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1809—The Lincoln Centenary—1909

"Little Farm That Raised a Man"

Memorial Museum Marks the Kentucky Birthplace of the Martyr President—The Old Log Cabin Restored

By James A. Edgerton

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THE little rocky farm that Thomas Lincoln was too poor to pay for has now become the property of the lovers of his son. When the new arrival reached the Lincoln cabin on Feb. 12, 1809, the last dream that could have entered the mind of the father was one comprehending the glory that had thus come to these barren acres. What shall the pawn say when the Master moves it, or what can it know of the result of the move? Most parents think their sons may become president, except those whose sons actually do become president. They are frequently so poor they think little about it. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and a soul that comes into the world is blown by the wind of the spirit to what heights or depths it may please him who sends the wind. As for the rest of us, we cannot foresee one single human destiny, and it is just as well that we cannot. When we plant an acorn we know an oak will grow, and when we sow corn or wheat we can foretell what the crop will be. But when a man-child enters the world we know naught of the harvest, whether it is to be of shame or of glory. There are no signs to tell of the coming of genius. The deity that provides at the birth of great souls may miss all the homes of wealth and culture to light at a stable or a cabin in the wilderness. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and none can tell where the spirit will carry the germs of God's purposes.

Lincoln was born on the very outer rim of civilization, yet the spot is now near the center of population of the United States. That shows how far each century goes ahead to pitch its tents; 1809 stopped with Kentucky, and 1909 has moved on to Manila; 2009 may go around the world and come back to Kentucky again. Who knows?

There is little to that Kentucky farm except the fact that Lincoln was born there. It is not much for crops or scenery. There is a rock spring on it and a creek. The muse of history has very little eye either for fertile soil or landscape effects. Battles are usually fought among most uninviting surroundings, and the immortals are liable to be born almost anywhere except where we would expect them to be born. If we were choosing a spot for one of the great ones to come into the world we would seek all the modern conveniences and a combination of seashore and mountain to furnish inspiration. That merely proves that we know how to raise crops and blooded stock, but we do not know how to raise great men. This is a branch of gardening that God does not leave to bunglers. Hothouse methods may be all right for forcing plants, but they are a failure for forcing genius.

The preservation of this shrine to the memory of Lincoln was made possible by the generosity of Robert J. Collier of Collier's Weekly. There were several enterprising gentlemen who desired possession of the farm for advertising purposes, and had it not been for Mr. Collier one of them probably would have succeeded in his shameless design. Among the bidders was a liquor firm that had already prepared posters announcing "Lincoln Birthplace Whisky." The agents of this firm imbibed too freely of their own wares, which permitted Mr. Collier's representative to steal a march on them and bid in the place before they arrived on the scene, for it is a sad and humiliating fact that the farm on which our greatest president was born was allowed to be sold for taxes. This, coupled with the further reflection that but for the interest and patriotism shown by one man this priceless shrine would have been used for selfish and base purposes, should make the American people feel quite proud. When it was too late there would doubtless have been raised a great cry of indignation which would have increased in pitch as the centenary of Mr. Lincoln's birth approached. We are saved from this humiliation by the thoughtfulness of one man—rather of two, for Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones had advocated buying the shrine before Mr. Collier took the matter up. Two men out of over 80,000,000! It is so God finds his agents, even though men are blind.

The birthplace farm is not the only Lincoln shrine saved from a degrading use. The old log building at New Salem in which Lincoln lived and had his store, together with the ground on which the historic village stood, was purchased by Mr. William Randolph Hearst and made a present to the Old Salem Chautauqua, the second largest Chautauqua in America. A whisky firm was also bidding for this to advertise some of its wares. It would seem that the whisky men appreciate the great liberator, whatever may be said for the rest of us.

It is a romantic fact that the only building left of the New Salem in which Mr. Lincoln spent his young manhood is that which he himself occupied. All the rest of the town has disappeared like a dream village, as though with his departure it had performed its function and gone back to the elements, leaving only his cabin as a memento.

