

Lincoln Boyhood

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Memorial
Indiana



*My childhood-home I see again,
And gladden with the view:
And still as mem'ries crowd
my brain,
There's sadness in it too.*

Abraham Lincoln, 1845



"There I Grew Up"

My father . . . removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the same time the State came into the Union.

Abraham Lincoln, revered among the greatest Americans, was shaped in large measure by his years in Indiana. The people he knew here and the things he experienced stayed with him throughout his life. His sense of honesty, pursuit of education and learning, respect for hard work, compassion, and notions of right and wrong were born of this place and time.

In the fall of 1816 Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln packed their belongings and children—Sarah, age 9, and Abraham, age 7—and left their Kentucky home bound for the new frontier of southern Indiana. Arriving at his 160-acre claim near Little Pigeon Creek in December, Thomas set about building a cabin and carving a new life from the "wild region," as Abraham described the largely unsettled Indiana woodlands.

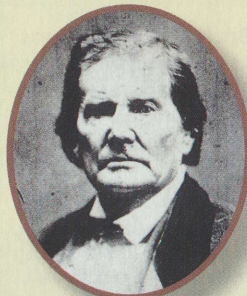
In much of the work Thomas was assisted by his son. As he grew older, Abraham increased in his

skill with the plow and, especially, the axe. He later recalled how he "was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument."

All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother. God bless her.

For the first two years here, life was good for the Lincolns. In the fall of 1818, when Abraham was age 9, Nancy Hanks Lincoln went to help some neighbors ill with milk sickness, and she became a victim. It was a tragic event for the family; the first of many losses Abraham would endure over his lifetime. Thomas and Abraham made a rough wooden coffin for her burial, and the family said their last farewells to their beloved wife and mother.

A New Household Within a year Thomas visited Kentucky, where he married Sarah Bush Johnston, a widow he had known for years. Sarah brought into the household her three children, ages 12, 8, and 5, a wagonload of furniture, and many books. Sarah proved to be a kind stepmother. Under her love and guidance, the two families became one.



Thomas Lincoln
LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY



Sarah Bush Lincoln
ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL LIBRARY

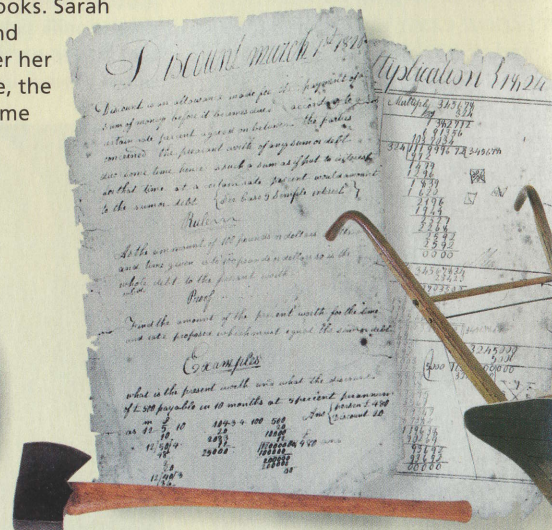


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

This earliest known photograph of Abraham Lincoln was made in 1846. Lincoln served as the 16th U.S. president, 1861–65.

There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.

In frontier Indiana, opportunities for formal education were few, and there was endless farm work. In total Abraham spent about one year in a classroom. But he loved to read and could often be seen



Lincoln's Indiana school papers, plow, and pioneer-era axe.
Memorial Visitor Center (far left).
PAPERS / NPS; AXE / CONNER PRAIRIE; PLOW / HENRY FORD MUSEUM

carrying a book as well as his axe. By age 16 Abraham was tall and muscular with a keen intellect. Joining in informal political discussions at Gentry's store, Abraham honed his debating skills.

In 1828 he got a job piloting a flatboat loaded with produce down the Mississippi and Ohio rivers to New Orleans. There he saw a slave auction on the docks, an experience that greatly disturbed him—and one that he would never forget.

Moving On Two years later the family left for Illinois, where Abraham spent his next 30 years. After Lincoln's assassination in 1865, the Indiana home site became a place to honor him and his mother. The memorial building, built in the 1940s, represents an era when the creation of memorials and landscapes was a popular way to express the nation's reverence for its 16th president. The state of Indiana administered the memorial until 1962, when Congress established Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial.

The park preserves our most tangible link to Lincoln's childhood and youth, the place where he worked side by side with his father, mourned the loss of his mother, read the books that opened his mind, and grew from a boy to a man.

The Milksick

Milk sickness occurs when cattle graze on white snake-root (*Eupatorium rugosum*), a shade-loving plant that grows in the Ohio River Valley. The plant contains tremetol, a poison to animals—and to humans who consume milk products or meat from those animals.



White snakeroot

Symptoms in humans range from nausea and vomiting to coma and death. The disease is rarely a problem today, but in early 1800s Indiana, "the milksick" was the scourge of frontier settlements. According to reports then, milk sickness caused over 50 percent of deaths in Dubois County, Indiana.

