

LINCOLN LORE

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THREE GENERATIONS OF LINCOLN BOYS

The recent discovery in Kentucky of what appears to be the grave of Abraham Lincoln's infant brother recalls the succession of mournful events which swept away most of the male children in at least three generations of Lincolns.

There were no daughters in the family of President Lincoln, and the deaths of three of his four sons, before they reached maturity, greatly reduced the probability that the Lincoln name would long survive. When Lincoln's only grandson died the name Lincoln was destined to disappear from among the descendants of America's illustrious men.

The five Lincoln boys who passed away early in life are mentioned in this monograph:

Thomas Lincoln 1811

A group of relief workers, clearing off the underbrush of an obscure burial ground in LaRue County, Ky., came across an old headstone bearing the initials "T. L." Inasmuch as the cemetery was located on the farm adjoining the Knob Creek home of the Lincolns, the question of identifying the grave with the burial place of some member of the Lincoln family immediately arose.

The cemetery was originally used by the Redmond family, and seventeen marked graves in two orderly rows, most of them with full inscriptions or initials, mark the resting places of the family. In a third irregular row there are four isolated graves, two with no inscription on the headstones, one marked "S. B." and another "T. L." There is no question about the accuracy of the initials on the last mentioned stone and the position of the burial place in the lot indicates the grave is not associated with the Redmond family. Every evidence now available points to the grave as the burial place of Thomas Lincoln, infant child of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln, in an autobiographical sketch which he wrote in the third person refers specifically to "A brother younger than himself who died in infancy." Although this child died early in life, he lived long enough to receive a name, having been called Thomas for his father. The year 1811 is usually given as the time of both his birth and death, although no record of either event is available.

Edward Baker Lincoln

March 10, 1846—February 1, 1850

The second child born to Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln was named Edward Baker in honor of one of Lincoln's associates, Edward Dickinson Baker.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected to Congress Mrs. Lincoln and their two

boys, Robert and Edward, accompanied him to Washington, later returning to Lexington, Kentucky, to visit Mrs. Lincoln's people. While Mrs. Lincoln was in Lexington, several letters passed between her and Mr. Lincoln at Washington.

On one occasion we find that Lincoln was hunting in Washington stores for some plaid stockings that would fit "Eddy's dear little feet." Lincoln also wanted to know what Bobby and Eddy thought of "the little letters father sent them," and concludes the letter by admonishing Mary "Don't let the blessed fellows forget father." Mrs. Lincoln in writing to Mr. Lincoln assured him that "Eddy's eyes brighten at the mention of your name."

Upon Abraham Lincoln's return to Springfield, his family again became settled in the Eighth Street home and here, in January, 1850, Edward was stricken with diphtheria and passed away on February first.

In writing to his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, on February 23, Lincoln said "as you make no mention of it, I suppose you had not learned that we lost our little boy. He was sick fifteen days and died in the morning of the first day of this month. We miss him very much."

Upon leaving Springfield for Washington for the Inaugural, Lincoln called to mind the passing of this boy when he said: "Here my children were born and here one of them lies buried."

William Wallace Lincoln

December 21, 1850—February 20, 1862

Willie Lincoln was named for William Wallace, husband of Mrs. Lincoln's sister. He is said to have been the most lovable of the Lincoln children. One well-known journalist of the day paid him this tribute, "His genial and open expression of countenance was none the less ingenious and fearless for a certain tincture of fun and it was in this mingling of qualities that he so faithfully resembled his father."

While out riding on his pony one day in February, Willie caught a cold which developed into an acute malarial infection from which he died. His death in the White House on February 20, 1862, when but twelve years old, was more responsible than any other one event for the mental collapse of Mrs. Lincoln.

This was said to have been the most crushing affliction which Mr. Lincoln had been called upon to pass through. On the day of the funeral it is said that for the first time in history the government department had closed upon the death of a child.

When the body of President Lincoln was taken back to Springfield on that memorable funeral procession, little Willie's body accompanied his father's and found a resting place in the tomb.

Thomas (Tad) Lincoln

April 4, 1853—July 15, 1871

Tad Lincoln, youngest son of the President, outlived his father, yet he did not reach maturity. Some time after the death of Mr. Lincoln, Mrs. Lincoln took Tad to Europe. While in Germany she wrote a friend she was pained to see Tad's face thinner.

When Mrs. Lincoln and Tad came back from Europe, Tad was ill. Mother and son went immediately to Chicago.

The Chicago Tribune published an account of Tad Lincoln's death from which the following excerpt is taken:

"At 7:30 on yesterday (Saturday) morning Tad Lincoln died at the Clifton House on Wabash Avenue, where he had been staying since his return from Europe. The cause of his death was dropsy of the chest. The first symptoms showed themselves while he was abroad, but it was not until his return, the middle of May, that his condition became alarming. The disease made its appearance in the left chest, afterwards attacking the right chest, and soon after it caused death by compression of the heart. He was convalescent at one time, but he got up one night slightly clad and swooned. This was followed by a relapse, after which he grew steadily worse. He was attended by Dr. Charles Gilman Smith."

Abraham Lincoln

August 14, 1873—March 5, 1890

The most far-reaching tragedy which occurred among the youthful members of the Lincoln family was the death of Abraham Lincoln, namesake of the President.

Robert Lincoln, only son of President Lincoln to reach maturity, married Mary Harlan, only surviving child of Hon. James Harlan. Mr. Harlan had lost a son just at the beginning of what appeared to be a promising career.

Both the Harlan and Lincoln families were intensely interested in the son born to Robert and Mary Harlan Lincoln, as he was the only hope of perpetuating the Lincoln name and the last male descendant in the Harlan family. At the time Robert was made United States minister to Great Britain in 1889, his son, Abraham, was a very promising youth. The family had not been in London very long before the boy was taken ill and passed away on March 5, 1890, at the age of seventeen. With his death all probability that the Lincoln name would be continued died out.

It is not known generally that for the past forty years there have been two Abraham Lincolns buried in the Lincoln Tomb at Springfield, although it is understood that the grandchild and namesake of the President has now been interred by the side of his father, Robert Lincoln, in Arlington National Cemetery.