

WILLIAM LINCOLN

GRAVESTONE RECALLS FIRST DEATH IN PIONEER RANKS

FIRST TREMPEALEAU GRAVE IS VISIBLE ON HIGHWAY 53

(ARTICLE WITH THE BY-LINE “WHITEHALL, FEB. 16”—NO DATE BUT POSSIBLY FROM THE 1920'S)

Of the thousands of persons who annually drive across Hunter's Bridge on Highway 53 south of Galesville, few know the history of a solitary tombstone on a little knoll about one half mile from the bridge site. The stone is a marker for the grave of William Lincoln, buried in 1853 in the first funeral service of which there is a record in Trempealeau County. There were only a few destitute settlers on either side of the Black River in the vicinity of the bridge in 1853 and one or two log huts on Decora Prairie. There were not a dozen houses between the Black and La Crosse Rivers.

William Lincoln lived in a log hut with a family by the surname of Snow. Young Lincoln became ill and died without medical aid as the nearest doctors were in La Crosse and the family, without funds, could not summon a doctor from that distance.

When the boy died, Snow went to the cabin of Stark Butman who lived in a log shanty on a 400 acre claim, a part of the present Sacia farm. Snow, told of the death of the boy and of his being without funds and said he had no burying place or coffin. Butman knew of a carpenter living on a claim across the river and fording the river in a skiff Butman aided the carpenter in making a coffin of rough lumber. When it was completed Butman carried it on his back to the edge of the river and transported it across the river in a skiff.

Young Lincoln's body was laid out in the rough coffin and placed in the wagon. The funeral procession, consisting of Mr and Mrs Snow and their two daughters and a son and Mr Butman followed the body on foot to the plot of ground where Mr Snow had dug a grave. As the coffin was lowered Mr Snow's daughter sang a hymn and the service was over. Later Snow's wife was buried at the site and another pioneer woman a few years later.

#Since there was no date attached to this article it is unknown if it refers to the first Hunter' Bridge—built in 1893 up river from the site of the present bridge—or the second bridge built in the late 1920's.