

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace

National Historic Site
Kentucky

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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.'" Lincoln did furnish the information, and almost everything we know of his childhood was contained in his own 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 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, Massachusetts. His descendants moved

on to fertile land in New Jersey and then Pennsylvania, and in 1768, John Lincoln and his family of 10 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 region only seven years earlier. It was still uncharted territory, the "Dark and Bloody Ground" of Indian warfare, but offered rich bottomlands for farming. Possibly at 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 the Lincolns moved to what is now Washington County, a more secure and populated area. Lincoln wrote that Thomas, "by the early death of his father, and very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering labor-boy." Uneducated he was, he was nevertheless an honest man, 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 antislavery views.

After roaming up and down Kentucky, Thomas and his family moved to Hardin County in 1803 and settled 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.

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 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 hardwood. The tiny window opening might have been covered with greased paper, animal skin, or an old quilt to keep out summer

insects and winter cold. The winter deepened as Nancy's time drew near. On Sunday, February 12, 1809, she lay close to the fire on her bed of cornhusks and bearskins. 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." He 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 cabinetmaking, 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—



*Thomas Lincoln
Nancy Lincoln*

The Lincoln family bible.

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

As Abraham grew from infancy, a young oak sapling grew near their 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.



Knob Creek Farm

In 1811 the Lincolns moved 10 miles northeast 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.

Statue of Abraham Lincoln in Hodgenville, Kentucky (left). View of hills or "knobs" surrounding Knob Creek Farm (right).



There 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 antislavery church. Life was better there, but the slavery issue, along with lawsuits over the titles to his farms, induced Thomas to move to Indiana. Late in 1816 the Lincolns crossed the Ohio to the land where the child shaped in Kentucky grew to manhood.

Photography by W.L. McCoy

Visiting the Park



The cabin before its placement inside the Memorial Building.



Establishing the Memorial

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. Because its early history is obscure, there is a lack of documentation to support the authenticity of the cabin enshrined in the Memorial Building as 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 then reassembled for exhibition in many cities. On August 28, 1905, Robert Collier, publisher of Collier's Weekly, purchased the farm where Lincoln was born. On April 18, 1906, Collier, along with 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 nation's 16th President. In that same

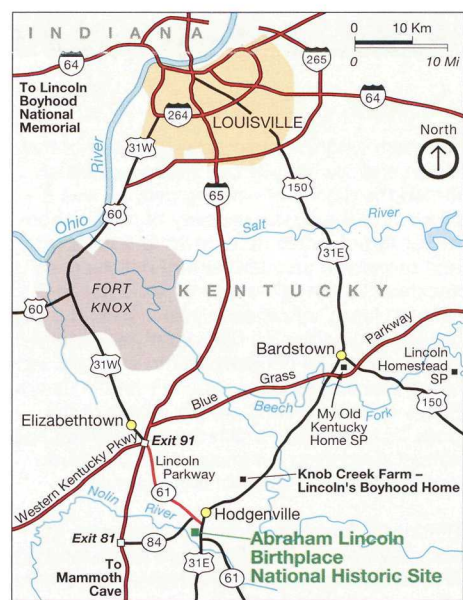
year this newly formed group purchased the cabin. The group also raised more than \$350,000 from some 100,000 citizens to build a memorial to house the cabin. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in 1909, and two years later the marble and granite memorial, designed by John Russell Pope, was dedicated by President William Howard Taft. The neoclassical structure in a farm setting may seem grandiose for a man who wrote: "I was born, and have ever remained, in the most humble walks 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.

The memorial and Sinking Spring Farm were established as a national park in 1916 and designated Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in 1959.

For More Information Write to: Superintendent, Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site, 2995 Lincoln Farm Road, Hodgenville, KY 42748-9707; call 270-358-3137; or connect to www.nps.gov/abli on the Internet.



Sinking Spring as it appeared when the Lincolns lived nearby.



Location Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site is located about 3 miles south of Hodgenville, Kentucky, on U.S. 31E and Ky. 61.

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Printed on recycled paper.

Activities and Facilities

The park is located in the Eastern time zone. Park staff at the visitor center provide information and answer questions. Groups may make advance arrangements for conducted tours.

Contact the park for hours of operation.

Picnic facilities and hiking trails are provided. Camping is not permitted in the park. There is an environmental study area for school use. Please leave things as you find them so others can enjoy them.

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

For Your Safety

There are steps at the site; use caution. When crossing roads be alert. Stay on trails to avoid poison ivy and briars. Lock your vehicles and store possessions out of sight.

A Walking Tour

When Nancy and Thomas Lincoln moved to Sinking Spring Farm, Kentucky had been a state for only 16 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 Big Sink Trail through the site of the Lincolns' farm will make clear how resourceful these settlers were. Along the 0.7 mile trail are numbered interpretive signs that explain points of interest.

