden, and the lapse of time between the announcement of the purchase and of the re-erection of the cabin on the Lincoln farm was very short. The announcement was made on or before August 29, 1895, and the cabin was purchased, moved, and re-erected for the excursion of Union veterans which occurred before September 19, 1895.[4]

The question of the cabin's originality, in spite of Rev. Bigham's corroborative statements, which he gathered at that time, was then a highly controversial subject.[5] It has remained one from that time to the present, and within the past year there has been a renewed public interest in the subject of the cabin's authenticity.

[3] Larue County Herald, September 19, 1895, Hodgenville, Kentucky.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Affidavit of Judge John C. Creal, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

Concerning the controversial subject of the alleged birthplace cabin and the difficulties involved in ascertaining the facts about it, Dr. Louis A. Warren very aptly has stated and repeated that "tradition alone can answer that question, and it gives both a negative and an affirmative answer."[6]

Of the traditions concerning the cabin's history there are two which are distinct and conflicting. The tradition most commonly accepted, and which, presumably, was originated by Rev. Bigham, is that Dr. George W. Rodman of Larue County visited Abraham Lincoln in Washington sometime after his inauguration as President, and that from this visit with Lincoln, Dr. Rodman acquired a great admiration for the President and that upon his return to Larue County, Dr. Rodman immediately purchased the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born. According to this tradition he purchased this cabin from Richard Creal who occupied a portion of the Thomas Lincoln Nolin Creek farm, commonly known as the "Sinking Spring Farm," and moved the cabin to his own farm which was located a mile or so north of the Creal portion of the Lincoln farm. The tradition has it that Dr. George W. Rodman then rebuilt the cabin on his farm in order to preserve it in honor of Abraham Lincoln, and that this farm of Dr. Rodman's and, presumably, the cabin, eventually passed into the possession of the B. A. Davenport family, the cabin being used by them until its purchase by A. W. Dennett's representative, Rev. J. W. Bigham, in 1895.

The best source of information concerning this tradition that the cabin

[6] Warren, Louis A., Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood, pp. 82-83.

was removed from the Lincoln farm about 1861 by Dr. George W. Rodman after he had visited Abraham Lincoln in Washington sometime during that year is Dr. Louis A. Warren's Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood. In this excellent book Dr. Warren assembled statements of several persons to support this tradition.

One of the persons he interviewed was a daughter of Dr. George W. Rodman, Mrs. Betty Burba. She formerly was Mary Elizabeth Rodman and had married Benjamin F. Burba in 1856.[7] She stated in this interview with Dr. Warren that her father had bought the cabin shortly after Lincoln was elected to the presidency, that he was a great admirer of Lincoln, and at one time had visited him in Washington. She also stated in that same interview that she thought the reason her father bought the cabin and had it moved to his own farm a mile and a half away was because of its connection with Abraham Lincoln.[8]

Another direct statement bearing on the Rodman tradition is given by Dr. Warren, the statement being in the form of a letter from Rev. W. T. Davenport to Rev. J. W. Cunningham, date unknown. Rev. W. T. Davenport was a brother of John A. Davenport, both of whom were sons of B. A. Davenport. He wrote:

"My mother's farm was just one mile and a half from the Lincoln farm. George Rodman, now dead, was our old family physician for years and often told us that he bought the old Lincoln cabin and had it moved to where it was then standing. It was there as a tenant house and was never used as a meat or smoke house. When I was on the Buffalo Mission 1872-73 we

[7] Marriage Book B, page 6, entry #58, Larue County Court
[8] Warren, op. cit., page 87

boarded with my mother and my wife taught a subscription school in the old cabin. Others taught in it after her. When my brother was married, he repaired the old cabin and made some additions to it, and lived in it, and three of his children were born in it."[9]

In 1906, John A. Davenport, brother of W. T. Davenport, made the following statement:

"The affiant, John A. Davenport, says that he is 56 years of age and that he lives in Larue County, Ky., that he came to Larue County in 1863 and resided near the Lincoln Farm, that in 1875 he moved into the cabin built of the logs from the Lincoln cabin, that when he first came into this county in 1863, it was known by all the old residents that these logs were taken from the Lincoln cabin at the spring, and were the logs composing the old Lincoln cabin. Affiant says that in 189_ [?] he sold these logs to one A. W. Dennett of New York. The trade was made with the Rev. J. W. Bigham who was acting for Mr. Dennette [Dennett], and these logs were taken to the Lincoln farm and a cabin was rebuilt on the site of the original cabin. It remained there a year or more and for [some] reason or purpose it was removed."[10]

The above affidavit was taken by Charles Williams of the law firm of Handley and Williams of Hodgenville for the Lincoln Farm Association. Although John A. Davenport failed to mention that Dr. George W. Rodman moved the cabin from the Lincoln farm to the subsequent Davenport farm,

[9] Warren, op. cit., page 88.

[10] Affidavit of John A. Davenport, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

his affidavit always has been used in connection with the Rodman tradition.

One of the most unusual pieces of testimony was given by Mrs. Zerelda Jane Goff to Mr. Charles Williams, the investigator for the Lincoln Farm Association. This affidavit was made on the same day as that of Mr. John A. Davenport, May 30, 1906. Mrs. Goff was also the mother-in-law of Mr. Davenport. She was at the time of the interview eighty-six years of age. Mr. Williams prefaced her affidavit with his certification that she was of sound mind and memory, and that she referred him to Mr. Lafayette Wilson as being the one who moved the cabin in question. The affidavit reads as follows:

