

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace

National Historic Site
Kentucky

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



I was born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky.

Abraham Lincoln, passionate defender of the Union and the man whose life and ideals affirmed the dignity of working people, was a product of the austere society of frontier Kentucky. After Lincoln had grown to adulthood and prospered as a lawyer and politician, he was reluctant to talk about what he called the "stinted living" of his early years. When he was asked for a campaign biography, he responded: "It can all be condensed into a simple sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's *Elegy*—'The short and simple annals of the poor.'" He did, however, furnish the information, and almost everything we know of Lincoln's childhood was contained in his remembrances.

Before the Lincolns came into Kentucky, the ancestors of our 16th president had a long and restless history in colonial America. Generation after generation had left their fathers' homes and moved westward in search of more land and fewer constraints. The first American Lincoln, Samuel, sailed from the west of England in 1637 and settled in Hingham, Mass. His descendants moved on to fertile land in New Jersey and then Pennsyl-

vania, and in 1768, John Lincoln and his family of ten migrated into Virginia. One of John's sons and Lincoln's grandfather, Abraham, reached the edge of the frontier, settling in the Shenandoah Valley.

By 1782, Abraham had sold his farm and, with his wife Bersheba and five children, had struck out for the Kentucky wilderness. Daniel Boone had blazed the first trail into this unknown region only seven years earlier. It was still a rugged, uncharted territory, "the Dark and Bloody Ground" of Indian warfare, but it offered rich bottom lands for farming. Possibly as a result of Boone's own urging, Abraham entered Kentucky through Cumberland Gap and settled near the present site of Louisville. In May 1786, as he and his children worked in the newly planted fields, Abraham was killed in an Indian raid. Ten-year-old Thomas, future father of a president, remained with his father's body and was saved from death at the last moment when one of his brothers shot an approaching Indian.

After Abraham's death, Bersheba and the children moved to what is now Washington County, Ken-

tucky, a more secure and populated area. Lincoln later wrote that Thomas, "by the early death of his father, and very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering laborer, and grew up literally without education." Uneducated he was, but he never deserved the ne'er-do-well reputation he had with early Lincoln biographers. He was an honest, reasonably industrious man, not shiftless but without driving ambition. He fulfilled the duties of a frontier citizen, serving as a militiaman and county guard of prisoners, paying his taxes, and sitting on juries. On at least one occasion he labored alongside slaves, which may have helped shape his anti-slavery views.

After years of roaming up and down Kentucky, Thomas moved with his family to Hardin County in 1803. Settling in Elizabethtown, he learned the carpenter's trade and was good enough at it to purchase a 230-acre farm. Thomas saved his money and in 1806 married a young woman named Nancy Hanks and brought her back to Elizabethtown.

Photography by W. L. McCoy

Simple Beginnings

In December 1808, Thomas and Nancy bought the Sinking Spring farm, paying \$200 for 348 acres of stony land on Nolin Creek. The couple's first child, Sarah, was a year old, and as they moved 14 miles southwest to their new home, Nancy was expecting another. The life of this

young frontier woman is shadowy. Lincoln remembered her fondly, but we know only that she was born in Virginia, was illiterate, and died shortly after the Lincolns left Kentucky. For historian Albert J. Beveridge, she remains "Dim as the dream of a shifting mirage . . . her face and figure waver through the mists of time and rumor."

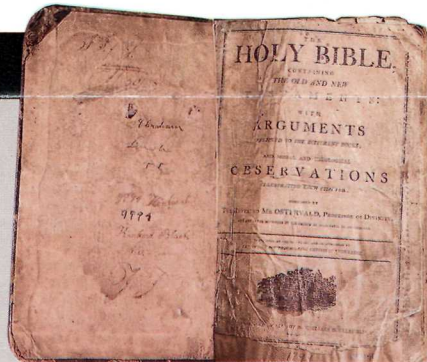
Sinking Spring Farm's red clay was not noted for its fertility. The farm stood on the edge of the Barrens, a great tract of land made treeless by Indian fires set to create grazing land for game. Perhaps the Lincolns bought it because it was closer to Nancy's relatives and only 3 miles south of Hodgen's mill.

