



Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation . . . Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, Editor
Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1580

Fort Wayne, Indiana

October, 1969

The Hardin Thomas House “the joiner’s work of which was done by Thomas Lincoln”

Today, about one and one-half miles north of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, just off Highway 31 W, there stands a dilapidated double log house which was once the home of Hardin Thomas. This ancient house has a special significance, because Thomas Lincoln, the father of the Sixteenth President, helped in its construction. Perhaps he did not build both of the cabins (they may have been built at different times) or even take part in the heavy constructional work of either building, but certainly he contributed something toward making it the fine home it became during the pioneer period.

Samuel Haycraft, Jr., who wrote *A History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky And Its Surroundings* in 1869, made the following statement on page 123: “He (Hardin Thomas) lived in a house rather better than usual for that day, the carpenter’s work of which was executed by Thomas Lincoln, the father of the late President, and the most of that work is to be seen at this day, sound as a trout, although done upwards of sixty years ago.”

In writing of Jack Thomas, the son of Hardin Thomas, Haycraft in his history, on page 55, stated that “He was



Photograph by J. C. Jennings, Elizabethtown (Ky.) News

The dilapidated Hardin Thomas house as it stands today north of Elizabethtown, Kentucky on Highway 31 W.

born on the 7th day of February, 1790. His father resided in a house the joiner's work of which was done by Thomas Lincoln, father of the President."

The word "joiner" is today obsolete in reference to house construction; however, an unabridged dictionary gives the definition as "a special artisan who finishes the woodwork for houses." In 1821, Thomas Lincoln, while a resident of Indiana, was responsible for the pulpit, window casings, and other woodwork of the Little Pigeon Baptist Church, which would certainly cast him in the role of a "joiner."

As Jack Thomas was born in the Hardin Thomas house in 1790, this eliminates Thomas Lincoln as the builder of the original log cabin or double cabin. In 1790 Thomas Lincoln (if he was born in 1776) was 14 years old. If he was born in 1778, as Abraham Lincoln believed, he would have been 12 years old. This would have been much too young for such a task.

Samuel Haycraft, Jr. in 1869 was of the opinion that the house was "upwards of sixty years" old, which would place the construction date at about the time of the future Sixteenth President's birth. Other local historians have fixed the date of the construction of the house as early as 1805.

References by Haycraft to the Hardin Thomas house are numerous. In a letter to the editor of the *Louisville Democrat* dated at Elizabethtown on July 9, 1865, referring to the death of Jack Thomas he wrote: "I have just learned that my old friend and relation Jack Thomas, Esq. departed his life at his residence in Leitchfield, Grayson County, on the 5th day of July, 1865. Jack Thomas and myself commenced this world poor boys together in the early existence of the state. He was born on the 7th day of February, 1790 near this town, his father resided in a house the joiner's work of which was done by Thomas Lincoln, father of the president."

It is of interest to point out that Abraham Lincoln claimed that he was at least faintly familiar with the handwriting of Jack Thomas. In a letter to Haycraft from Springfield, Illinois, dated May 28, 1860 Lincoln wrote: "... I recognized your hand-writing, on opening your letter, before I saw the signature. My recollection is that Ben Helm was first clerk (Hardin County Court), that you succeeded him, that Jack Thomas and William Farleigh graduated in the same office, and that your handwritings were all very similar — Am I right?" (See *Lincoln Lore* No. 1456).

The earliest date that can be established that Thomas Lincoln was in Hardin County is July 13, 1796 when he was paid 39 shillings by Samuel Haycraft, Sr. for work on an Elizabethtown mill race and mill dam. Tom Lincoln was at that time either nineteen or twenty-one years of age.

The names of Hardin Thomas and Thomas Lincoln are linked together in Hardin County court documents. One such document is a petition (signed by 43 people) for a "road from the River Ohio to the Court house . . . that the road begin a quarter of a mile below the mouth of Flippin's Run . . ." The above document is to be found in a bundle marked "Road Petitions Before 1805" in the Hardin County Court records. As Thomas Lincoln's name, along with the name of Hardin Thomas, is signed to this petition, we can be reasonably assured that the two men were acquainted.

Haycraft provided a biographical sketch of Hardin Thomas in his history (pages 122-124): "Among the early settlers of this town was Hardin Thomas. He was the father of Jack Thomas, Isaac Thomas, Jesse Thomas, Miles H. Thomas, Alex Thomas, and of several daughters, one of whom married Col. Jacob B. Hayden, our present Senator.