"My name is Zerelda Jane Goff. I was born in Washington County, Ky., on October 8, 1820. In March 1831, I moved with my parents to Larue County. It was then in Hardin. I have been living in the vicinity of the Lincoln birthplace since that date. I have known the Lincoln farm and its buildings all this time. I have spent many days when a mere child playing about the spring and the Lincoln cabin. The Lincoln family had left here before I moved into this neighborhood, but I know the cabin in which they lived by the history given by the residents of this community at that time. It was known by all the other older residents that the Lincoln cabin stood on the hill to the right of the spring. And where I am informed the flag pole now stands. There was a right smart orchard around this cabin-old fashioned apples and pears. There were two of these cabins, the main cabin and a smaller cabin which stood some few feet from it which was used as a meat house evidently. There was a family

living in the Lincoln cabin by the name of Skaggs when we first came to this neighborhood. The little cabin which was made of little round poles standing near the main cabin rotted away many years ago. I recollect the time these logs were taken away from the place. I mean the logs making up the original Lincoln cabin. As to the date this was can't say, but recollect the occurance [occurrence] very well. These logs were carried up to the George Rodman place and were used by him in building a tenant house. This Rodman property is now the property of Mr. John A. Davenport. There were only two cabins on the Lincoln Place as it is now known, and they were the two I have just mentioned, the main cabin and the little cabin near it which rotted down. There were no other cabins near the spring. I have been living on an adjoining farm to the Lincoln farm since 1833, played at the spring, and the cabin when a child, and my memory is clear regarding this Lincoln cabin and its site. I recollect distinctly when but a child of the people who knew the Lincoln family speak of this family and being in their home which was the cabin standing on the hill near the spring and which was afterwards removed from the place to the Davenport place. I saw the cabin on the Rodman place which was built out of these logs from the Lincoln cabin, and recognized them from the manner in which they were hewn, and from their general appearance and construction. I was in this cabin frequently which was built on the Rodman place, out of the logs from the Lincoln cabin and I remember them being sold by Mr. Davenport to Mr. Dennette [Dennett] some years ago,

and by him taken away from here."[11]

In order to evaluate the testimony of the Davenports, and that of John A. Davenport in particular, the following brief sketch of the Davenport family is in order.

The B. A. Davenport family came from Marion County, Kentucky, in 1854, and purchased a farm on the North Fork of Nolin, almost adjoining the town of Hodgenville, Kentucky. According to his son, Ivy Davenport, John A. Davenport was at that time seven years of age. This farm was purchased from Thomas Durbin on January 9, 1854.[12] The Davenport family occupied the farm until 1864, during which time B. A. Davenport died. The widow, Nancy A. Davenport, received permission from the Larue County Court to sell the above property, and by deed dated October 27, 1864, she and the heirs conveyed the title to Samuel Spriggs.[13] She already had purchased from Samuel Spriggs the farm on the South Fork of Nolin on August 4, 1864.[14] It seems that this transfer of property between Spriggs and the Davenports was for the purpose of clearing a debt which the latter owed on the farm on the North Fork of Nolin.

In view of the above history of his family, there are then several apparent discrepancies in the affidavit made by John A. Davenport in 1906. In the first place he had been residing in Larue County since 1854, and not since 1863 as he stated.[15] Although he gave his age as fifty-six

[11] Affidavit of Zerelda Jane Goff, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

[12] Deed Book 3, page 515, Larue County Court, Hodgenville, Ky.

[13] Deed Book 6, page 220, Larue County Court.

[14] Deed Book 7, page 536, Larue County Court.

[15] Deed Book 3, page 515, Larue County Court.

years, he was actually fifty-nine years of age. This age is further evidenced by information to follow. Nor is it likely that Lincoln was known in Larue County as early as 1854 which antedates his debates with Douglas at least four years. No tradition exists, to this writer's knowledge, that the alleged birthplace cabin was moved prior to 1860, certainly not as early as 1854, the date of the Davenports' first residence in Larue County.

In 1904, during the period of litigation concerning the portion of the Lincoln farm which had been transferred by A. W. Dennett to David Crear of New York in 1899, a deposition was taken from John A. Davenport as evidence in the proceedings.[16] The examiner took the deposition of Mr. Davenport at the home of William Burton who was at that time a renter of the farm referred to as the Lincoln farm and who occupied the old "Creal House." This is important to know in order to interpret the questions and the answers.

It also should be borne in mind that this deposition was made two years prior to the date on which the affidavit was made for the Lincoln Farm Association. Among several questions the following pertinent questions and answers were recorded.

1. Q. "Mr. Davenport, how far do you reside from Lincoln Farm, and what is your age?"

   A. "About one mile; age 57 years."

16 A. W. Linforth, Trustee in Bankruptcy, Vs. David Crear, A. W. Dennett, et al, Equity Box 243, Larue County Circuit Court.

2. Q. "How long have you known the Lincoln Farm?"

   A. "Ever since 1863."

3. Q. "Did you ever see the house that is said to be the house where Abraham Lincoln was born on said farm?"

   A. "Not until it was brought from my place here."

4. Q. "How come it on your farm?"

   A. "I only know from hearsay."

5. Q. "Did you ever see it while it was on the Lincoln Farm?"

   A. "Yes, Sir."

6. Q. "Is it on the farm at this time?"

   A. "No, Sir."

7. Q. "How long has it been since it was on the farm?"

   A. "I could not say."

8. Q. "Has it not been off the farm for 8 or 10 years?"

   A. "I know it has been off for a number of years. I could not state how long."

Although he had been living for ten years, 1854-1864, within three miles of the Lincoln Farm and during years when Lincoln's name was known to everyone, he stated that he never knew the Lincoln farm nor had ever seen the cabin by the spring prior to 1895. Nor did he know first hand in 1904 why the cabin was on the Davenport place, presumably, from about 1860 to 1895. But his brother, Rev. W. T. Davenport stated that he had heard Dr. George W. Rodman tell many times that he, Dr. Rodman, had moved

the cabin to what was later the Davenport farm. But John A. Davenport never stated that he had heard Dr. Rodman make that statement.

In regard to the affidavit of Zerelda Jane Goff, it must be remembered that she had reached the age at which a person has a tendency to romanticize a subject, especially one of national importance such as the subject of the alleged birthplace cabin. She was recalling events that had happened as many as seventy to seventy-five years before. And there is reason to doubt that the Lincoln family was well enough known to cause any special reference to them as early as the 1830s — certainly there is reason to doubt that there was enough to impress a child's mind. The very fact of its detailed descriptions of events that had happened so long before, tends to lessen the validity of the statement and, as a result, its value as documentary evidence is diminished.

