

A photograph of a rustic log cabin with a stone chimney, surrounded by trees and a wooden fence. The cabin is made of horizontal logs and has a dark roof. A tall, cylindrical stone chimney is attached to the right side. The cabin is situated in a wooded area with many trees, some of which have sparse green leaves. In the foreground, there is a dirt path leading towards the cabin, and a wooden fence made of stacked logs runs across the middle ground. The overall scene is peaceful and historical.

Lands of Lincoln

From a log cabin to a world-class museum, this collection of Midwest sites sheds light on our 16th president

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The boys were not allowed in the parlor. Mary Todd Lincoln knew better than to permit her rambunctious sons from roughhousing around her fine furnishings. The sitting room was the place for family time. But because the chairs were uncomfortably low for Abraham Lincoln's 6-foot-4-inch frame, he sprawled on the floor to play with his boys. Mary watched from the doorway, arms akimbo, smiling tolerantly at the men in her life. At least that's how I imagined the homey scene.

During my tour of the **Lincoln Home National Historic Site** in Springfield, Illinois, I was able to easily conjure up images of the young father and future president. That was also the case when I visited other Lincoln-related sites across central Illinois and southern Indiana. Each of these places—including homes, a living history farm, and his final resting place—offer insight into President Lincoln, whose life was cut short 160 years ago this spring. With our nation's Inauguration Day taking place this January, it's an apropos time to reflect on one of our most beloved leaders.



Formative Years

I watched kids sidle up to eight limestone panels at **Lincoln State Park** just south of Lincoln City, Indiana. Each stone is 6-feet-4-inches tall, Lincoln's height when he left Indiana, but has markings of how tall he was at various ages from 7 to 21—the years he spent in Spencer County, Indiana. Some kids stood on tiptoes to measure up to Abe at their age.

Abe was born on a Kentucky farm in 1809 and moved with his family to what is now southern Indiana in 1816. At age 7, Abe helped fell trees and split wood to build their log cabin. I had goosebumps walking in his footsteps on the state park trail that winds through the former Little Pigeon Creek community, where the Lincolns counted among its 40 households.

At the site of a mill in the park where 9-year-old Abe was kicked in the head by his horse, I pondered how history might be different had he died that day. Hardship and death were ever present in the pioneer settlement, and Abe experienced both. In a cemetery next to the site of the community's white clapboard church, I found the grave of Abe's older sister, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby. She and her infant died in childbirth; Grigsby was buried cradling her baby. Visitors often tuck Lincoln pennies into her tombstone's ornate scrollwork, and I added some of my own.

The **Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial**, just north of the state park and administered by the National Park Service, preserves links to Abe's formative years as he grew from boy to man. A defining childhood moment was the death of his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, when Abe was 9. He and his father built her rough wooden coffin and buried her in the pioneer cemetery that's part of the memorial today.

I made the short walk to the site of the family's log cabin. Bronze castings of logs mark the footprint of a home no bigger than my suburban garage. Here, Nancy gathered the family around the hearth to read aloud in the evenings, a practice Abe's stepmother continued after his father remarried. Abe said he attended school "by littles." His formal schooling, interrupted by chores, added up to less than a year inside a classroom. Instead, he taught himself through his love of reading and was often seen walking the neighborhood carrying both a book and his axe.

The memorial's **Living Historical Farm**, which occupies 4 acres of the Lincoln



A statue of young Abe in front of his childhood home (left) faces a model of the Lincoln family in front of the White House (right). Presidential Museum; his home in Springfield, Illinois (far right).

From left: A replica cabin at the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial; the nameplate from Abe's Springfield home; a monument at Lincoln State Park honoring Abe's formative years in Indiana.





A statue of young Abe in front of his childhood home (left) faces a model of the Lincoln family in front of the White House (right) at the Lincoln Presidential Museum; his home in Springfield, Illinois (far right).



family's 160-acre claim, gave me a glimpse of pioneer life. From spring into fall, costumed reenactors work in a 20th-century cabin and outbuildings that were moved to the site. I watched as they tended crops and livestock, split logs, and made clothing using only tools from Abe's day.

