

Formal Education and Playmate

In a short autobiographical sketch prepared for John L. Scripps, Lincoln made the following statement concerning his early schooling: "Before leaving Kentucky, he and his sister were sent for short periods, to A.B.C. schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney, and the second by Caleb Hazel."

Zachariah Riney was born in 1762 in St. Mary's County, Maryland, came to Kentucky in 1795, and was an early Catholic school teacher at the Rolling Fork Settlement. He conducted a subscription school about two miles north of Lincoln's Knob Creek home. Abraham Lincoln was just six years old when he accompanied his sister, Sarah, to the log school house situated near the present site of Athertonville, Kentucky, at the fork of the Cumberland and Pottinger's Creek Roads. This was a blab school. Numbers from 1 to 10, the alphabet A to Z, and other lessons were recited aloud to show they were busy studying. Riney later moved to northern Hardin County, and the town of Rineyville is named in his honor.



Lincoln's First School, 1910
Taken shortly before it was dismantled, this is the only known real photo postcard of the school house. On May 15, 1910, the sender wrote, "School house where Lincoln rec'd part of his education when a boy-Athertonville, Ky."
Photo Courtesy Carl Howell, Hodgenville, Kentucky

The next teacher who taught in this schoolhouse was **Caleb Hazel**. He lived about three hundred feet from the Lincolns' Knob Creek home. This next door neighbor of the Lincolns also attended the Little Mount Church. Hazel was known to have fine penmanship.

OF THE FIVE SCHOOL TEACHERS THAT ABRAHAM LINCOLN HAD DURING HIS BRIEF TENURE OF FORMAL EDUCATION, FOUR ONCE LIVED IN HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY.

Indiana Years

The first school Abe attended in 1819-20 in Indiana was one and one-half miles south of his cabin. The teacher was **Andrew Crawford** and parents paid two dollars for each child they had enrolled in this subscription school. It was here, at age eleven, that Lincoln first read Weem's *Life on Washington* a book that discussed politics, presidents and heroes. This book would have a profound effect on Lincoln in his later years.

INDIANA MENTORS FROM HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Crawford moved from Spencer County, Indiana, and in the 1821-22 school term, Lincoln's second teacher was **James Swaney**, (Sweeney) son of Michael Swaney who had moved to Indiana from Hardin County, Kentucky, just before the Lincolns. Swaney's school house, larger and better constructed than the Crawford school, was four and a half miles southwest of the Lincoln farm. The distance may have kept Abe from attending regularly; however, Swaney, nevertheless, should be given credit for introducing Lincoln to some new books, including Murray's *English Reader*, which was supposed to be the best text of its day. Lincoln's stepmother, Sally Bush Johnston Lincoln, owned a copy of this book, and he spent many hours laboring over exercises in the use of English.

Two years after Lincoln's brief attendance at the Swaney school, he enrolled in his third and last school in Indiana. **Azel W. Dorsey**, born in Kentucky in 1774 and legal guardian of James Swaney, had engaged in farming a tract near the farm of Thomas Lincoln in Hardin County, Kentucky. Dorsey had removed to Indiana a few years before the Lincolns. He served in several political offices as well as a teacher before instructing Lincoln during the 1824-25 term. His school was located a little over a mile southwest of the Lincoln farm. Ward Lamon in his volume on Lincoln describes the school as follows: "It was built of unhewn logs, with windows of greased paper, the roof was just high enough for a student to stand erect."

Memorable School Days Friend

Austin Gollaher, the son of Thomas Gollaher who lived about two miles from the Lincolns, often played with Abraham Lincoln. Gollaher lived well into his 90's and told how he once saved the seven-year-old Lincoln's life in 1816.

Lincoln while president said,
"I would rather see (him) than any man living."