Thomas, Nancy, and their infant daughter moved into a one-room log cabin built on a knoll near Sinking Spring. The Lincolns' cabin was probably a typical frontier dwelling: about 18 by 16 feet, a dirt floor, one window and one door, a small fireplace, a shingled roof, and a low chimney made of clay, straw, and hard wood. The tiny window opening might have been covered with greased paper, animal skin, or an old quilt to keep out

summer insects and the cold winter wind.

The winter deepened as Nancy's time drew near. On Sunday, February 12, 1809, she lay close to the fire on her bed of corn husks and bear skins, and the family, in the words of Carl Sandburg, "welcomed into a world of battle and blood, of whispering dreams and wistful dust, a new child, a boy." The boy was named Abraham, after his grandfather.

Thomas and Nancy Lincoln and their children lived the self-sufficient life of a frontier farm family. Thomas continued to do a little carpentry and cabinet-making, but he was now a farmer. He spent long hours behind the plow and tramping through the woods with his rifle in search of meat. Nancy cooked plain food—bread, corn, pork



*Thomas Lincoln
& Nancy Lincoln*

The Lincolns' family bible.

—in her Dutch oven and long-handled frying pan. The Lincolns' life was spare, but they were not poverty-stricken. They owned two farms, a lot in Elizabethtown, and livestock. They were members in good standing of their community.

As Abraham grew from infancy, a young oak sapling grew near the Lincolns' cabin. Until its death in 1976, the Boundary Oak was a living vestige of the quiet farm where Lincoln spent the first two years of his life.



Statue of Abraham Lincoln in Hodgenville, Ky.

Knob Creek Farm
In 1811, the Lincolns moved 10 miles east to a farm on Knob Creek, where the soil was richer. Lincoln's earliest memory was of this farm, helping his father plant pumpkin seeds among the corn. There

Interior of a replica of the Lincolns' cabin at Knob Creek.



the boy got his first taste of education in Caleb Hazel's "ABC school," or as Lincoln called it, a "blab school," for the constant recitation. Lincoln's views on slavery may have been formed at Knob Creek, as Hazel was an outspoken emancipationist, and the Lincolns belonged

to an anti-slavery church. Life was better there, but the slavery issue and lawsuits over the titles to his farms induced Thomas to move to Indiana. In late 1816 the Lincoln family crossed the Ohio to the land where the child shaped in Kentucky grew to manhood.

Visiting the Park



The cabin before its placement inside the Memorial Building.

Almost 100 years after Thomas Lincoln moved from Sinking Spring Farm, a log cabin originally accepted as the birthplace cabin was placed in the Memorial Building. Although its early history is obscure, extensive research suggests that the cabin displayed in the Memorial Building is probably not the birthplace cabin of Abraham Lincoln. New York businessman A.W. Dennett purchased the Lincoln farm in 1894 and had the cabin moved to a site near the Sinking Spring. But shortly thereafter it was again dismantled and re-erected for exhibition in many cities. About 1900, Robert Collier (publisher of *Collier's Weekly*), Mark Twain, William Jennings Bryan, Samuel Gompers, and others formed the Lincoln Farm Association to preserve Lincoln's birthplace and establish a memorial to the country's 16th president. The association bought the farm in 1905 and the cabin in 1906. The group also raised over \$350,000 from more than 100,000 citizens to build a memorial to house the cabin. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in 1909, and two years later the marble and granite memorial, designed by John Russell Pope, was dedicated by President



Sinking Spring as it appeared when the Lincolns lived nearby.

William H. Taft. The neo-classical structure in a farm setting may seem grandiose for a man who wrote: "I was born and have ever remained in the numbe waiks of life." But the rough cabin within the memorial dramatizes the basic values that sustained Lincoln as he led the Nation through its darkest period.

Visiting the Park

The memorial and Sinking Spring Farm were established as a national park in 1916 and designated Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in 1959. The site is about 3 miles south of Hodgenville, Ky., on U.S. 31E and Ky. 61. **Contact park for seasonal changes in hours of operation.** Interpreters are available at the visitor center to furnish information. Groups may make advance arrangements for conducted tours.

