



**Austin Gollaher
Lincoln's Childhood
Companion
(1805-1898)**

“Where is my old friend and playmate Austin Gollaher [?] . . . I would rather see Gollaher than any man living.” Abraham Lincoln

Of Lincoln's childhood companions Austin Gollaher is best known as the man who

claimed to have saved his life. Gollaher was born in 1805, died in 1898, and is buried in the cemetery of the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church near White City in Larue County. A number of sources, including accounts of interviews and speeches he gave over the years, have survived. Did he, in fact, rescue the young Abraham Lincoln from the flood waters of Knob Creek?

President Lincoln is supposed to have expressed his desire to see Gollaher to Dr. Jesse Rodman of Hodgenville. Gollaher himself is supposed to have referred to this meeting, adding that Lincoln had offered to pay his way to Washington, D.C., but that he did not go because of his fear of trains! At various times over the years, Gollaher also claimed to have saved Lincoln's life. Indeed, in one source he claims to have done so several times.

So what did happen? Clearly we cannot know for sure. Lincoln never mentions being rescued by Gollaher, who is himself the only source for this claim. Most scholars are skeptical, noting that Gollaher's memory seems to have become more precise the older he grew.

It is, however, certainly believable that President Lincoln would, as Dr. Rodman recalled, wish to reminisce in the nostalgic presence of a childhood friend. And as for the rescue, who can say for sure? But one thing is clear. If the young Austin Gollaher did indeed save the life of the younger Abraham Lincoln, if only once, then we are all immensely in his debt. And even if he did not, he clearly occupied a unique place in Lincoln's fond memories of his Kentucky childhood.

Postcard of Austin Gollaher's cabin assembled at Knob Creek, postmarked June 13, 1942
Private collection

