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TRAVEL

Lincoln logs

Head to southern Indiana for a Presidents Day weekend trip to Abe's boyhood home and see newly public artifacts from the 16th president's life

KATHERINE RODEGHIER/
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE



JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

LIFE

When mariachi meets meditation

Yoga isn't something you usually find in Little Village. But a free, bilingual class offered by an instructor who grew up in the neighborhood is bringing the meditative and physical benefits of the practice to residents.



BILL TORPY/THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

LIFE

A shelter's plea for help

An animal shelter is in crisis because dogs are flowing into the facility and staying. Adoptions have plummeted nationwide, likely due to economic uncertainty, with people unwilling to take on the added responsibility of pets.



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Mediterranean-inspired offerings

Pistores Pizza & Pastry has what co-owner Joel Reno describes as an 'eclectic menu meant to be fun and creative' **LIFE**

TRAVEL

Finding Lincoln in Indiana

A Presidents Day weekend guide to Abe's boyhood home

By Katherine Rodeghier
Chicago Tribune

Illinois proudly proclaims itself the "Land of Lincoln" on vehicle license plates and eagerly promotes its many historic sites associated with the 16th president. But if you're a Lincoln lover, you'd be remiss to overlook the state's neighbor if you want a full understanding of the man.

You'll find Lincoln lore scattered across the Hoosier state. The newest treasure trove, once the largest private holding of Lincoln memorabilia, is now on public display, split between exhibits in Fort Wayne and Indianapolis. To trace the footsteps of the great man, head south to Spencer County where sites from his formative years continue to inspire future generations.

A boy becomes a man

Lincoln's life story actually began in Kentucky with his birth in 1809. His father, Thomas, moved the family to southern Indiana in 1816, and 7-year-old Abe helped clear the land, fell trees and split wood to build their log cabin home. Abe spent 14 years here, before moving to Illinois at age 21.

"Those are the years that determine who you are," said Julie Kemp, speaking from experience as a retired fourth-grade teacher, now a reenactor at the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial. Without this upbringing, she said, "Lincoln would not have been the president he was."

The memorial and Lincoln State Park tell the story of Abe's early life, one marked by tragedy, hardship and determination.

You get a sense of those years on Mr. Lincoln's Neighborhood Walk, a trail in the state park where "you can walk in the actual footsteps of Lincoln," said Joe Compton, who manages the park for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The 1.7-mile path winds through the former Little Pigeon River community, where the Lincolns counted among its 40 households. A Baptist church stands near the site of the log cabin church they attended. You'll find the grave of Lincoln's older sister, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, in the cemetery, often with Lincoln pennies tucked into her tombstone's ornate scrollwork. Sarah and her baby boy died in childbirth and are buried together, the baby in her arms, Compton said.

The trail skirts the site of Noah Gordon's Mill, where young Abe was kicked in the head by his horse, nearly ending his life, Compton said. "Git up ...," Abe had prodded the animal before it reared on both hind legs and knocked him unconscious. When he finally awoke, young Abe finished his sentence: "... you old hussy."

Inside the park entrance, a Bicentennial Plaza commemorates stages of Lincoln's life in Indiana. Fourteen limestone pillars mark his approximate height from age 7 to 21, when he reached 6-foot-4. Kids often stand next to the pillars comparing their own height at Abe's age.

Two parks tell the tale

Lincoln State Park puts most of its emphasis on recreation, with boat rentals and a beach at Lake Lincoln, created by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. The park maintains cabins and campgrounds, as well as a 1,500-seat amphitheater drawing tributes and national acts with tailgating in the parking lot before showtime.

The Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, part of the National Park Service, focuses on historical events shaping Lincoln's life, particularly the death of his mother when Abe was 9. Nancy Hanks Lincoln is buried in its pioneer cemetery, though the exact location of her grave remains unknown. She caught milk sickness while helping a neighbor who had consumed the milk of a cow that ate a toxic plant. Highly treatable today, it caused half the deaths in a pioneer community where medicines and doctors were scarce.

Nancy insisted on educating her children, teaching them to read and write before they arrived in Indiana. The family often gathered around the hearth to read aloud in the evenings, a pattern continued by Abe's stepmother after Thomas remarried. Though Abe had less than a year of formal schooling, he taught himself through his love of reading and often could be seen walking the neighborhood carrying both a book and his ax.

You'll get a feel for the Lincolns' pioneer homestead in the memorial's Living Historical Farm, covering 4 acres of Thomas' 160-acre claim. A 19th-century cabin and outbuildings moved to the site are staffed seasonally by costumed reenactors who tend crops and livestock, split logs and make clothing using tools of the day. Bronze castings of logs mark the outline of the Lincolns' surprisingly small cabin. Its hearthstones stand in the memori-



At Lincoln Landing in Rockport, Indiana, a bronze bas-relief of 19-year-old Abraham Lincoln marks the spot on the Ohio River where he departed on a flatboat trip to New Orleans. KATHERINE RODEGHIER/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS



The Crawford Cabin is one of 14 replicas of cabins from the Lincoln era at Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum in Rockport, Indiana.

al's visitor center, along with a desk made by Thomas, who was renowned for his carpentry skill. Outside the visitor center, take time to view sculpted panels of Indiana limestone depicting places Lincoln lived and quotes from his speeches.