About 19 miles south of Lincoln City, I peeked inside more replica cabins at the **Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum** (closed November through April) in Rockport, Indiana, a town Abe often visited. One represents the law office of John Pitcher, a judge who befriended young Abe and lent him law books. Another re-creates the Jones Store in Gentryville, Indiana, where Abe earned 25 cents a day as a clerk while passing time reading newspapers and conversing with customers. Here he honed his skills as a storyteller and debater.

A mile away, a bronze bas-relief bust of Abe at age 19 marks the spot on the Ohio River where he

departed on a flatboat for New Orleans. It was in the Crescent City where he witnessed a slave auction—a horrific scene that stuck with him throughout his life. I bent down to read his defiant quote on the monument: "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I'll hit it hard." Thirty-five years later, Abe issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Law and Politics

The Lincolns moved to Illinois in 1830, and Abe embarked on his adult life in New Salem, where he worked as a postmaster, store clerk, and rail splitter. Now a re-created pioneer village, **Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site** near Petersburg features reenactors in period attire who cook, tend horses, and perform other chores. Abe also studied law here and was elected to two terms as state representative before moving to Springfield in 1837.

About 22 miles southeast of the historic site, the **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum** in Springfield covers the full arc of Abe's life in two buildings containing about 13 million items. The library serves as a resource for scholars while the museum's exhibits entertain and inform.

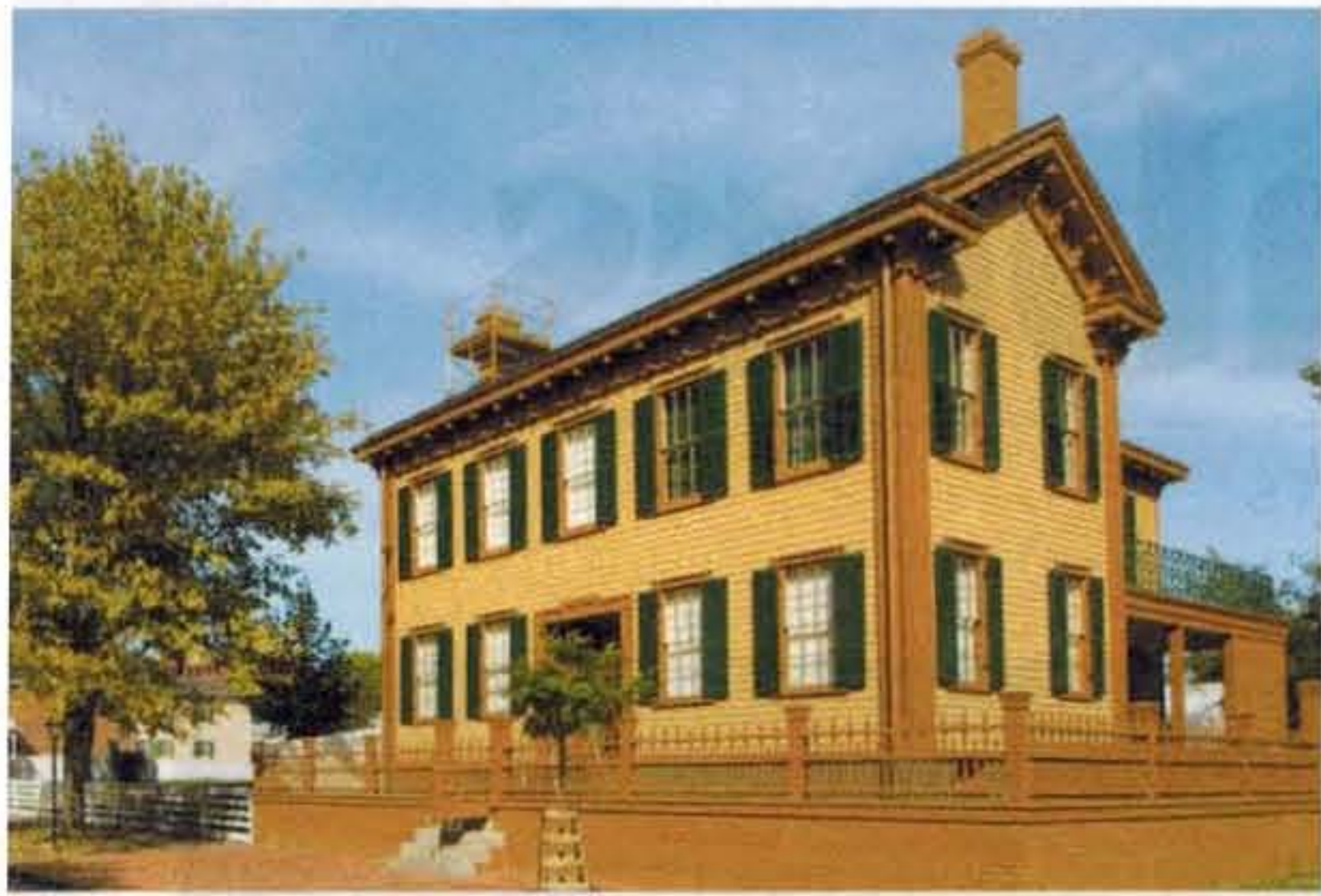
I particularly enjoyed the museum's Treasures Gallery that displays a rotating collection of artifacts, but only for short periods in order to preserve them. For example, lucky visitors might see Abe's Bible, one of five existing copies of the Gettysburg Address in his own handwriting, the quill pen he used to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, or a bloodstained piece of cloth from the dress of an actress who cradled his head the night he was assassinated.