The other tradition concerning the removal of the cabin from the Lincoln farm to the farm which was owned by the Davenports after 1864 and which affects the originality of the cabin, has its genesis in the affidavit of Lafayette Wilson, made in 1906 for the Lincoln Farm Association by the firm of Handley and Williams. Mr. Wilson was an old Union Army veteran of the Civil War.[17] He was sixty-three years of age at the time he was interviewed. His affidavit follows:

[17] Statement of Judge Otis M. Mather, Hodgenville, Kentucky.

"My name is Lafayette Wilson. My Post Office address is Buffalo, Larue County, Kentucky. I was born in Hodgenville, Kentucky, in 1843, and I have been a resident of Larue County all my life. In the year 1860, in the month of March I moved the logs from the Lincoln cabin to the farm now occupied by John A. Davenport, a distance of about one and one half miles. One James Dyer assisted me in moving these. A negro by the name of Phillips also helped me. This negro is now dead. The cabin which we moved from there showed evidence of considerable age, some of these logs were rotted away at that time. We added some new logs to the cabin built on the Davenport place. Near the main cabin stood the ruins of a smaller cabin, a round log cabin. This cabin stood on a knoll north of the spring 50 or 75 yards distant. My father came to this county in 1822, moving here from Alabama, and located at Hodgenville. My brother, who is now 84 years of age told me where the cabin stood in which Mr. Lincoln was born and he indicated the spot as being the knoll from which the cabin was removed by me in 1860. I have heard and read the affidavit of Mrs. Zerelda J. Goff and she refers in said affidavit to the logs which I removed from the Lincoln place to the Davenport place. I was employed by one Daniel Dyer to remove these logs."[18]

This affidavit was made in 1906, and in 1910 Mr. Wilson told Mr. John M. Cissell, who was the caretaker of the Memorial Building at that time, that he moved the cabin from the Lincoln farm to the farm which later became the Davenport farm. According to Mr. Cissell, Mr. Wilson also

[18] Affidavit of Lafayette Wilson, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park.

stated at that time that Daniel Dyer employed him to move this cabin and to re-erect it on the subsequent Davenport farm to serve as a home for Dyer's widowed sister.

## II

If the tradition is to stand that Dr. George W. Rodman moved the cabin in question from the Lincoln farm to his farm in order to preserve it in honor of Lincoln, of necessity it would seem to follow that he had a title to the farm later owned by the Davenports. The same condition would have to hold for the Wilson or Dyer tradition, namely, that Daniel Dyer had a title to that farm. It must have been evident to former writers on this subject that it was highly improbable that both Daniel Dyer and George Rodman had a title to the farm. This writer's first task in this research was to attempt to determine the true owner of the tract of land to which the cabin, supposedly, was moved about 1860. Upon investigation of the county land records it was discovered that neither Dr. George Rodman nor Daniel Dyer ever owned that tract of land. So far as I know this is the first time this fact has ever been brought to light.

The discovery that neither George Rodman nor Daniel Dyer ever had a recorded title to the farm to which the cabin, supposedly, was moved, immediately cast grave doubts as to the possibility of ever substantiating either of the traditions. The land records divulged no

further information, nor did any of the other records examined in the county courthouse, that either of these men ever had a pretended title, such as a title bond, to the Davenport farm. The chain of title given below shows that Turner Wilson of Nelson County, Kentucky, owned the Davenport farm during the years from 1846 to 1863.

| Date | Grantee | Grantor | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| August 4, 1864 | Nancy A. Davenport, Widow of Benjamin A. Davenport. 146 acres. | Samuel Spriggs | Deed Book 7, page 536, Larue Co. Ct. |
| Dec. 23, 1863 | Samuel Spriggs | Turner Wilson | Deed Book 5, page 222, Larue Co. Ct. |
| January 14, 1846 | Turner Wilson | William Burks | Deed Book 1, page 205, Larue Co. Ct. |
| Sept. 1, 1845 | William Burks | James Davis | Deed Book 1, page 178, Larue Co. Ct. |
| Sept. 24, 1833 | James Davis | Feilding Merrifield and wife | Deed Book O, page 186 Hardin Co. Ct. |
| Dec. 29, 1828 | Feilding Merrifield and wife | Richard Mather's heirs | Deed Book L, page 126, Hardin Co. Ct. |
| June 11, 1798 | Richard Mather | Joseph James | Deed Book E,P.15. Kentucky Court of Appeals, Frankfort. |
| July 29, 1786 | Joseph James | William Greenough | Deed Book E, p.15, Ky. Ct. of Appls. Frankfort. |

| Date | Grantee | Grantor | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| August 12, 1783 | William Greenough** | Joseph Smith | Treasury Warrants (Virginia) Certificate bundle #2414, Land Office, Frankfort, Ky. |
| July 21 1783 | Joseph Smith | Commonwealth of Virginia. | Certificate Bundle #2414, Land Office, Frankfort, Ky. |

(This chain of title has been checked against the county records by Mr. Carl Howell, a lawyer. He found it to be in order.)

Upon discovering that Dr. George W. Rodman never had a title to the Davenport farm, the writer began locating the real estate for which Dr. Rodman did have a title.

According to the records in the County Court Clerk's office of Larue County, the first piece of property purchased by Dr. George Rodman was a one acre lot in Hodgenville, which he bought in 1859.[19] The following

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**Greenough received Virginia Treasury Warrants for Joseph Smith by Smith's endorsement on the warrants, prior to the patent or survey. Greenough had the warrants surveyed (Survey Book 3, page 265, Ky. Land Office, Frankfort) and the survey patented (Grant Book 9, page 211, Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort, and also Grant Book 1, pages 56-60, State Land Office, Richmond, Virginia).