At the time Mr. Collier bought "the little farm that raised a man" the historic rock spring from which it took its name had degenerated into a hog wallow, while the cabin in which Lincoln was born had been taken north for show purposes and was housed in a Long Island basement. This was rescued from the blight of commercialism, like the farm, and sent back from its wanderings to rest in honor in its own place. The journey to Kentucky was one of triumph. The little one room log cabin was escorted to its destination in greater state than most kings and conquerors. The railroads carried it free; the Wanamaker store in New York decorated the car; the governor of Kentucky detailed an officer and four militiamen to escort the old logs through with safety; Mayor Weaver of Philadelphia received it with honor; Baltimore, through which Lincoln had to pass in secret to keep from being assassinated, greeted the cabin that gave him birth with speeches of welcome; at Altoona the school children decked the car with flowers; at Pittsburg the Grand Army took it in charge; at Columbus the mayor and superintendent of schools made stirring addresses; at Indianapolis appropriate exercises were held, and at Louisville former Vice President Stevenson spoke for the state of Illinois and Henry Watterson for the state of Kentucky. One of the striking utterances of Colonel Watterson, who was introduced as "the greatest living student of the life of Lincoln," is worthy of reproduction. Of Lincoln the orator said:

He was inspired of God, for nowhere else could he have acquired that wisdom and virtue. Where did Shakespeare get his genius, Mozart his music? Who wrote the lyric of the Scotch peasant? As God raised up and inspired them, so did he Lincoln. When, a thousand years hence, the truth of history shall have left no room to doubt, no drama will be followed with deeper feeling than that which tells the story of his life and death. God laid his hands upon these rough hewn logs, and they brought forth a nation's hero.

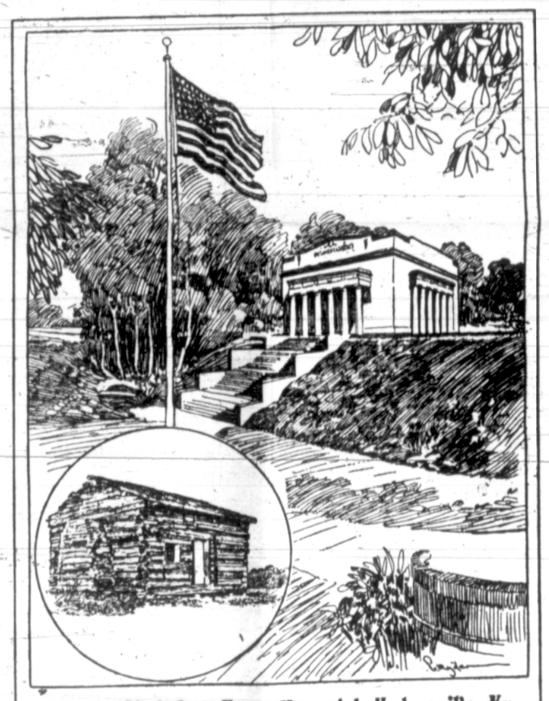
Thus the plain Kentucky cabin, the humblest birthplace of a great soul since the manger of Nazareth, returned to its home to grace the centennial of that advent which had come to earth through its door. Both the farm and the house were turned over by Mr. Collier to an association headed by Joseph W. Folk of Missouri and having on its board of trustees such representative men and women as Henry Watterson, Cardinal Gibbons, William H. Taft, Ida M. Tarbell, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Charles A. Towne, Mark Twain and Albert Shaw. The fund for the work was made a common people's offering, and tens of thousands of these became members and gave each his mite to honor the man who in his origin, words and constant attitude had so signally honored them.

On the farm the little cabin has been placed at the exact spot where it before stood and has been surrounded by a strong and simple edifice, in which it forms the sole exhibit. This building, with its Greek columns, stands upon a hill and is approached by a broad sweep of steps leading from a plaza, from which also descends the path to the old spring. The remainder of the farm has been left as before, even to a gnarled apple tree said to be the last of Tom Lincoln's orchard.

How fortunate it would be if with this revival of interest in the spot that gave Abraham Lincoln birth we could have a like revival of interest in his spirit, his ideals and his aims! He was not alone a man for one crisis, but for all. His fidelity to the public good, his refusal to permit private considerations to stand in the way of duty and principle, his tender solicitude for the poor and humble and his placing of man above wealth, of humanity above things and of popular rights above institutions, his faith in the masses, his devotion to the doctrine of equality and of the rule of the majority—all of these things are needed now and ever in the republic. What a splendid opportunity this centenary presents to study Lincoln's spirit, the innermost of the man that gives him his hold on the people of his age and all ages!

