

# Abraham Lincoln Birthplace

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace  
National Historical Park  
Hodgenville, Kentucky



## The First Lincoln Memorial



The first memorial building, built to honor Abraham Lincoln, was dedicated in 1911 at the place of his birth, here, in Hodgenville, Kentucky. The cornerstone of the memorial was laid two years earlier on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mr. Lincoln's birth, February 12, 1909. Owners of the property, the Lincoln Farm Association, received donations of 25¢ to \$25 from common Americans who wished to honor the most common of men, Abraham Lincoln. Inside the Memorial Building is housed the symbolic cabin located near the site where our 16<sup>th</sup> president was born.

### The Lincoln Farm Association



*Lincoln Farm Association membership certificate*

The centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth in 1909 prompted people throughout Kentucky and the country to begin planning local and national celebrations. The United States Postal Service planned a release of 100 million 2 cent stamps with Lincoln's picture on them. The United States Mint was designing a new penny that was to be the first U.S. coin to have a presidential likeness on it and a newly formed, nonprofit group, the Lincoln Farm Association, decided to create a memorial on Sinking Spring Farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky, where Lincoln was born. Writers Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and Ida Mae Tarbell; Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor; presidential candidates William H. Taft and William J. Bryan as well as local Kentucky notable Col. Henry Watterson of Louisville were members of the Lincoln Farm Association.

The group purchased 110 acres of the original farm where the 16<sup>th</sup> president was born and the logs identified by some local residents as coming from the original Lincoln birth cabin. The association desired to construct a national memorial to Abraham Lincoln at a time when public interest was growing in preserving and protecting important aspects of cultural and environmental heritage. Through a fund-raising effort, the Lincoln Farm Association received donations totaling more than \$350,000. Prominent architect John Russell Pope (future architect of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C.) was hired to design a memorial building to enshrine the Lincoln birth cabin. Samuel Clemens expressed the feelings of the group in a 1907 editorial for the New York Times "his birthplace [was] worth saving."

### The Memorial Building

The construction of the pink granite and marble building catapulted small Hodgenville, Kentucky, into the national limelight. The Lincoln Farm Association took donations large and small. A funding issue delayed construction of the building and only the foundation and cornerstone were ready for the centennial celebration of Lincoln's birth on February 12, 1909. On that day, President Theodore Roosevelt spoke of "this rail splitter...whose rise was by weary and painful labor, lived to lead his people through the burning flames of a struggle from which the nation emerged purified as by fire, born anew to a loftier life." The construction continued for 2 more years and Architect John Russell Pope incorporated the

architectural neoclassical style which earned him the label "Last of the Romans." He included symbolism into the building as exhibited in the 16 rosettes on the ceiling to represent Lincoln's place as the 16<sup>th</sup> president and 56 steps leading up to the building, one for each year of Lincoln's life. The Memorial Building at Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park was constructed 11 years before the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. Once the building was finished, the symbolic birth cabin was reconstructed inside the Memorial Building. The building was dedicated by President William H. Taft on November 9, 1911, before an audience of 3,000 people.