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[19] Deed Book 5, page 29, Larue County Court.

year, in March, 1860, he purchased two other lots in the town.[20] It is of interest to note here that he purchased these two lots from his brother, Dr. Jesse H. Rodman. In return for the lots, Jesse received George's share in their joint office credit account. In 1864 Dr. George Rodman purchased a house and lot in Hodgenville, Kentucky.[21]

In 1868, Dr. George Rodman purchased a small tract of eight acres adjoining the eastern bounds of the town of Hodgenville.[22] Later that year he bought an additional thirteen acres to join his original tract.[23] The following year, 1869, he purchased another small tract.[24] In 1870 he added another small tract to his growing farm.[25] His last recorded purchase, dated 1872, was of a rather small tract which was added to his farm on the eastern edge of Hodgenville.[26]

Sometime between 1872 and 1875 Dr. George Rodman died. His last purchase of real estate was in 1872, and by 1875 his heirs were selling his land. He died on the farm which he had made from the small tracts he had purchased, his heirs stating in a deed that it was "the same on which the said G. W. Rodman lived at his death."[27] This farm was located at least a mile north of the Davenport farm, the one to which Dr. Rodman, supposedly, moved the alleged birthplace cabin.

[20] Deed Book 5, page 30, Larue County Court.
[21] Deed Book 5, page 201, Larue County Court.
[22] Deed Book 6, page 439, Larue County Court.
[23] Deed Book 6, page 536, Larue County Court.
[24] Deed Book 7, page 256, Larue County Court.
[25] Deed Book 7, page 401, Larue County Court.
[26] Deed Book 8, page 453, Larue County Court.
[27] Deed Book 10, page 28, Larue County Court.

Since Dr. George Rodman owned lots in town at the time the tradition states that he moved the alleged birthplace cabin from the Lincoln farm to the Davenport farm, and since we know that he had a medical office in Hodgenville in partnership with his brother, Dr. Jesse Rodman,[28] it seems highly improbable that he would have rented a farm at least two miles from town, and therefore would have had to travel to and from his office on horseback, or by some other equally slow means.

Nor does there seem to have been any family connection between Dr. George Rodman and Turner Wilson, owner of the subsequent Davenport farm. George Rodman's first wife was Frances Gibbons and his second wife was Mary (Brown) Brawford.[29] However, the name of Turner Wilson's wife has not been discovered.

Jesse H. Rodman, a brother of Dr. George W. Rodman, was also a medical doctor, having graduated from the Louisville Medical Institute in 1838.[30] Shortly after that date he came to Hardin County, residing, evidently, in that part which in 1843 became Larue County. Dr. Jesse H. Rodman early became a prominent figure in both medicine and in politics. In 1848, and again in 1865 and 1866, he was elected state representative from Larue County.[31]

[28] Interview by the writer with Mrs. Mattie Bussey, granddaughter of Dr. George W. Rodman, Louisville, Kentucky.

[29] Interview with Mrs. Howell Thomas, granddaughter of Dr. George Rodman, Magnolia, Kentucky.

[30] The Filson Club Historical Quarterly, Vol. 7, page 140.

[31] Collins, L. H., History of Kentucky, Vol. 2, page 457. Also see House Journals, 1848, 1865, 1866, State Library, Frankfort, Ky.

According to the best available information, the Rodman brothers came from Washington County, Kentucky, where in 1836 Jesse Rodman had purchased a tract of land,[32] and had disposed of it that same year.[33]

Three years after his graduation from medical school, Dr. Jesse H. Rodman was listed in the Hardin County records as a party to a mortgage on some livestock to the amount of seventy-five dollars.[34]

Five years later, in 1846, he was in Larue County at which time he purchased a one-hundred acre tract of land near Hodgenville, subsequently becoming a well known land dealer, engaging in buying and selling property, both within the city and the county. The Larue County records are replete with his name.

Because he was such a prominent figure, he was chosen by the citizens of Larue County, and possibly some adjoining counties, as their emissary to President Lincoln during the Civil War. I believe that the evidence is sufficient to prove that Dr. Jesse H. Rodman, instead of his brother, Dr. George W. Rodman, went to Washington during the Civil War to see President Lincoln. One item of such evidence is a newspaper report of Dr. Jesse H. Rodman's visit to Washington.

"It was characteristic of Lincoln that while he did not often refer to his early life, he seemed ever mindful when occasion offered of those who were then his associates and friends. A case very aptly illustrating

[32] Deed Book M, page 524, Washington County Court, Springfield, Ky.

[33] Deed Book N, page 34, Washington County Court, Springfield, Ky.

[34] Deed Book T, page 482, Hardin County Court, Elizabethtown, Ky.

this point occurred at the time the ranks of the Union Army were being repleted by the operations of the 'Draft Acts'.

"Through some technicality or other an injustice was done that section of Kentucky surrounding the county in which Lincoln was born, and several counties were not credited with the numbers of enlistments that had really been made from within their borders. Finally, Dr. Jesse Rodman, of Hodgenville, prominent as a citizen and politician, was sent to Washington for the purpose of interviewing President Lincoln and endeavoring to have the error corrected.

"Lincoln received him with the greatest cordiality, and insisted that Dr. Rodman should remain several days as presidential guest. During this time Lincoln made the fullest and most minute inquiry concerning persons whom he had known in his boyhood life among the Kentucky hills. The desired relief was also cheerfully given by the President."[35]

In a letter dated August 20, 1889, Charles Friend, a native of Larue County wrote to William H. Herndon that when President he (Lincoln) described the country of his birth to Dr. J. H. Rodman of Hodgenville, and that he inquired after the neighbors of that time, and inquired particularly about " 'my old friend and playmate, Austin Gollaher....' "[36]

[35] Quoted in Nichols, Clifton M., Life of Abraham Lincoln, page 262. The author of this article was D. J. Thomas, formerly of Larue Co., then with "The Voice," New York. Mr. Thomas died only a year or so ago and is survived by a sister who lives in Hodgenville, Ky.

[36] Friend to Herndon, Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress. Photostat copy of letter in Abraham Lincoln Nat'l. Hist. Park files.