While associations are making beautiful memorials of the material spots that knew him and are arranging programs to act as the machinery of praise, the form and shell that carry the substance and life, why should not the millions of men and women who love Lincoln devote their leisure to a study of his life and utterances and an attempt to define the genius that animated them? Then why not crown all by a resolve to give to the affairs of the nation the same unselfish devotion, the same high regard for truth, the same love of the rights of man, the same spirit of righteousness, the same hatred of tyranny, fraud and sham and the same faith in God and the common people that he gave in such full measure, even to the sacrifice of life itself?

If this centenary, this dedication of the birthplace farm, this worldwide ceremony in his praise, could beget a spirit like that it would be of untold benefit to the nation and to the race. Could this people once truly comprehend Lincoln and follow the lines he marked out, they would make of this such a republic as has never been known in the files of time. We have never had a democracy as yet. We have never incarnated in a government the principles of the Golden Rule and the sermon on the mount.



Lincoln Birthplace Farm Memorial, Hodgenville, Ky.

Lincoln bodied forth both of them. He was the genius of these divine utterances made flesh. Herein was his strength. This it was which made his utterances shine with the light of love, tempered his judgment with mercy, and gave him such sweet humility in wielding his unequaled power. Democracy, the equality of man, have their origin in the spiritual. Men are not equal outwardly, but only in their fundamentals and in the innermost. God and nature treat all alike. Here is the model for human government, and it was on this model that Abraham Lincoln worked. His code of principles consisted in the doctrines of the Nazarene crystallized into politics. We need both them and him. We can have him only by looking through his words and acts to the soul beneath. To find that and give it forth universally to humanity would be a centenary worth while, would be of more help than all the birthplace farms, all the formal programs, all the panoply and trappings and state. Not that we underrate these outward things. They are necessary, but they are not precious in themselves, only for what they represent. It is the mighty, the majestic and the merciful spirit of Lincoln that gives them life. It is that which we honor and that which we need. Show it to mankind, body it forth in all its whiteness and beauty, and we shall lend a glory to the outward show which will make it an event to be remembered forever. Without this it will be hollow and meaningless. It is for us to meet the crises of our day with the same spirit in which Lincoln met the crisis of his day. Otherwise we are not worthy of him; otherwise all our praise becomes but so much lip service that insult rather than honors him.

We have our Lincoln farms and tombs, our Lincoln homes and shrines, our Lincoln statues and ceremonies. Now let us have the Lincoln spirit, and we can build a nation that will be a memorial for him indeed.

ON THE TRACKLESS PRAIRIE AND A RACE FOR LIFE BY BUFFALO BILL

FROM "TRUE TALES OF THE PLAINS"

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IN the fall of 1865 General Sherman and the Indian commissioners who were to make a treaty with the Arapahoes and Comanches in southwestern Kansas came to Fort Zarrah, on the Arkansas river. From there they were to go to what was known as Council Springs, a distance of sixty-five miles from Zarrah. Between Zarrah and the Springs is a flat, level country, but no water is to be had. Consequently there was no water carried save for drinking purposes, which was carried in canteens in the ambulances, for the general's orders were that he would leave Fort Zarrah at 2 a. m. so as to get a good start over this dry country.

Our chief of scouts and guide at that time was Dick Curtis. The outfit was composed of three ambulances, with saddle horses for the general and Indian commissioners, and when the general and commissioners were riding in the ambulances their saddle horses were led by orderlies. The general had three or four staff officers, a company of cavalry as an escort and about thirty scouts and messengers well mounted. These scouts' and messengers' duty was that whenever the general wished to send any quick dispatches back to Fort Riley, at that time the nearest telegraph point, these men were to carry them. I was at the time a young scout employed for this purpose.

It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after leaving the fort, that a young officer, one of the general's aids, was riding along talking to me and asking me about when I thought we were going to get to Council Springs, where the Indians were. I told him that if we kept on in the direction we were going we would never get there.

He asked, "Why not?" I replied that we were not going in the direction of the Springs; that we were bearing too far to the west.