"Hardin Thomas was a man of peace. He married Hetty Gerrard, a daughter of really the first Baptist preacher in Kentucky. He was a farmer, and his life was not such as to attract a great deal of attention from the outside world; but he was the 'noblest work of God — an honest man.' And not only an honest man, but was possessed of a degree of benevolence rarely met with in this world of dollars and cents. His house was a kind of cen-

tral point for the neighborhood; and as at that period, when churches were few, and religious services rather poorly attended to, a little visiting and good eating on the Sabbath day was not looked upon as at this day; on the contrary the folks worked all the week and considered that resting on the Sabbath consisted in visiting friends, having social chats, and a good share of table indulgences. So whether Hardin Thomas and Cousin Hetty preferred it or not, the Sabbath was not only a day of rest to them, but rather a day of labor. The neighbors and young folks poured in every Sabbath, or nearly so. I have often been one of them, and partook of the hospitalities of the united head of the family; and those hospitalities were not extended with a stinted or grudging hand, but flowed bountifully from their diligent hands and generous hearts.

"And these Sunday doings were not all. But if a peniless man or woman sick, afflicted or distressed, passed through our country, they invariably dropped in to Hardin Thomas' and were there nursed, fed and lodged and kindly treated. And if you have been inclined to insult Hardin Thomas or his wife let one of these unfortunates ask them what was to pay for board, etc.

"Everybody loved Hardin Thomas and his wife. He was very popular, but never had any political aspirations or thirst for office. I once heard a man ask Hardin Thomas why he did not offer for the Legislature. His reply was that he 'would as soon be found with a sheep on his back' . . .

"Hardin Thomas was a man of portly form and a pleasant countenance — just such a one as was comfortable to look at, and was a complete index of the inner man; but many years since he and his good wife have finished their courses and gone to their reward. His mother was a Hardin, the daughter of John Hardin, who was a brother of the old original Mark Hardin, of George's Creek, Pennsylvania. His father was named Owen Thomas; he was the brother of Gen. John Thomas, who commanded the Kentucky troops under Gen. Jackson at the battle of New Orleans . . .

"One peculiarity more of Hardin Thomas I will name. He was so honest himself that he was unsuspecting of others. And although he lived upon a public road leading from Louisville to Nashville, he trusted all to luck; had no lock to his house, or desk, or smoke house, or corner. I heard him myself say that there was not a lock about his house. And singular as it may be, I never heard of his losing anything by theft . . ."

Haycraft stated that Hardin Thomas was "a man of peace." However, there is to be found in the Hardin County Court Order Book A (August term 1800 to June Term 1801) a list of twenty-five frontiersmen from Hardin County who fought with General George Rogers Clark, and Hardin Thomas was one of them. These men went through the hardships of war, ice, overflowing rivers, and hunger to make a vital contribution to our nation's independence and to the settlement of Kentucky. As Clark's men were never fully compensated by either Virginia or the United States, the twenty-five soldiers twenty-three years after the expedition against the Wabash Indians, as they called it in Kentucky, petitioned the Hardin County Court for reimbursement. They asked from 1 pound, 15 shillings and 2 pence to varying amounts up to 18 pounds, depending upon the services rendered. Hardin Thomas and the remaining twenty-four men were all able to produce satisfactory proof that they fought with General Clark.

As to Thomas Lincoln's building activities, there is documentary proof that he followed the carpenter's trade in Elizabethtown. This is revealed in the details of the Geoghegan-Lincoln suit. Lincoln not long after his marriage to Nancy Hanks (1806) made a contract to hew enough logs to erect a mill. Lincoln, historians like to believe, fulfilled his part of the contract but Geoghegan claimed the work was not done according to specifications. Lincoln brought suit against Geoghegan in a magistrate's court on March 25, 1807. Lincoln won the suit. The judgment was for four pounds and nine shillings and the cost of the trial amounted to four shillings and six pence plus the cost of the appeal.

Another entry in Haycraft's history (page 74) would indicate that the father of the President constructed the

house in which he lived in Elizabethtown: "After this time (turn of the century) similar buildings were erected by George Berry, Jacob Bruner, Samuel Patton, Mrs. Jane Ewin, Mrs. Boling, Mrs. Llewellyn, Thomas Lincoln (father of the President), James Crutcher, Asa Coombs, Thomas Davis, Henry Ewin, James Love and David Vance."

Because Thomas Lincoln was a skilled cabinetmaker or joiner, it has been asserted by some that he would not have built the Hardin Thomas house, except the finished woodwork. Perhaps he did both. His carpenter's work ranged all the way from Geoghegan's mill to the beautiful mantelpiece (from the Hardin Thomas house) now located in the Lincoln Room of the Armor Center Officer's Open Mess at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The Hardin Thomas mantelpiece (probably made of pine) was secured in the fall of 1919 when Camp Knox was under construction. Major William Radcliffe, a construction quartermaster, lived with his family for a time in Elizabethtown in the home of Mrs. J. F. Albert, a great grand-daughter of Hardin Thomas. From Mrs. Albert, Major Radcliffe learned of the Hardin Thomas house and from Mr. B. F. Jenkins (at the time the owner) he secured for the United States Government the Thomas Lincoln mantelpiece, which he installed in a building then called "The Hostess House" at the army post. (See *Lincoln Lore* No. 1512)

Little public attention was paid to the log house after 1919 because it was in the hands of a private owner and was occupied by tenants. Long neglected, it fell into a bad state of repair. Sometime during its interesting history it had been covered with clapboard, but time and the elements allowed the massive logs to show through in several places where the modern covering had broken away. Today most of the siding has been ripped off, exposing the huge logs of the original house. Those logs which have disintegrated are to be replaced with sound ones taken from another cabin on the old Reed farm on the Valley Creek road.

