

Lincoln's Home - Springfield, IL

The Story of Springfield

For 17 years, Abraham Lincoln called this simple house at the corner of 8th and Jackson Streets home. The only house he ever owned, it saw his transformation from a small town lawyer to a figure of national importance and witnessed some of the most important events in his life prior to his inauguration as president.

Lincoln came to Illinois with his family in 1830. He moved to New Salem a year later, pursuing various attempts as a merchant, beginning his legal studies in earnest, and involving himself in local politics. In 1832, he ran unsuccessfully for the State legislature as a Whig. He was more successful two years later winning the seat he held until 1841. By March 1837, he gained admission to the Illinois Bar and moved to Springfield with all his possessions in two saddlebags. In 1842, the year he left the legislature, he began to court socially prominent Mary Todd.



For the first year and half, the newlyweds lived in rented rooms, where their first son Robert Todd was born. In 1844, Lincoln purchased the only home he ever owned for \$1,500. Built in 1839, the house was originally a one-story cottage with two attic rooms. Between 1846 and 1855, Lincoln enlarged the house to 12 rooms and two full stories.



Retired from the State legislature and with a thriving law practice, Lincoln achieved his first major political triumph when he won election to the United States House of Representatives in 1846. At the end of his term in the spring of 1849, discouraged with politics, he came back to Springfield and turned his attention to the law.

In 1854, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which reopened the whole divisive question of the expansion of slavery into the territories, brought Lincoln back into the politics. In 1855, he ran unsuccessfully for the United States Senate as a Whig. His decision to join the newly formed Republican Party in 1856 marked a turning point in his career. Lincoln rapidly rose to a position of leadership in the party. In 1858, the Illinois Republicans named him their candidate for the United States Senate, running against Stephen A. Douglas, the author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Lincoln's acceptance speech, with its ringing prediction that "a house divided cannot stand," set the tone of the campaign. Lincoln's logic, moral fervor, and elegant language gained him national attention. Douglas won the election, but Lincoln's status as an eloquent speaker, a skilled debater, and a moderate anti-slavery man won him the Republican nomination for president in 1860.



Running against three opponents, he received a clear majority of the electoral votes, but only about 40 percent of the popular vote.

On February 6, 1861, about 700 friends, neighbors, and well-wishers came to a grand reception in the home. At the train station on the morning of February 11, Lincoln bade an emotional farewell to Springfield and asked the support of his friends and neighbors in the coming crisis. It was the last time he would set eyes on Springfield.

Lincoln's assassination in 1865 caused a national outpouring of grief, and his home became the focus for mourners. Overcome with grief, Mary Todd Lincoln could not bear to return to the home she had shared with her husband. In 1882, her only surviving son, Robert Todd Lincoln, inherited the residence - he gave it to the State of Illinois as a public museum five years later.

Today, the National Park Service has restored the house to its 1860 appearance.

“ To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born and one is buried. ”

- Lincoln on his departure for Washington in 1861