Judge Otis M. Mather of Hodgenville, an historian of note on local history, has told the writer on different occasions that he always had the impression that Dr. Jesse H. Rodman visited Lincoln in Washington, and that if Dr. George W. Rodman visited Lincoln in Washington, there was no record of that visit. Only the tradition concerning the alleged birthplace cabin refers to the visit, presumably, made by Dr. George W. Rodman in 1861. (It seems likely that Dr. Jesse H. Rodman's visit to Washington on behalf of Larue County in connection with the Draft Acts was in the latter part of the war, probably 1863 or 1864, since it was during this time that there was most trouble in connection with the draft.)

Albert J. Beveridge evidently accepted the statement as being true that Dr. Jesse H. Rodman instead of Dr. George W. Rodman, visited President Lincoln in Washington.[37]

It is of record that Turner Wilson of Nelson County, Kentucky, owned the subsequent Davenport farm and two adjoining tracts from 1846 to 1863.[38] At that time he also owned several other tracts in Larue County, located on Knob Creek.[39] During all this period that he was buying and selling real estate in Larue County he was engaged actively in the real estate business in the adjoining county of Nelson. In the Nelson County deed books there are more than forty-three references to his land entries, both within the limits of the city of Bardstown and in the surrounding county.

[37] Beveridge, Albert J., Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858, pp. 30-31.

[38] Deed Book 1, page 205, Larue County Court.

[39] Land Records of Larue County, Larue County Court.

Since he had such extensive holdings in Nelson County and in Bardstown particularly, it is doubtful that he ever lived in Larue County on the tract in question, the subsequent Davenport farm. Furthermore, it is almost certain that he had his residence in Nelson County as shown by his deed from Burks in 1846,[40] and by the deeds his heirs made for his Larue County property after his death which occurred sometime between 1863 and 1866. In the above deeds he was listed as "Turner Wilson of Nelson County."

Undoubtedly, he had some one to oversee his property located in Larue County, but who, there is no way, it would seem, of learning. There were several Wilsons in this vicinity during Turner Wilson's ownership of that particular tract, notably, a William Wilson and a Samuel Wilson, both of whom were sizable land holders themselves, both of whom had dealings with the Rodmans. But to assume by similarity of names that there was any relation among them would be mere speculation at this time, due to the lack of supporting evidence. Nor does it appear that there was any family connection between Turner Wilson and the Rodman brothers.

It is fairly certain, however, that there was a dwelling on this property, built either before or during Wilson's ownership. Wilson sold the tract to Samuel Spriggs, and Spriggs, after only seven months of ownership, conveyed it to the Davenports, thereby making it improbable that during such a short time Spriggs would have erected a dwelling which was

[40] Deed Book 1, page 205, Larue County Court.

on the farm when the Davenports purchased it in August, 1864.

Daniel Dyer, for whom Lafayette Wilson stated that he moved the so-called Lincoln birthplace cabin, was another well-known and well-landed gentleman of that time. He bought and sold several farms from the date of the formation of the County of Larue in 1843 through the period of the Civil War. At the date of Mr. Wilson's removal (supposed) of the cabin for Mr. Dyer, he (Dyer) owned land located near the Davenport farm. It is interesting to speculate or conjecture why Mr. Dyer would have a cabin moved for any purpose to Turner Wilson's property when he, Mr. Dyer, owned a considerable amount of land near by. Nor does there seem to be any family connection between Daniel Dyer and Turner Wilson. Neither has it been determined who Dyer's widowed sister was, of whom Lafayette Wilson spoke.

## III

That the birthplace cabin by 1865 had disappeared from the old Thomas Lincoln farm by having been moved away, or for some other cause, is well authenticated.

John B. Rowbotham visited the Lincoln Farm in the spring of 1865 for the purpose of sketching the birthplace home of Abraham Lincoln for a firm in Cincinnati, Ohio, which was publishing Joseph H. Barrett's Life of Abraham Lincoln that year. But he did not find the home of

Lincoln's birth, nor did he find anyone who knew the whereabouts of the birthplace cabin. However, the site of the birthplace cabin was pointed out to him and he did sketch that. That sketch was included in the book by Barrett. On his return to Cincinnati, Rowbotham wrote at length to William H. Herndon about his trip to Hodgenville, and to the birthplace farm, as follows:

"...From Louisville, take the car to Elizabeth Town, old Thomas Lincoln worked there occasionally as carpenter & it is probable there may be someone left who remembers him-but I did not stop to inquire-. From E. T. /Elizabethtown/ proceed to Hodgenville which /is/ about ten miles south east of there. I inquired the way to /the/ Rock Spring Farm owned by Mr. R. A. Creal, better known as 'old Dickey Creal.' The farm is about 3 miles south east of Hodgenville and a good straight road. The site of Mr. L's birthplace is on this farm about five-hundred yards from Mr. Creal's house. It is situated on a little knoll or rising ground & is now a barley field. Some rocks indicating the site of the chimney are still there. At the edge of the field are two old pear trees planted by Thomas Lincoln, between which was a gateway leading to the house. Mr. Creal remembers him well. Near the spot is a very romantic spring from which the farm takes its name, & where no doubt Mr. L. as a child ofted strayed. You will find Mr. Creal a truthful kindhearted man...."[41]

41 John B. Rowbotham to William H. Herndon, June 24, 1865. Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress. Copy in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

That the birthplace cabin was missing from the old Lincoln farm in 1865 is further substantiated by a "Letter to the Editor" which appeared in the Washington Post, October 11, 1948. The letter was written by David Rankin Barbee of Washington, D. C. He cited an account taken from the Philadelphia Press, September 1, 1865. This article stated that "... there are now no vestiges of the Lincoln cabin remaining."[42]

The above statements that the birthplace cabin was not on the "Sinking Spring Farm" in 1865 neither proves nor disproves the authenticity of the alleged birthplace cabin because there is some evidence that this cabin was removed from the Lincoln farm about 1860. Granting that the alleged birthplace cabin was removed from the Lincoln farm, then the point to determine is whether this cabin was standing on the Lincoln farm in 1809, and is the one in which Abraham Lincoln was born that same year.