The collection occasionally grows, as was the case last year when Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and

From left: A reenactor at Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site demonstrates woodworking in the replica village.



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First Lady MK Pritzker donated a document detailing Abe's order to blockade Southern ports. It was his first direct military action against slave states attempting to secede after the Confederacy's attack on Fort Sumter. It will be on display until February 11 before being placed in the museum's vault for safekeeping.

Under the museum's rotunda, I was drawn to a figure of young Abe perched on a tree stump outside a replica of his boyhood log cabin. His eyes gaze toward the opposite wall, which is anchored by a model of his future home: the White House. Figures of the first family stand stoically outside.

The 1860 presidential election put the Lincolns in the White House, and an amusing exhibit imagines that political campaign in a modern context with paid ads and TV news programs covering the issues of the day. A video presentation in another room, *The Civil War in 4 Minutes*, includes an electronic counter that adds up the casualties throughout the conflict to horrifying effect.

Pre-presidency, Abe was elected to the Illinois legislature five times before winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1846. Between campaigns, he courted Mary Todd, whom he married in 1842. Two years later, they moved into a Greek Revival house on the corner of Eighth and Jackson streets in Springfield, enlarging it several times to accommodate their family of four sons. It was the only house Abe ever owned. Part of the **Lincoln Home National Historic Site**, it has been restored to its appearance in 1860 as the family prepared to move into the White House, never to return. Several other houses and outdoor exhibits, including an Underground Railroad location, make up the four-square-block historic site.

Final Journey

Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, shocked the nation. Mourners lined the tracks of the train carrying his body to Springfield's **Old State Capitol**, where Abe had served in the legislature, argued

cases before the Illinois Supreme Court, and delivered his famous speech declaring "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