Picnic facilities and hiking trails are provided. Camping is not permitted within the park, but camping facilities are available nearby. An environmental study area is for school use. Please leave things as you find them so others can enjoy them.

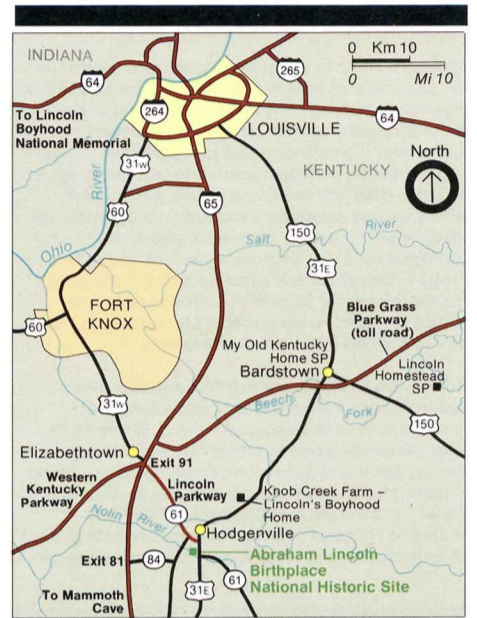
Special services and facilities are provided for handicapped visitors. Ask for information and assistance at the visitor center or from any uniformed employee.

For Your Safety

There are numerous steps at the site; use caution. When crossing roads, be alert. Stay on the trails to avoid poison ivy and briars.

Administration.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 2995 Lincoln Farm Road, Hodgenville, KY 42748, is in charge. (502) 358-3137



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A Historic Walking Tour

When Thomas and Nancy Lincoln moved to Sinking Spring Farm, Kentucky had been a state for only 17 years. While there were a few frontier stores, pioneers mainly used what they could raise and what grew at hand for food, shelter, and tools. A short walk along the Forest Trail through the site of the Lincolns' farm will make clear how resourceful these settlers were.

The red oaks shading the picnic area, young trees when the Lincolns lived here, remind us that much of the farm was left wooded, for the forest was as important as the farm in supplying the settlers' needs. Wild apples, wild cherries, hazel nuts, hickory nuts, and black walnuts were valuable food sources. Black walnut shells were also used to make buttons. Boiled, they yielded a black dye.

1 The smaller plants, easily overlooked today, helped make frontier life bearable. Sassafras, rose hips, and mint made good teas, and berries brightened a

monotonous diet. Salads were made of dandelions, wild lettuce, and pokeweed. Medicinal herbs took the place of drugs, and before the flax was harvested, nettles were used to make thread for weaving. Lamp wicks were fashioned from milkweed and moss.

2 Some of what has now reverted to forest was once fields, cleared by Thomas Lincoln's labor. He planted most of the land in corn, a staple of the frontier diet that was made into corn pone, corn bread, hominy, and hoe cakes. The husks were used to stuff mattresses. Corn was often converted to whiskey, a common medium of exchange on the frontier.

3 The large depression here is called Big Sink. The natural spring that flowed until the 1930s was one of the features homesteaders looked for in choosing a site.

4 This area was covered with large quantities of may apples. Settlers ate its fruit and used the root in home remedies.

5 Nothing escaped the practical eye of the settlers. The kind of large knot visible 30 feet up the tall oak tree was valuable as a hard wood for making bowls and kitchen utensils.

6 Small animals like opossum, raccoon, fox, rabbit, turkey, and squirrel, some of which would have used the kind of tree hole visible here, were an important source of food for the Lincolns. Thomas also brought home such large game as deer, bison, elk, and black bear, which, besides meat, provided clothes and bedding.

7 The white oak was one of the most useful trees in the Kentucky woods. Its hard wood was turned into cabin logs, fence rails, farm implements, and fuel. The acorns could be eaten in an emergency.

8 Shagbark hickory was also prized by settlers. Its strength and flexibility made it ideal for wagon parts and tool handles. It was unequaled as firewood, and a good stock was comforting to a family facing a long winter in a thin-walled cabin.