Along the Ohio River

Fourteen Lincoln-era replica cabins dot the grounds of Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum in Rockport, an Ohio River town in southern Spencer County.

The Crawford cabin contains a replica of a cupboard Abe and Thomas built for their neighbors as a parting gift before the Lincolns moved to Illinois. You'll see the original secured behind glass in the museum. At the cabin representing the John Pitcher Law Office, you'll learn Lincoln walked 17 miles to study under Rockport's first city attorney and borrow his law books. Abe earned 25 cents a day as a clerk in the Jones Store, but gained a wealth of knowledge reading newspapers and interacting with customers. He developed a reputation as a gifted storyteller and debater.

The Gentry Mansion in Pioneer Village replicates the home of a wealthy trader who hired Lincoln to travel with his son to New Orleans. Lincoln Landing on the Ohio River in Rockport marks the spot where they departed on a flatboat. You'll see a bronze bas-relief bust of 19-year-old Lincoln and a plaque with a quote expressing his horror at witnessing an auction of enslaved people in New Orleans: "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I'll hit it hard." President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation 35 years later.

Going public in Fort Wayne

While the Lincoln sites in Spencer County cover actual locations from Abe's youth, exhibits in downtown Fort Wayne span the full spectrum of Lincoln's life.

The Rolland Center for Lincoln Research opened Jan. 10, 2022, inside the Allen County Public Library. It contains part of what had been the world's largest private

collection of Lincoln memorabilia. Begun in the 1920s by Lincoln National Life Insurance Co. headquartered in Fort Wayne, the collection was deemed to the state of Indiana after it bid against competitors such as the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

The state's offer to digitize the material tipped the scales in its favor, said Curt Witcher, director of special collections at the library. The result is "not like the museums of yesteryear," Witcher said, but a mix of artifacts and interactive technology. "It's a 21st-century experience."

You could spend hours playing with digital photo frames and kiosks sending you down rabbit holes of Lincoln lore. Check out the contents of the Lincoln Family Album and trace Abe's family tree, click on maps and details of events during the Civil War, read the diaries of Civil War soldiers and examine inauguration materials and items related to Lincoln's assassination. You'll immerse yourself in Lincoln history in a 180-degree projection room with soundscapes matched to images. Don't overlook display cases of physical artifacts such as a handwritten note granting one soldier a military discharge Abe penned just days before that fateful night at Ford's Theatre.

People are drawn to Lincoln's "rags-to-riches story," Witcher said, and he remains one of the most written-about presidents in history.

The formerly private Lincoln Collection comprises more than 20,000 items spread between two public locations. Two-dimensional items, such as books, newspapers and photos, reside in the Rolland Center in downtown Fort Wayne. You'll find 3D items, such as sculptures, clothing and other personal belongings in Indianapolis at the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. Copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery are highlights of the collection in Indy.

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The interior of a cabin at Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum in Rockport.

IF YOU GO

Visitor information: Spencer County Visitors Bureau, Lincoln's Indiana Boyhood Home: abelincolinindiana.com Visit Fort Wayne: visitfortwayne.com

Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial: Free admission, open all year, Living Historical Farm buildings staffed mid-April through September. 3027 E. South St., Lincoln City; 812-937-4541; nps.gov/libo/index.htm

Lincoln State Park: \$7 a day for noncommercial vehicles with Indiana license plates, \$9 out-of-state. 15476 County Road 300 East, Lincoln City; 812-937-4710; on.IN.gov/lincolnsp

Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum: Open May 1 to Oct. 31, \$5 adults, \$3 ages 12 and under and over 55. 928 Fairground Drive, Rockport; 812-649-9147; lincolnpioneervillage.com

Rolland Center for Lincoln Research: Free with personal tours by appointment at the Allen County Public Library, 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne; 260-421-1200; acpl.lib.in.us/research/rolland-center-for-lincoln-research

Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites: \$16 adults, \$15 ages 60 and up, \$11 ages 3-17. 650 W. Washington St., Indianapolis; 317-232-1637; indianamuseum.org

WHERE TO STAY

Lincoln Pines Lakefront Resort: 27 modern rental cabins. 3862 E. Indiana 162, Lincoln City; 812-646-7100; staylincolnpines.com

Hampton Inn & Suites: 136 rooms downtown. 223 W. Jefferson Blvd., Fort Wayne; 260-247-6915; hilton.com/en/hotels/fwadthx-hampton-suites-fort-wayne-downtown

The Bradley: 124-room boutique hotel downtown. 204 W. Main St., Fort Wayne; 260-428-4018; provenancehotels.com/the-bradley