He said: "Why don't you tell the general this? He is up there in the ambulance." I told him (the officer) that I was not guiding General Sherman; that Mr. Curtis was the guide and that I had no right to interfere with him whatever, nor did I intend to do so. This young officer (I have forgotten his name) tumbled to the situation, and, galloping ahead, he rode alongside the ambulance and told the general what I had said and explained to him my reasons for not mentioning the situation. The general appreciated it at once and called a halt, climbed out of the ambulance, sent for Mr Curtis to come back to him, and also for the scouts to come up, of whom I was one. He laid out a large map on the ground, and when we all got near him he said to Mr. Curtis:

"I wish you would show me on this map just where we are."

Mr. Curtis told him, which was perfectly true, that the maps were all so incorrect that it was impossible to go by them.

The general remarked: "Well, then, Mr. Curtis, how far are we from the Springs? From the distance we have traveled since leaving Zarrah at 2 o'clock this morning we should be very near them."

Mr. Curtis replied: "General, this is a very level country, as you can see. There are no landmarks, and there are so many thousands of buffaloes all over the prairie that it is pretty hard to tell just where we are and how far we are from the Springs. Furthermore, I have not been over to the Springs for several years, and when I last went there I was not acting as guide. Consequently I feel that I am rather lost myself."

The general, looking at the other scouts, said, "Do any of you know where the Springs are?" The young officer had pointed me out to the general, and he was looking straight at me when he asked the question.

I said, "Yes, general; I know where the Springs are."

"How far are we from them?" asked the general. I told him about eighteen miles.

He asked in what direction, and I answered, saying they were due south from us now and we were headed dead west. Dick Curtis spoke up and said, "Billy, when were you ever out to the Springs?"

I told him I had been there on two or three different occasions with Charlie Rath, the Indian trader, and had killed many buffaloes all over this country. The general called for his horse, mounted it and said: "Young man, you come and show me the Springs. I will ride with you. Mr. Curtis, come along. No disrespect to you, sir. I appreciate how hard it is for one to find his way in a country where there are no landmarks, level as the sea and covered with buffaloes."

I headed due south, the general riding by my side, and during this ride the general asked me many questions—how I came to know this country so well, etc. I told him that my father had been killed in the border ruffian war of bleeding Kansas and that since his death I had grown up on the plains with the freighters, trappers, buffalo hunters, Indian traders and others and I was quite familiar with all the country lying between the Missouri river and the Rocky mountains. We rode on in this way until, approaching a little rise in the prairie, I said, "General, when you get to that small ridge up there you will look down into a low depression of the prairie and see Council Springs and the Indians." The Springs rise in this vast plain, and they run for only about four or five miles, when it becomes a small stream of water sinking into the sand. When we gained this ridge, there before the general's eyes were hundreds and hundreds of horses and a large Indian village.

I said: "There you are, general. There are your Indians, camped on the Springs." He patted me on the back in a fatherly way and said, "My boy, I am going to know you better."

"General Sherman, riding by my side, asked me many questions."

The general and the peace commissioners counseled here for three days, and in the evening of the third day an orderly came to me and told me the general wished me to report to him at his tent. The general kindly invited me in and said: "Billy, I want to go from here now to Fort Kearny, on the Platte river, in Nebraska. How far is it?" I told him the way that he would have to go to have good camping places and that it would be about 300 miles. He asked, "Can you guide me there?" I told him I could, and he said: "All right. We will start tomorrow for Fort Zarrah and from there to Fort Riley, and from Fort Riley I want you to guide me to Fort Kearny." Which I did, and on arriving at Fort Kearny the general complimented me and said: "From here I am going to Fort Leavenworth. I wish you to guide me there." I told him that would be easy, for there was a big wagon road from Kearny to Fort Leavenworth. He said: "That is all right. It will make it easier for you. You have guided me safely for over 300 miles where there were no wagon roads, and I am not afraid to trust myself with you on a big wagon road." On arriving at Leavenworth I parted with the general, and he said General Sheridan was coming out to take command in a short time and that he would tell him of me. This was the last time I saw the dear old general for several years. He was one of the loveliest men I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

* * * * * * * *

One day in the spring of 1868 I mounted Brigham and started for Smoky Hill river. After galloping about twenty miles I reached the top of a small hill overlooking the valley of that beautiful stream. As I was gazing down on the landscape I suddenly saw a band of about thirty Indians nearly half a mile distant. I knew by the way they jumped on their horses that they had seen me as soon as I came in sight.