It is certain that there was a dwelling by the spring in 1852 when this tract of land around the spring was sold by Thomas H. Thomas to Henry Horn in that year.[43] The conveyance stated that it was to "include the spring where the said Horn now lives." It is of interest to note here that Horn was residing on the property before the date of his actual purchase. Mr. Jacob Brothers stated that his father, Henry Brothers, lived

[42] Copy in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files, furnished by Region One, National Park Service.

[43] Deed Book 2, page 493, Larue County Court.

on the farm before the date of his recorded ownership. This residence before purchase evidently was not an uncommon practice at that early date.

Henry Horn conveyed the tract around the spring to Royal Hankla the following year, 1853.[44] However, I have been unable to determine just where Hankla lived during his ownership of this tract, 1853-1867. I do know that at the time he purchased this tract from Horn he owned a considerable acreage immediately west of Horn's tract by the spring. It is likely that he had his residence established on his land which was on Nolin Creek west of the present park. If he did not live on the property purchased from Horn, then it would seem that Horn's cabin by the spring would have been available for removal by some interested party.[45]

However, there is evidence that the dwelling on the portion of the Lincoln farm around the "Sinking Spring" in 1852 was not the dwelling in which Abraham Lincoln was born; in fact, that the birthplace cabin did not long survive.

In an interview with Jacob S. Brothers, Mr. J. T. Hobson reported that Brothers told him that when his father, Henry Brothers, purchased the tract of land around the "Sinking Spring," he tore down the house that was then on the farm and erected a newer one and used the logs of the older house for firewood. Brothers further stated that his father

[44]Deed Book 3, page 279, Larue County Court.

[45]Deed Book 2, page 493, Larue County Court.

bought this farm in 1827.[46]

Henry Brothers, however, did not receive a title to the farm until 1835, which title was an endorsement of a title bond from John Gash to Henry Brothers, dated April 2, 1835.[47]

It also must be remembered that Jacob S. Brothers was an old man recalling events of early childhood, and at that age older people tend to romanticize an event. Nevertheless, of all the informants whose statements have been accepted, Brothers was most intimately associated with the farm and the dwellings during those years his father claimed ownership; the others knew of them only indirectly, so to speak.

Clifton M. Nichols, while preparing his Life of Abraham Lincoln for the publishers, Mast, Crowell, and Kirkpatrick, of Springfield, Ohio, visited the country of Lincoln's birth some time before or during 1896. It was during this visit that he secured the photograph (Evans) of the cabin rebuilt near the Spring by Rev. J. W. Bigham. His informants remain unknown to the present writer, but Mr. Nichols relied on their information sufficiently to include the following in his published book:

"The Lincoln family occupied the cabin on Nolin's Creek for a period of four years after Abraham's birth, when they removed to the eastern end of the County. The farm on which Abraham was born passed into the hands of other and more energetic owners. The humble cabin was torn down and

46 Hobson, J. T. Footprints of Abraham Lincoln, pp. 14-15.

47 Charles F. Huss Vs. Richard Mather's Heirs et al, Equity Box 19, Larue County Circuit Court. Copy in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

the materials used in its construction were utilized otherwise, and ultimately destroyed in the manner common to the section and period. A more pretentious residence was erected on the site, but it, too, was built of logs. At a later date the farm again changed proprietors, and this second house was also torn down. The new owner built his residence at a different point. The logs used in the vacated dwelling were sold to a neighbor, and a portion of them remain at the present time in a dwelling occupied by Mr. John A. Davenport, and located about a mile from the old Lincoln homestead. For years after this the site of Abraham Lincoln's first home was cultivated in common with the surrounding land, and was marked only by a small mound, and a pear tree, rugged, gnarled, and sturdy, growing thereon. In 1895 the farm was purchased by New York speculators, who at once began its improvement with a view to its sale to the United States Government for use as a National Park. Many visitors suppose the cabin illustrated above to be the original Lincoln cabin, and certain recent Lincoln biographers give credence to the idea that it is. This, however, is a mistake. The present cabin is only a clever imitation of the original, built on the same plan, and with logs obtained from a very old, decaying house on an adjoining farm."[48]

Mr. Nichols' statement must not be taken without criticism. In the first place he is confused to the extent that he states the cabin which was returned to the Lincoln farm was still occupied by John A. Davenport;

[48] Nichols, Clifton M., Life of Abraham Lincoln, page 18.

that the one pictured is from another farm. It is conceded by nearly everyone that the present cabin enclosed within the memorial building is the one, materially, which was removed from the Davenport farm. He is also confused in that he mistakes the Mill Creek farm for the Knob Creek farm of Thomas Lincoln.

But it would be helpful to know his source of information concerning his statements about one cabin having been destroyed, the second sold, and the location of the site of the third house, and by whom it was erected.

His story, which, presumably, was based on an on-the-spot investigation, antedates Hobson's interviews with Jacob S. Brothers by four years. However, Brothers corroborates Nichols' story in that the first cabin was destroyed, but they fail to agree in their stories of the second and the third cabins. Although Mr. Nichols failed to state his sources, which is regrettable, he had the opportunity to interview the same persons interviewed by Rev. Bigham during the time Bigham was active in promoting the cabin and the farm.

One of the most reliable informants, both in actual knowledge and in direct association with the cabin and with the farm, was Judge John C. Creal. He was a trusted public servant and an honest and a truthful man. He was born and reared on part of the old Lincoln farm, his father having purchased a portion of it about 1830. Although it is very doubtful that he sold the cabin in question to some one about 1860, Judge Creal's father, R. A. Creal, doubtless knew the dwellings on the tract around

the spring prior to his purchase of the tract in 1867. And it is likely that he knew the Lincolns. Judge John C. Creal, representing the Creal heirs, sold the portion of the Lincoln farm owned by them to A. W. Dennett in 1894, and through this sale he became acquainted with Rev. J. W. Bigham. The statement following is the one he gave the investigators for the Lincoln Farm Association in 1906:

"My name is John C. Creal. I was born on a part of the Lincoln farm in Larue County, Kentucky, in the year 1836, and I have lived in Larue County near this place all my life. For the last sixteen years of my life I have been the County Judge of Larue County. I sold the farm now owned by Robert J. Collier to one A. W. Dennette [Dennett] of New York City. My recollection of the house made of logs which was removed by the Rev. J. W. Bigham from the farm, is that it was a comparatively new house when I first remember anything about it. The stairway in this house and the upper floor were placed in there by my uncle J. B. Cates when I was about ten years of age.