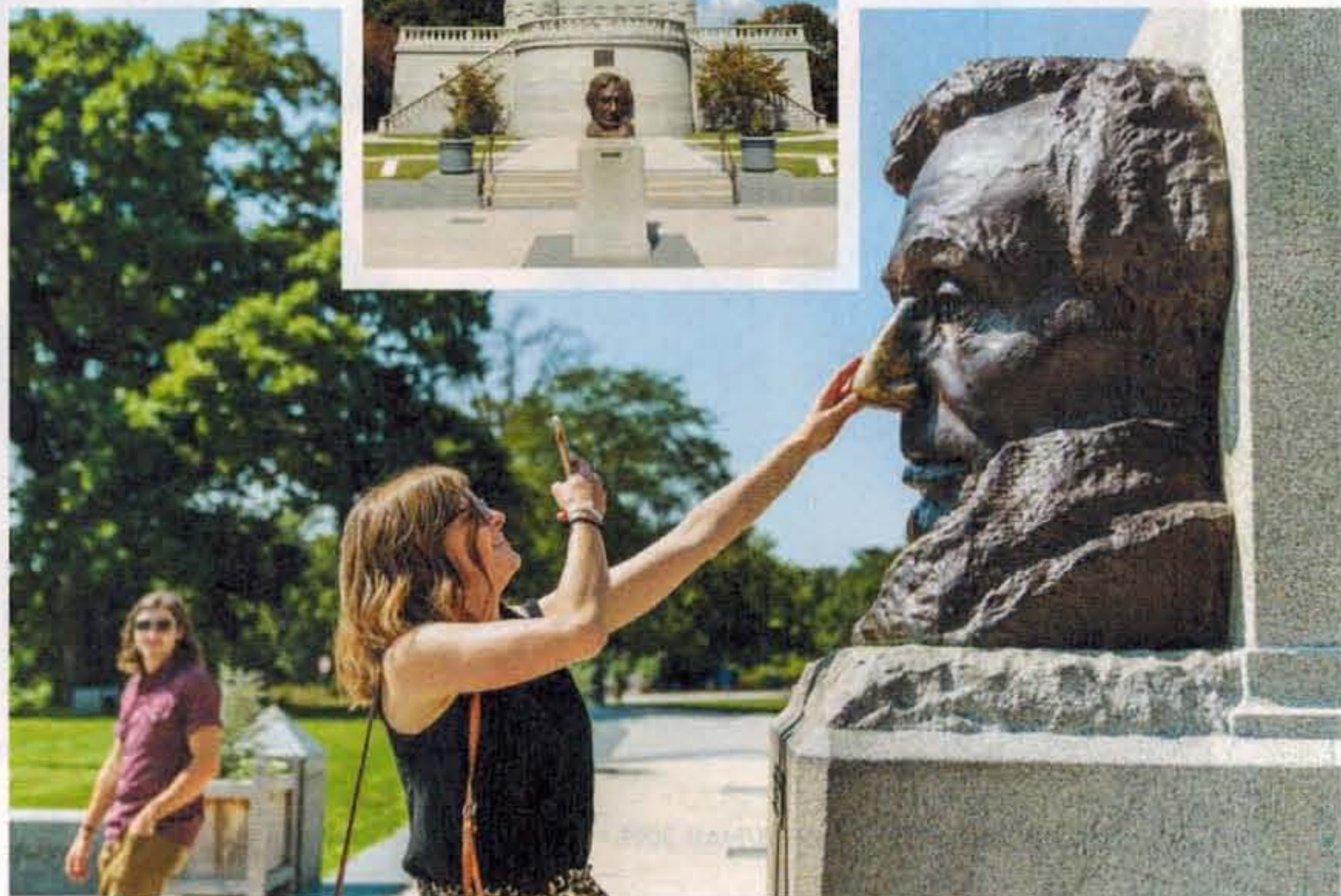
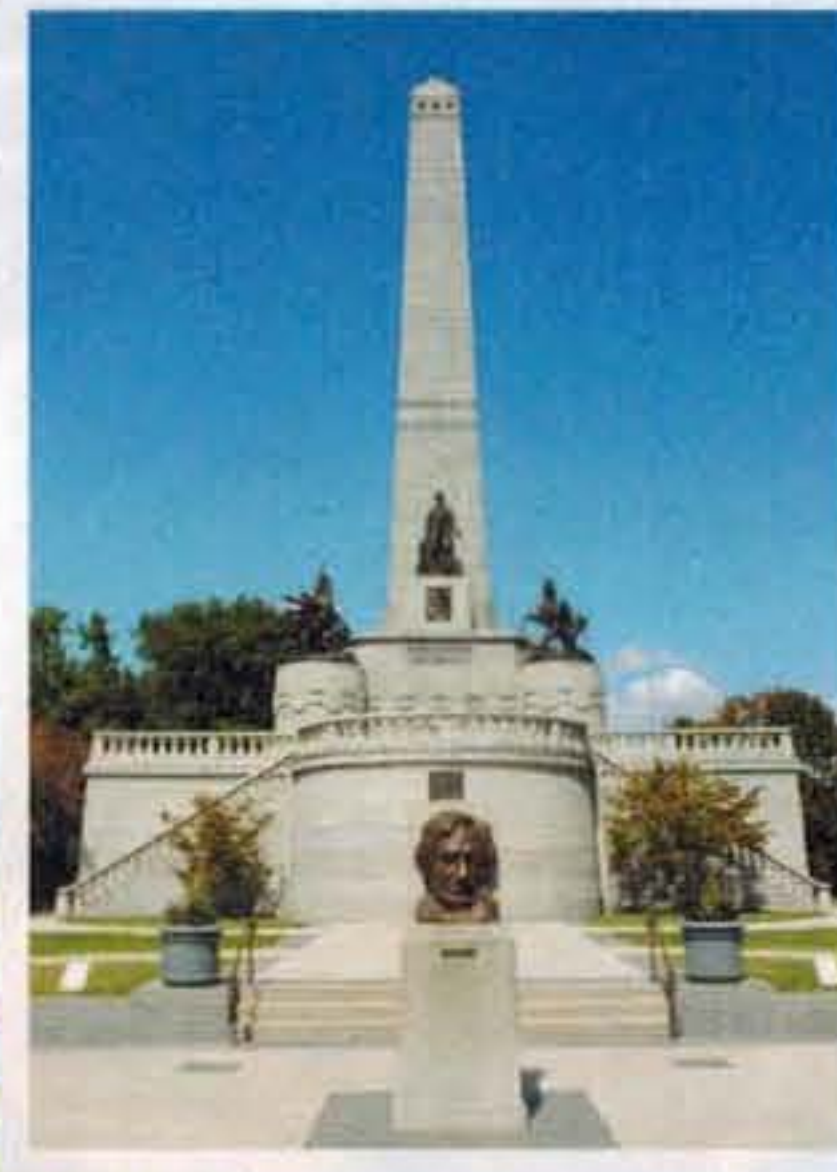
Abe was buried in **Oak Ridge Cemetery** in Springfield, where an obelisk rises 117 feet over the **Lincoln Tomb State Historic Site**. A bronze bust of the president at the tomb's entrance greets visitors, its nose shiny from generations of schoolchildren and others rubbing it for good luck. I was one of them during an eighth-grade field trip.

Returning as an adult, I took time while inside the tomb to read excerpts of Abe's inspiring speeches. Mary is interred nearby, along with three of their four sons. Robert Todd Lincoln, their only child to live to adulthood, is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

While John Wilkes Booth claimed Abe's life several generations before I was born, I still felt a solemn tug on my heart in that chamber for the husband and father whose life ended just 42 days into his second presidential term. Through the various places I visited that preserve his memory, I'd gotten to know and better appreciate this man of humility and dignity, eloquence and empathy.

Moments after Abe took his last breath, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton said of his friend: "Now he belongs to the ages." I'd like to think that he belongs to Midwesterners, in particular, because of how the region's people and places helped shape our nation's 16th president.

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A 117-foot-tall obelisk rises over the Lincoln Tomb State Historic Site, where visitors often rub the nose on a bronze bust of the president for luck.