The only chance I had for my life was to make a run for it, and I immediately wheeled and started back toward the railroad. Brigham seemed to understand what was up, and he struck out as if he comprehended that it was to be a run for life. He crossed a ravine in a few jumps, and on reaching a bridge beyond I drew rein, looked back and saw the Indians coming for me at full speed and evidently well mounted. I would have had little or no fear of being overtaken if Brigham had been fresh. But as he was not I felt uncertain as to how he would stand a long chase.

My pursuers seemed to be gaining on me a little, and I let Brigham shoot ahead again. When we had run about three miles farther some eight or nine of the Indians were not over 200 yards behind, and five or six of these seemed to be shortening the gap at every jump. Brigham now exerted himself more than ever, and for the next three or four miles he got right down to business and did some of the prettiest running I ever saw. But the Indians were about as well mounted as I was, and one of their horses in particular, a spotted animal, was gaining on me all the time. Nearly all the other horses were strung out behind for a distance of two miles, but still chasing after me.

The Indian who was riding the spotted horse was armed with a rifle and would occasionally send a bullet whistling along, sometimes striking the ground ahead of me. I saw that this fellow must be checked or a stray bullet from his gun might hit me or my horse, so, suddenly stopping Brigham and quickly wheeling him around, I raised old "Lucretia" to my shoulder, took deliberate aim at the Indian and his horse, hoping to hit one or the other, and fired. He was not over eighty yards from me at this time, and at the crack of my rifle down went his horse. Not waiting to see if he recovered, I turned Brigham, and in a moment we were again fairly flying toward our destination. We had urgent business about that time and were in a hurry to get there.

The other Indians had gained on us while I was engaged in shooting at their leader, and they sent several shots whizzing past me, but fortunately none of them hit the intended mark. To return their compliment I occasionally wheeled myself in the saddle and fired back at them, and one of my shots broke the leg of one of their horses, which left its rider hors(e) de combat, as the French would say.

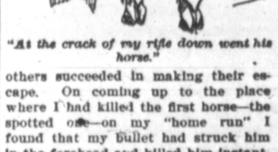
Only seven or eight Indians now remained in dangerous proximity to me, and as their horses were beginning to lag somewhat I checked my faithful old steed a little to allow him an opportunity to draw an extra breath or two. I had determined, if it should come to the worst, to drop into a buffalo wallow, where I could stand the Indians off for awhile, but I was not compelled to do this, as Brigham carried me through most nobly.

The chase was kept up until we came within three miles of the end of the railroad track, where two companies of soldiers were stationed for the purpose of protecting the workmen from the Indians. One of the outposts saw the Indians chasing me across the prairie and gave the alarm. In a few minutes I saw, greatly to my delight, men coming on foot, and cavalrymen, too, galloping to our rescue as soon as they could mount their horses. When the Indians saw this they turned and ran in the direction from which they had come. In a very few minutes I was met by some of the infantrymen and trackmen, and, jumping to the ground and pulling the blanket and saddle off Brigham, I told them what he had done for me. They at once took him in charge, led him around and rubbed him down so vigorously that I thought they would rub him to death.

Captain Nolan of the Tenth cavalry now came up with forty of his men, and upon learning what had happened he determined to pursue the Indians. He kindly offered me one of his cavalry horses, and after putting my own saddle and bridle on the animal we started out after the flying Indians, who only a few minutes before had been making it so uncomfortably lively for me. Our horses were all fresh and of excellent stock, and we soon began shortening the distance between ourselves and the redskins. Before they had gone five miles we overtook and killed eight of their number. The others succeeded in making their escape. On coming up to the place where I had killed the first horse—the spotted one—on my "home run" I found that my bullet had struck him in the forehead and killed him instantly. He was a noble animal and ought to have been engaged in better business.

"At the crack of my rifle down went his horse."

When we got back to camp I found old Brigham grazing quietly and contentedly on the grass. He looked up at me as if to ask if we had got away with any of those fellows who had chased us. I believe he read the answer in my eyes.



The Meekest Woman.

Sunday School Teacher—William, can you tell me who was the meekest man? William—Yes, ma'am; Moses. Sunday School Teacher—That's right. Now, Tommy, can you tell me the name of the meekest woman? Tommy—No, ma'am; there never was no meekest woman.—Chicago News.