"Some time in April, 1893 the question was raised about these logs since removed by Mr. Bigham being the logs in the original Lincoln cabin. My mother, at that time about seventy years old told me that these logs afterward removed from the place had no connection whatever with the logs in the original cabin; that a man by the name of Jackson had built this cabin from the logs that were removed. My mother further told me that the site of the original Lincoln cabin had been pointed out to her by the old citizens as being at a point different from where the Jackson

cabin stood. She said that these old people told her the Lincoln cabin stood south of the old trail about seventy yards distant from the point where the flag pole now stands which is supposed to indicate the site of the original cabin.

"My mother moved into this neighborhood about 1830. One of my earliest recollections is that an old cabin stood about ten or fifteen feet from the Jackson cabin. This old cabin at that time was in a very bad state of repair and showed age and was evidently a very old house. My recollection is that this was a round log cabin. I do not recollect what became of this old cabin.

"Some time in the seventies a party of ex-soldiers came out to the farm and wanted to be shown the site of the Lincoln cabin. I had uncle Jimmy Walters, a very old man, who recollected seeing Mr. Lincoln when he and Lincoln were boys, to point out to this party the site of the original cabin as he recollected it. He came on to the place and after some time spent in rambling over the place, fixed the site at a different point to that designated by my mother. He fixed on the first knoll east of the spring about one hundred yards there from and probably a distance of a hundred yards from the site indicated by my mother. I believe that Mr. Walters was mistaken in location of the site of the Lincoln cabin." [49]

[49] Affidavit of Judge John C. Creal, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

This testimony of Judge Creal is most significant, not only because it came from a citizen of good character, but because it is also based on direct association with the cabin and the farm. It seems that all the members of the Creal family held the same view concerning the alleged birthplace cabin. During the years from as early as 1894 when he sold the birthplace farm to Dennett until the time he made the above statement in 1906, Judge Creal's convictions concerning the cabin's authenticity were never altered. In spite of the nation-wide advertising the alleged birthplace cabin received from 1895 to 1906, and the claims made by Bigham that the cabin was original, Judge Creal, presumably, never altered nor diminished his convictions on the subject. In 1906, his testimony still contradicted the idea of the cabin as being the one in which Abraham Lincoln was born.

The treatment received by the cabin after its purchase by Rev. J. W. Bigham from John A. Davenport is a prime example of careless and irresponsible handling of what was presumably an object of great historical value. When John A. Davenport began living in the alleged birthplace cabin about 1875, he added an upstairs and a room to the single room cabin.[50] For access to this added room he cut a door in the back or rear wall of the cabin. When Rev. Bigham re-erected the cabin on the Lincoln farm he abolished the door which had been made by Mr. Davenport, replacing the pieces which had been cut through for the door with full length logs. It

[50] Statement made by Ivy Davenport, son of John A. Davenport.

is most likely that the door was at least seven logs in height, and the removal of these pieces has resulted in their loss forever.

Contemporary evidence gives credence to that accusation of careless handling. Rev. Bigham placed the alleged Lincoln birthplace cabin on exhibition at the Tennessee Centennial at Nashville in 1897, and for that exhibition he prepared what he termed, "A Lecture-Historic and Descriptive."[51] This lecture was the means by which he enlightened the visitor concerning the history of the cabin. Although this writer has never found a copy of this lecture, presumably it embodied the Rodman tradition. In addition to the alleged birthplace cabin the Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition stated that Rev. Bigham also had "The remains of the rail fence that surrounded the cabin ... brought along and re-erected, and a number of old chairs from the Lincoln home were also in the cabin. The doors, windows, and shingles were also brought and put in their proper places...."[52]

Nor had there been any attempt by Rev. Bigham to place each log in its position which it had occupied at the time the cabin was dismantled preparatory to its removal to the Lincoln farm from the Davenport farm in 1895. The logs were loaded onto wagons, a side of the cabin to each wagon. Four wagons hauled the full length logs, the fifth brought the odd pieces.[53] The first time the logs of the cabin were numbered was in 1897, just before

[51] Bankruptcy Suit #3740 of Alfred W. Dennett in the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of California, San Francisco. Copy of suit in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

[52] The Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, pp. 210-11.

[53] Statement of Ivy Davenport, son of John A. Davenport.

the cabin was shipped to Nashville.

It is difficult for present day historians to understand how Rev. Bigham could have been so careless and so completely lacking in responsibility in his treatment of the alleged birthplace cabin, while at the same time so fervently advertising it as the original cabin of Lincoln's birth.

The reckless claims made by Rev. Bigham, such as the statement that the original chairs, rail fence, shingles, doors, and windows were with the cabin and his evident lack of care in the handling of the supposedly historical cabin are sufficient in themselves to warrant suspicion on the part of the historian concerning the authenticity of these objects.

An incident which reveals Rev. J. W. Bigham's personal opinion of the subject of the cabin's authenticity has been related only recently by David Rankin Barbee of Washington, D. C. He recalled:

"When I was a young reporter the state of Tennessee held an Exposition to celebrate its century of statehood. Among the exhibits on the Midway was a log cabin brought there by a faker and advertised as the 'original cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born.' Being skeptical about that, and being stationed on the Exposition grounds to cover daily events, I asked the owner of this cabin how he knew that Lincoln was born in that very cabin. His reply was about like this, according to my recollection: 'Lincoln was born in a log cabin, weren't he? Well, one cabin is as good as another.' This identical fake was later sold to the people who erected

the marble shrine over it at Hodgenville." [54]

It is late to gather any additional statements from anyone who has direct knowledge of the alleged birthplace cabin. And there also seems to be a dire shortage of source material concerning it. The question of the cabin's authenticity has heretofore rested on the statements gathered for the Lincoln Farm Association. These statements have been examined to some extent in this report, but they now merit closer scrutiny.