A temporary roof has been built over the entire structure. In the laying of the new roof, it was discovered that part of the old wooden shingles had been secured with pegs. In addition, to the work mentioned, all of the laths on the interior, which are not a part of the original structure, have been removed.

This partial restoration has come about because the land on which the Hardin Thomas house stands has become a part of the Valley Creek watershed which provides the City of Elizabethtown with water storage, flood control and recreation facilities.

Meanwhile, considerable research has been underway. Efforts to trace the original deeds back to Hardin Thomas have been undertaken. Unfortunately, several complications have prevented this approach from being successful; however, it is possible that this may still be done after more research. Then there is the question as to which is the original structure of the double house, and of course the interior woodwork has been carefully studied (it is not of an exceptional quality except for the Fort Knox mantelpiece) because it is undoubtedly the handiwork of Thomas Lincoln.

The log building has also been carefully examined by experts who have worked on other restoration projects; namely, the Thomas brothers (no relation). Dr. Samuel W. Thomas is the resident curator of "Locust Grove" near Louisville, Kentucky, (the restored home of George Rogers Clark) and his brother James is presently working on the restoration of Shakertown. They disagree as to which of the buildings of the double house is the older.

Apparently, one building, likely the first, was originally one-story with a loft. The other building is a full two-story structure. The buildings were joined with siding, and it is believed there was a fireplace and chimney between the two as there is a hearth box on the lower level. The upstairs is partitioned and the log buildings are joined with a doorway between. Both buildings have stairways to the upper floors, one of which is in a much better condition than the other.

Many Elizabethtown people have been engaged in the restoration of this building (now known as the Lincoln Heritage House), and those taking a leading role have been Graham Egerton, Mrs. Wilbur Terry, Rufus Brandenburg, W. Burton Cowley, Mrs. T. D. Winstead, Mrs. Elizabeth Pate, Mrs. Henry Faurest, R. R. Thomas, and Mrs. M. S. Richerson. Virgil Cowley has served as the foreman of the project, working under the direction and with the advice of Dr. Sam Thomas, and assisted by Carl Keplinger.

In addition to their interest in the town's early history, the local people are further motivated by the beauty of the rustic home site. Today the ground slopes down from the Thomas house to Freeman's Lake, which has been created by the Valley Creek Watershed project. Occasionally, at the right season of the year, a flock of wild ducks can be seen adding charm to an ancient setting.

There is also an old family cemetery nearby to enhance the pioneer environment. Many of the original tombstones have crumbled away. About five stones bear legible inscriptions indicating burials of Thomases and Millers in the 1830s and 1840s. Perhaps extensive research will eventually be undertaken to identify these dead and to restore the old graveyard to its former condition. It is of particular interest to mention that Confederate Ben Hardin Helm, the brother-in-law of Abraham Lincoln, lies buried only a short distance from the Thomas house and the pioneer cemetery.

If the double sections of the house were constructed at different times, perhaps that would vindicate Haycraft's claim that Thomas Lincoln did the "carpenter's work" and at the same time allow descendants of Hardin Thomas to maintain that Jack Thomas was born in the cabin home in 1790.

One point on which Elizabethtown citizens are certain is that Thomas Lincoln did the interior "joiner's work" for Hardin Thomas.

What a fortunate and remarkable thing it is that a house which Thomas Lincoln helped to build is still standing, that it is in the process of restoration, that it is well above the flood area of Freeman's Lake, that it is located on public land, that it is near an important highway and that it is located in the Lincoln Country of Kentucky.

On the other hand, all is not well with this restoration project. The log house is now just a shell and all the interior woodwork, except for the two stairways, is gone. No additional money in the foreseeable future is available for further restoration. The fate of this historic house hangs in the balance. Will the people of Elizabethtown and Hardin County take the necessary steps to preserve it?



Photograph Courtesy of Mrs. M. S. Richerson

View of the Hardin Thomas house before any restoration work had begun.

History of the Tinsley Building

(Continued from the September issue)

October 17, 1849

The Post Office was removed from building to John William's new building on 4th Street nearly opposite the store of Hickox Brothers. Two postmasters served in the building. G. W. Spottswood served as postmaster from August 1841 to November 1844, and Jonathan R. Diller served from 1844 to 1849.

