

# 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.

## Presidential Attention



Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park continued to receive national attention. On February 12, 1909, Theodore Roosevelt came for the laying of the cornerstone ceremony. Upon completion of the Memorial Building, President William Howard Taft gave the dedication speech on November 9, 1911. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson, on behalf of the American people, arrived to receive the cabin, Memorial Building and land as a gift from the Lincoln Farm Association. In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the park to celebrate Flag Day. On April 23, 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower was the fifth president to visit Lincoln's birthplace. Over 8,000 people attended the occasion. President Eisenhower spoke of how Lincoln seemed to "...represent all that is best in America, in terms of its opportunity and the readiness of Americans always to raise up and exalt those people who live by truth, whose lives are examples of integrity and dedication to our country."



Pictured top to bottom:  
Woodrow Wilson,  
Franklin Roosevelt and  
Dwight Eisenhower

## The Symbolic Cabin



Sketch drawn by Lloyd Ostendorf

Although the National Park Service questioned the authenticity of the cabin logs shortly after it began administering the site in 1933, an article by Lincoln scholar Roy Hays in *The Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, titled, "Is the Lincoln Birthplace Cabin Authentic?" published in 1948 brought national attention to the controversy. Mr. Hays believed that the cabin was not the original birthplace and that the logs from Lincoln's fellow Kentuckian, and the former Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, might be mixed with any original logs from the Lincoln area. In 1860, a local delegate to the state Republican convention visited the Sinking Spring Farm and reported that no cabin was on site. Likewise in 1865, an artist for a Cincinnati publishing firm and a correspondent from a Philadelphia newspaper visited the site and found "no vestiges of the Lincoln cabin." How then did the Lincoln cabin reappear? In 1895 a New York based entrepreneur named Alfred Dennett purchased the Lincoln property near Hodgenville and a cabin from a nearby farm. Dennett's plan to develop both into tourist attractions fell through and the Lincoln Birthplace Cabin, as it was then known, was taken to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in 1897 and exhibited alongside another old cabin claimed to be the birthplace of Jefferson Davis. Both cabins traveled to the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in

Buffalo, New York. From there the cabins were shipped to Coney Island where the logs became intermingled. Later, all the logs were moved to Long Island, New York. In 1906, the Lincoln Farm Association was created. They purchased the logs for \$1,000 and shipped them back to Kentucky with much fanfare. Arriving in Louisville in June 1906, the logs were erected in a local park, then dismantled and placed in storage until the completion of the Memorial Building. In 1911, the logs were reassembled creating the cabin which now stands inside the Memorial Building. The article by Roy Hays had brought about a flurry of research activity. The director of the National Park Service at the time concluded that "there simply [wasn't] any trustworthy recorded evidence for the authenticity of the cabin." Finally in 2004, a special dendrochronology study conducted by the University of Tennessee dated the cabin to a time period around 1848. This proved that the cabin was actually 39 years too young to have been the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born. Today the National Park Service refers to the cabin as being symbolic, or representative, of the one which stood on the rise above the spring on that winter day of February 12, 1809, in which one of our country's most memorable presidents was born.