The statement of Mrs. Goff, age 86, immediately loses some of its value because of her extreme age. And in her statement that the older residents in the 1830s were speaking of the Lincoln family who had resided near the "Sinking Spring" only two or three years, 1808-11, she was alluding to a highly improbable situation, due to the fact that Lincoln, in the 1830s, was probably unknown outside Illinois.

The affidavit of John A. Davenport, age 59, is practically negated by his deposition made two years prior to the making of the affidavit. Its value as documentary evidence is further lessened by the obvious discrepancies in it. Finally, it is obvious that it is only hearsay.

The statement of Lafayette Wilson, age 63, does not corroborate the statements of Mrs. Goff and Mr. Davenport in any way that would enhance the authenticity of the cabin. The truth is that it contradicts them on the primary points as to the reason the cabin was moved from the Lincoln farm to the Davenport farm and for whom it was moved.

[54] Washington Post, October 11, 1948; Letter to the Editor, by David Rankin Barbee. Copy of clipping in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files. Clipping in Region One office, National Park Service, Richmond, Va.

Judge John C. Creal's testimony is contradictory to all others except, possibly, Mr. Wilson's. Evidently there was a tradition that came down in the Creal family that a cabin was moved for Daniel Dyer from the site near the spring.[55]

Due to the fact that all the testimonial evidence concerning the cabin is such a mass of cross statements and contraditions, Dr. Louis A. Warren has stated that "the affidavits and written testimonials ... are in irreconciliable confusion."[56] Of course, this applies equally well to the testimony of Jacob S. Brothers and to the statement of Clifton M. Nichols.

In regard to the reliability of older persons' memories and consequently their statements, E. R. Burba of Hodgenville, Kentucky, wrote William H. Herndon in 1866 that he knew nothing of the Lincolns from direct knowledge and that all "the information I have is from some of the old settlers and it appears that they are at a considerable loss on that subject."[57]

If the older settlers were "at a considerable loss on that subject" in 1866, only fifty-seven years after Lincoln's birth, it is all too obvious that the probable extent among the affiants of their "loss on that subject" of the Abraham Lincoln birthplace cabin in 1906, ninety-seven years after Lincoln's birth, was much greater.

55 Statement of John M. Cissell, Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

56 Warren, Louis A., "Lincoln Lore," No. 1019.

57 E. R. Burba to William H. Herndon, March 31, 1866. Copy in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

And, too, it must be borne in mind that when the affiants in 1906 referred to the "Lincoln Cabin" they used that term to denote the cabin owned by the Lincoln Farm Association which had been widely publicized as the "Lincoln Cabin" for twelve years. When they used that word or term in their statements, it never enhanced the cabin's claim to authenticity, but, instead, only served to denote the cabin in question.

Although on the basis of the information presented, the matter of the traditional birthplace cabin's authenticity is neither proved nor disproved definitely, yet the evidence against the cabin's supporting tradition is overwhelming.

The fact that Dr. George W. Rodman never had a recorded title to the Davenport farm on which Rev. J. W. Bigham discovered the alleged birthplace cabin in 1895, of course, is the hardest blow to the Rodman tradition. Coupled with the above fact is another, that he (Dr. Rodman) owned several lots in Hodgenville at the time he supposedly moved the cabin from the Lincoln farm. It is unlikely that Dr. Rodman would have moved a cabin for preservation to any other than his own property. The doubt that he ever visited Lincoln in Washington lessens the possibility that he ever moved a cabin in honor of Lincoln to any place. Finally, the type of men Rev. Bigham and A. W. Dennett were, their apparent motives in buying the farm and the cabin, their personal financial interest in its exploitation, and their manner of handling and advertising what they claimed was an object of prime historical importance, have aroused considerable suspicion concerning the authenticity of the alleged birthplace cabin. It is apparent

that from the date on which Rev. Bigham purchased the cabin from John A. Davenport in 1895, his main purpose in obtaining the cabin and the portion of the Lincoln farm was of a mercenary nature. In fact, he has been quoted as stating that "Harvey and I are going to make a barrel of money off the cabin." [58] The proceedings of the suit involving the bankruptcy of A. W. Dennett reveal the men and their plans. [59]

In the light of the evidence against, and the lack of evidence for, the Rodman tradition concerning the alleged birthplace cabin, the present position of the National Park Service is now hardly tenable, because the basic interpretive program rests on the Rodman tradition. The Rodman tradition is the one Rev. Bigham apparently developed in order to explain the authenticity of the cabin, and the tradition was accepted by the Lincoln Farm Association when it purchased the cabin from David Crear of New York. The War Department in 1916 and the National Park Service in 1933 both accepted the cabin on the basis of the Rodman tradition. However, the National Park Service deserves more credit than it has received publicly for its objective and scholarly attitude on the subject of the cabin. Within the limits of funds and personnel available for research, it has made determined attempts to discover the truth concerning the cabin.

Since it now appears that the Rodman tradition has no provable or

[58] Statement of John M. Cissell.

[59] Bankruptcy Suit #3740 of Alfred W. Dennett, in the U. S. District Court, Northern District of California, San Francisco. Copy of suit in Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park files.

plausible basis, the National Park Service will be forced to alter its interpretive program at Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park. In the light of such feeble support as it would seem the cabin now has to authenticity as the birthplace cabin, it could hardly be expected that interpretive personnel should continue to use the Rodman tradition as evidence to support the theory that possibly the cabin may be derived in part from the Lincoln birthplace cabin.

Nor would the Dyer tradition concerning the cabin be sufficient. In the first place, there is no evidence whatever in this tradition that the cabin was moved because of its association with Abraham Lincoln. In this case any discovery of the cabin's ever having been associated with Lincoln would have been accidental. More important, any story at this late date based on a tradition with little supporting evidence would fail completely as a nucleus for an interpretive program. The whole story would fall flat on the ears of a public already inclined toward skepticism concerning the alleged birthplace cabin.

(SGD.) BENJAMIN H. DAVIS,
Benjamin H. Davis,
Historical Aide,
Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park
February 15, 1949.