November 22, 1850

William Peacocke's grocery moved into old Post Office room in building.

June 7, 1850

S. M. Tinsley sold building to Philip C. Johnson.

April 28, 1851

E. D. Taylor purchased stock of S. M. Tinsley. This was the store Tinsley had in west half of building. Taylor was partner of Hurst & Taylor in corner room.

May 16, 1851

William Peacocke offered for rent the old post office room and the second and third story of the west half of the building which was lately occupied by S. M. Tinsley.

June 19, 1851

An advertisement in the *Register* indicated that Peacocke moved from the Tinsley Building.

August 9, 1851

Tinsley offered for rent the store room vacated by Peacocke.

February 24, 1852

Journal carried advertisement that new firm of Pheasant & Pritchard had rented room vacated by Peacocke.

October 1, 1852

Lincoln & Herndon office over McGraw & Buchanan store west side of square vacated by W. I. Ferguson, attorney. *Daily Register* reported that Ferguson left for permanent residence in Texas September 25, 1852. (*Register*, September 27, 1852) Location of Lincoln & Herndon law office between August 23, 1849 when still in the Tinsley Building and this location is not definitely known.

April 1, 1853

The *Register* in statements dated April 1 and 19, announced the formation of a new mercantile firm, Yates, Smith & Co. at the old stand of Pheasant & Pritchard in the Tinsley Building. C. M. Smith was Lincoln's brother-in-law.

April 7, 1853

American Express Co. with S. M. Tinsley as agent was located over Hurst & Taylor (corner store) but whether second or third floor is not known.

August 17, 1855

A. C. Dickens, U.S. Marshal, announced the renting of the second floor of Logan Building (northeast corner of the square) thus moving the federal courts out of the Tinsley Building.

May 22, 1854

Philip A. Johnson *et al* sold building to James A. Barrett.

May 28, 1856

Barrett sold east half of building to Charles W. Matheny. The complete text of the deed recorded that Yates & Smith occupied the building next door west and back of building which had been the Post Office until October, 1849.

February, 1858

Hurst & Matheny formed partnership. Matheny owned building where Hurst had store for many years. The firm became Matheny & Company.

1866

J. H. Matheny & Whithurst, lawyers, had office in building. Structure was called Matheny Building.

1868

John Bressmer took over store of Matheny & Co.

1868-1875

Matheny & McGuire, lawyers, had office in building.

1871

C. M. Smith razed the west half of the Tinsley Building and also the next two store buildings (Butler Brothers) and built "Smith's Block." The room nearest the corner was occupied by Roberts & Co. The next area by T. S. Little and the third room by C. M. Smith & Co. The original old post office room in the Tinsley building which fronted on Sixth Street was connected in the back of Smith's new store. (See *Journal* January 1, 1873, February 2, 1873 and January 1, 1875)

November 13, 1872

C. M. Smith & Co. moved into their new building.

1882

Frank Burnett, lawyer, had office in building.

1882-1914

The Farmers National Bank occupied first floor. The bank was organized in the office of Isaac Keys on May 2, 1882 (See *Journal*, May 3, 1882)

1884 Directory

Offices over the Farmers National Bank were rented to W. H. Colley, R. M. S. Crook, C. P. Kane (Rooms 3 & 4) and S. D. Scholes.

1882-1886

Bluford Wilson & Frank H. Jones, attorneys, had office in building.

1894

R. H. McAnulty, lawyer, had office in building.

1914

After the Farmers National Bank moved out of the building in 1914, its space was rented for mercantile businesses. For many years and until restoration there was a shoe store. The second floor space seems to have always been rented for law offices. However, only one law office was left when restoration started; the rest were vacant. The third floor was occupied for the last 72 years by Murray S. Hanes and his father, S. J. Hanes, who were architects.

February 16, 1967

The building was purchased and restored by Mr. and Mrs. James E. Myers, Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Axtoby and Mrs. H. B. Bartholf.

1968

The restored Tinsley Building was opened in the fall to the public. There was no formal opening. The only literature available concerning the restored structure refers to it as The Lincoln-Herndon Building.

CORRECTION

The statement is made in the September, 1969 issue on page 2, first column, line three, that "Herndon had been a law student in the Logan & Herndon office." This law firm should have been Logan & Lincoln.

Unique Honor

Abraham Lincoln was "justifiably lauded at a Democratic political function (February 12, 1968) in Spokane . . . and then awarded an honorary membership in the Democratic party."

The Union ladies of the interior of Kentucky are having Bell and Everett printed on their bonnet strings. *Per contra* the republican ladies West are having pictures of Lincoln on their bonnet strings, as an offset to the Kentucky ladies.

Boston Advertiser (August 17, 1860)