Photo of Austin Gollaher taken in front of the Sinking Spring.
Photo Courtesy Carl Howell, Hodgenville, Kentucky



Gollaher's Story:

"I once saved Lincoln's life. We had been going to school together one year; but the next year we had no school, because there were so few scholars to attend, there being only about 20 in the school the year before. Consequently Abe and I had not much to do; but as we did not go to school and our mothers were strict with us, we did not get to see each other very often. One Sunday morning my mother waked me up early, saying she was going to see Mrs. Lincoln, and that I could go along. Glad of the chance, I was soon dressed and ready to go. After my mother and I got there Abe and I played all through the day. While we were wandering up and down the little stream called Knob Creek Abe said: 'Right up there' - pointing to the east - 'we saw a covey of partridges yesterday. Let's go over and get some of them.' The stream was swollen and was too wide for us to jump across. Finally, we saw a narrow foot-log, and we concluded to try it. It was narrow, but Abe said, 'Let's cross it.' I went first and reached the other side all right. Abe went about half-way across, when he got scared and began trembling. I hollered to him, 'Don't look down nor up nor sideways, but look right at me and hold on tight!' But he fell off into the creek, and, as the water was about seven or eight feet deep, and I could not swim, and neither could Abe, I knew it would do no good for me to go in after him. So I got a stick - a long water sprout - and held it out to him. He came up, grabbed with both hands, and I put the stick into his hands. He clung to it, and I pulled him out on the bank, almost dead. I got him by the arms and shook him well, and then rolled him on the ground, when the water poured out of his mouth. He was all right very soon. We promised each other that we would never tell anybody about it, and never did for years. I never told any one of it until after Lincoln was killed."

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DAUGHTER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FIRST TEACHER

In the fall of 1815 Abraham Lincoln attended school for a brief period. The school was on the location of the present town of Athertonville, Kentucky, (about 2 miles northeast of the Lincolns' Knob Creek farm). The teacher was Zachariah Riney, Susan Riney Yeager, Zachariah Riney's daughter, was interviewed by the *Elizabethtown* (Kentucky) News in 1897. The following is an excerpt of that interview:
Yes I remember Abe Lincoln well as a little bit of a fellow, she said It was what now is LaRue County, but was then a part of Hardin County. Abe and I went to the same school. My father, Zachariah Riney, was the teacher.
I can see the old school house now, the old lady continues with a far-away look in her eyes. It was built of rough logs, as all school houses were in those days and mostly all of the dwelling houses, daubed with mud. The school house had no windows, but one log removed the length of the building served for light and ventilation. The floor was a dirt one, leveled and beaten solid. The benches consisted of logs split in the middle and placed alongside the walls. There was just one bench made of plank supported by stumps. This the privilege of sitting upon it.
The old lady laughed as her memory called her back eighty long years and evidently the senses of her childhood were vividly presented to her mind. She continued...
But you want to know about little Abe. He was then barely seven years old and I was ten. I remember his big sister bringing him to school the first day. Oh, she was fond of him, she also attended school there; and all day long, whether at lessons or at play, her careful eye was constantly watching him. She was a regular little mother to him. I have seen her on rainy days, or when the roads were muddy, carrying him in her arms to and from the school house. At playtime she would always insist that he play with her and the girls...telling him to keep away from the big boys, as they were likely to hurt him in their rough play. In those days quit a number of the scholars were full grown men.
A school session lasted the summer months, because it was too cold to go to school in the winter. It therefore took a long time to acquire such an education as the county afforded. But little Abe would not consent to be held to his sister's apron strings. He had a will of his own and, strangely enough he did seek the society of boys his own age.
The one thing I remember most about him was his unfeeling good humor. I never remember seeing him cry during the two years he attending that school.
He wore home spun clothes as did all the children, and went barefooted. He never received a whipping and in our time the child was not spoiled by sparing the rod, and to go without a whipping a whole session was proof that he was an extra good boy.
Of course, laughed Mrs. Yeager, I did not know then that the little chap we all loved so well would someday be the president or I would have taken notes of his sayings and doings. Indeed, it is a fact that I never knew until after his death that President Lincoln was the same identical little Abe. In those days the Lincoln family pronounced their name, Linkhorn.
One thing I remember very distinctly is seeing him bending down saplings and riding them horses. That was his favorite amusement at playtime.



Funded in part by the Kentucky Humanities Council Inc. in association with the Kentucky Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

LINCOLN - FAMILY and FRIENDS