In the fall of 1818 milk sickness broke out in the Little Pigeon Creek settlement. Several of Lincoln's neighbors died, and in late September Nancy Hanks Lincoln fell ill. She died on October 5 and was buried on a wooded knoll one-quarter mile south of their cabin.

Living Historical Farm

This re-created 1820s homestead is on four of the original 160 acres owned by Thomas Lincoln. A cabin and outbuildings from the 1800s were moved from elsewhere in Indiana and reassembled here. There are split-rail fences, livestock, vegetable and herb gardens, and field crops. Park rangers in period clothing demonstrate farm life with historic tools and techniques. The farm area is open mid-April through September. From October through mid-April the buildings are closed and not staffed, but you may visit the farm grounds.

Crop Area The first spring the Lincolns put in six acres of corn, which was used by people and livestock. The corn grew 15 to 18 feet high, and they planted beans in the corn rows so vines



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NPS / © LAURENCE PARENT



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The Lincolns did not own this cabin, but it is typical of the region and era.

could climb the stalks. Few southern Indiana farmers raised wheat for market because it was inconvenient and expensive to have it milled, but they sowed enough for their own use. They grew oats for feed, broomcorn for making brooms, and flax and cotton to make fabric.

Besides raising crops, frontier families kept a vegetable garden. We don't know exactly what was in the Lincoln's kitchen garden, but common vegetables were potatoes, turnips, gourds, beans, cucumbers, melons, asparagus, cabbage, onions, and herbs for preservatives. Pumpkin was as popular with the farm animals as it was with people. It was stewed, fried, eaten raw, and made into molasses and pies. Punkin leather, a favorite with children, was small dried strips of pumpkin rolled into balls.

Living history interpreters feed chickens (above left), make shingles (left), and do other farm chores.

Planning Your Visit

Getting Here Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial is just outside Lincoln City, Ind. From I-64, take exit 57A. Go south on U.S. 231 to the Santa Claus/Gentryville exit. Turn right (west) on Ind. 162; go 2½ miles to the park entrance on the right. (See small map at right.)

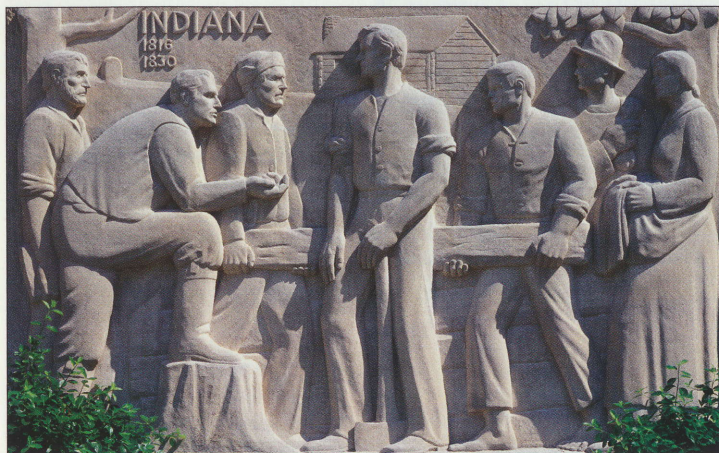
The park is open year-round, except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. A fee is charged. There are picnic tables at the farm area parking lot. Picnic, camping, and recreational facilities are available in Lincoln State Park.

Things To See and Do Stop first at the Memorial Visitor Center for information, a film, bookstore, and museum exhibits. On the outside walls are sculptured panels, carved from Indiana limestone, that depict places where Lincoln lived. The quotations above them are from Lincoln's speeches.

Pioneer Cemetery Abraham's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died of milk sickness in 1818 and was buried on this hill. Her exact burial place is unknown, but a



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Detail from relief sculpture panel, Memorial Visitor Center.

memorial grave marker is visible from the trail. The cemetery is the resting place of others in the Little Pigeon Creek community.

Cabin Site Memorial A bronze casting of sill logs and fireplace hearthstones symbolizes a cabin that the Lincolns began building in 1829.

Trails The Lincoln Boyhood Trail connects the Pioneer Cemetery to the Living Historical Farm. The Trail of Twelve Stones begins at the Living Historical Farm and ends near the pioneer cemetery. The two trails form a loop of about one mile. The Boyhood Nature Trail loops about one mile through the woods north of the Living Historical Farm.

Lincoln Spring The spring was the main source of fresh water for the Lincolns. Its presence was probably a reason that Thomas Lincoln chose this home site.

An Italian marble headstone commemorates the life of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. Her exact burial site is not known.

Accessibility The park is wheelchair accessible. Portions of the trails are slippery when wet. Service animals are welcome.

For a Safe Visit Please be alert and follow these regulations.

- Stay on established trails.
- The railroad line near the parking area is still in use. Be very careful crossing the tracks.
- Take precautions against insect bites and poison ivy.
- For firearm regulations, see the park website.
- All plants, animals, and cultural features are protected by federal law.

Emergencies: call 911.

More Information

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Lincoln City, IN 47552
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www.nps.gov/libo

Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

