

LINCOLN LORE

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IN THE HEART OF THE NATION

The romance of historical research has been visualized by a striking coincidence which occurred in stories appearing in recent issues of two well-known magazines. *The Saturday Evening Post* for August 28, 1943, under the caption "His Name was Not Forgotten," by Joel Townsley Rogers, presented a well written story on the adventures of Abraham Lincoln's grandparents in the Kentucky wilderness. The September issue of *Think*, illustrated Per Jacobsson's article, "The Future of Gold is at Stake," with a photograph of the "depository at Fort Knox, housing U. S. gold bullion reserves."

Certainly the casual reader would discover no parallel themes relating the episodes of some pioneers in the later years of the eighteenth century, with the storage of gold in the middle years of the twentieth century. The Lincoln historian, however, knows that the picture in *Think* might well have been used as a sequel illustration for the *Post* story. The underground vault in Hardin County, Kentucky, which now serves as a depository for the Nation's gold bullion reserves, is but a short distance from the spot where the pioneers prepared the burial vault for the remains of the grandmother of Abraham Lincoln.

There is an old proverb which states that "Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also." We might assume that the proverb would have the same application to social, political, and economic groups. This conclusion would imply that Kentucky with her buried gold is the heart of the nation.

More than twenty years ago the editor of *Lincoln Lore* first visited the grave of Abraham Lincoln's grandmother in the unused cemetery where the Old Mill Creek Church once stood. Observing the growth of underbrush which almost obscured the burial grounds from the nearly impassible road, and the unkempt condition of the grandmother's grave, a nearby farmer was given a small compensation for taking care of the Lincoln-Brumfield graves until public sentiment would demand better attention for them. A few years ago the burial grounds were made into Kentucky State Park No. 17.

There is no implication here that the

Nation has acquired so much gold that its vault had to be enlarged to include the burial place of the old grandmother, but the extension of the boundaries of Camp Knox have not only encompassed the burial ground, but also the old home where Bersheba Lincoln lived for a time with her youngest son, Thomas, father of the President. This last acquisition makes the second farm in Kentucky, owned by Lincoln's parents, now in possession of the government.

If men rather than money constitute the national treasure, old Hardin County, Kentucky might also be recognized as the Heart of the Nation for the gift of this treasure, because it contains the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln.

Larue County was cut off from Hardin County in 1843 and Hodgenville was made the new county seat. While this division was vigorously opposed, the exponents of the new county were finally successful. The separation was not consummated, however, until the debate drew a humorous classic in the form of a caustic rebuke from one of the opposition, a member of the old family from which Hardin County received its name. It is presented here as printed in *Ben Hardin p. 638*.

"Fellow-citizens, I hear everywhere that there is a decided wish to divide Hardin county, and some, I regret to say, oppose it. Why? I ask, why? fellow-citizens. Look at this end of Hardin. It comes out of the way. It is detached naturally from Hardin. It projects like the toe of a boot; and, fellow-citizens, the toe of that boot ought to be applied to the blunt end of any candidate who opposes this just, proper, and natural division. (Cheers.) Having shown you that this end of the county is thus by nature, and should be divided by law from the other, my next consideration is the county seat. To gentlemen as intelligent as you, and as familiar with the section to be divided off, I need not point out that Hodgenville will be the center of the proposed county; and where, but at the center should the county seat be? (Cheers.) Gentlemen, you have doubtless heard the removal of our State capital spoken of. As it is, it is tucked up in a north corner of the State, where it is about as convenient a situation for the capital of the whole

State as Elizabethtown (the county seat of Hardin) is to be the county seat of your proposed new county. The same reasons that induce us to separate this part of the county from the other should make us move the capital. We must move it, and to the center of the State. Now take a map. Kentucky is four hundred and twenty miles long, by about one hundred and forty wide in the center. Now the new county will be on a perpendicular line just seventy miles from the Ohio River, and two hundred and ten from each end of the State, and Hodgenville is the center of the new county. I have thus mathematically demonstrated to you that the State capital should be removed to Hodgenville. (Enthusiastic cheering.) Fellow-citizens, I have been inadvertently led into these questions, but I will proceed farther. In the late war (the war of 1812) Washington City was burned by the British, and why? Because it was our exposed border. The National capital should be removed from the Atlantic coast, and to the center of the Union. Kentucky is the great seal set in the center of our mighty republic, (1843) as you will see by enumerating the surrounding States, and, as I have already shown you that this is the center of Kentucky, it follows that the National capital should be removed to Hodgenville. As some had begun to smell a large Norway by this time, the cheering was not quite so loud. 'Nay,' said the orator, in a burst of enthusiasm, 'Hodgenville is the center of God's glorious and beautiful world?'

"How in the devil do you make that out?" said an irritated voice in the crowd.

"The speaker, drawing himself up, and sweeping his forefinger in a grand circle around the horizon, said: 'Look how nice the sky fits down all around!'"

Ben Hardin, who presumably made the above speech, for all his humorous deductions, was apparently a blind prophet. The little log cabin near Hodgenville where Abraham Lincoln was born would become more quickly recognized today by the peoples of many countries than the birthplace of any other character. It is doubtful if there has appeared, since the coming of the Messiah, one who has so truly captured the sympathy of the world masses as the child born at Hodgenville.