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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

----- NATIONAL PARK

FILE NO.

HISTORY DIVISION
ABRAHAM LINCOLN NHP
RESEARCH

ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENTS OF HAYS AND DAVIS

LINCOLN LOG CABIN QUESTION

By: Charles W. Porter, III

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The Lincoln Log Cabin Question

The Advisory Board, at its November 1950 meeting, considered the following points in analyzing the arguments of Hays, Davis and Warren concerning the authenticity of the Cabin:

1. The greater part of Hays' article (pp.130-163), deals with the travels of the Cabin while it was owned by Dennett. This later history of the Cabin can have no bearing on its authenticity as Lincoln's birthplace, and is irrelevant for the purpose of the main discussion. It does, however, reveal the shady character of Dennett and Bigham.
2. Hays cites Jacob Brothers as saying [1903] that the Lincoln Cabin was razed and the logs burned before 1840. This evidence from an 84-year old man trying to recall events that happened in another state 76 years before, when he was 8 or 10 years old, is practically worthless. Significantly, the Lincoln Farm was in the possession of the Brothers family for only five years, 1835-40.
3. Hays cites the fact that Rowbotham visited the Lincoln Farm in 1865 and found no cabin there. Wintersmith's letter of October 2, 1860 to McKeeham from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, is evidence that the cabin had been removed by 1860. This fact could readily be admitted by those who believe the cabin authentic because the traditional story has it that the cabin was removed to the Davenport Farm in 1860 or 1861. However, what is extremely difficult to explain is that neither Rowbotham nor Wintersmith seems to have been told that the cabin had survived in whole or in part on another site. It is hard to believe that they would not have been told this interesting fact if any of the logs had in fact survived.
4. After reading Hays' argument, Dr. Warren in a rebuttal in Lincoln Lore, October 18, 1948, cited three sources to prove the cabin may have been on the Lincoln Farm in 1860-61, viz: Missouri Telegraph of November 23, 1860, quoting "a young lady of La Rue County"; Dr. R. H. Brown, who visited the Farm on Nolin Creek, 1862 or 1863, and Robert Harvey, Company D, 74th Regt., who claimed in 1905 that he saw the birthplace cabin of Lincoln in October 1862, after the Battle of Perryville. However, we cannot be sure that these witnesses were all thinking of the same Lincoln Farm, as the site had not then been definitely identified and a number of farms were associated with Lincoln in the public mind.
5. Lafayette Wilson deposed in 1906 at the age of 63 that in the month of March, 1860, he moved the cabin from the Lincoln Farm to the Davenport Farm. As I see it, the entire case for the authenticity of the cabin now rests on this and supporting affidavits. Such affidavits can usually be obtained to prove anything you may wish to prove. They are a very unreliable type of historical evidence.
6. The tradition that the cabin was moved by Dr. Rodman in 1860 or 1861 to the Davenport Farm is one of the vital questions at issue. Davis' report, while not completely destroying this tradition, shows that

available court records do not substantiate it. Indeed, they make the tradition appear improbable by destroying the motive for the alleged removal of the cabin. However, the real clue to the Rodman ownership of or residence at the Davenport place might exist in the form of an unrecorded deed or lease, among the loose papers of the County Court (like the Chancery papers that prove Thomas Lincoln once owned the Lincoln Farm).

7. To summarize, there simply isn't any trustworthy recorded evidence for the authenticity of the cabin. In view of the Mountebank character of Dennett and Bigham, the traditions springing from them are certainly not to be trusted. It is an open question whether the affidavits (our only evidence) reflect the influence of these charlatans.
8. The Advisory Board recommended that the Davis article, entitled "Report of Research on the Traditional Abraham Lincoln Birthplace Cabin ", be offered for publication. It also passed the following resolution - "The Advisory Board recommends that the National Park Service make clear that it considers the authenticity of the cabin debatable."

File Lincoln
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Lincoln Log Cabin Question

Analysis of the Arguments of Hays and Davis, and Warren

1. The greater part of Hays' article (pp. 130-163) deals with the travels of the Cabin while it was owned by Dennett. This later history of the Cabin can have no bearing on its authenticity as Lincoln's birthplace, and is irrelevant for the purpose of the main discussion. It does, however, reveal the shady character of Dennett and Bigham.
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5. Lafayette Wilson deposed in 1906 at the age of 63 that he moved the cabin from the Lincoln Farm to the Davenport Farm, in the Month of March, 1860. As I see it, the entire case for the authenticity of the cabin now rests on this and supporting affidavits. Such affidavits can usually be obtained to prove anything you may wish to prove. They are a very unreliable type of historical evidence.

6. The tradition that the cabin was moved by Dr. Rodman in 1860 or 1861 to the Davenport Farm is one of the vital questions at issue. Davis' report, while not completely destroying this tradition, shows that available court records do not substantiate it. Indeed, they make the tradition appear improbable by destroying the motive for the alleged removal of the cabin. However, the real clue to the Rodman ownership of or residence at the Davenport place might exist in the form of an unrecorded deed or lease, among the loose papers of the County Court (like the Chancery papers that prove Thomas Lincoln once owned the Lincoln Farm).
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8. It is suggested that Davis' article be offered to the Abraham Lincoln Quarterly for publication with a note saying that in the future the Service intends to refer to the cabin as being "of debatable authenticity and only symbolic of the kind of house in which Lincoln was born." The Service might at the same time refer to research authenticating the farm as the Lincoln Farm. While the Davis article is not conclusive one way or the other, its publication would indicate to scholars that the Park Service is sincerely interested in knowing the truth about the cabin and is not seeking to hide any of the facts.

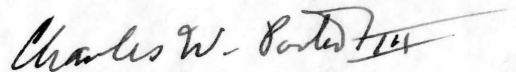
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