

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 6, 2017

Tour of the Lincoln Country: In the spring of 1994, two couples in our "Game Group" (see "News" of 1/2/12) urged me to take them on a tour of the Lincoln country in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. Lindsay and Marge Greenplate of Heritage Park and Amos and Lois Bassett of West Chester joined Ruth and me in our 1985 GMC Suburban, and we started out on June 1.

Since other historic American figures such as Daniel Boone, Henry Clay, William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Stephen Foster, and George Rogers Clark were also much involved in the areas through which we would be traveling, we included them as well. After lunch at an historic inn at Strasburg, Virginia, we stopped for the night at the Martha Washington Inn at Abingdon, Virginia, only 15 miles from the Tennessee line at Bristol. A hundred miles west of there was the historic Cumberland Gap, through which Daniel Boone coaxed thousands of Easterners to find a new life, starting in 1775, in what was to become Kentucky. So, like those more than 200 years before, we went through the gap and stopped at the top for the view (which was disappointing on a hazy morning). Abraham Lincoln, grandfather of our 16th president, moved his family over the gap from Virginia in 1778. Six years later, he was fatally shot by an Indian while clearing his field, with his six-year-old son Thomas watching. Thomas Lincoln (1778-1851) was Abe's father.

Traveling northward through eastern Kentucky, we visited Berea College and spent the night nearby. On our third day, we toured the reconstructed Boonesborough, Daniel's original stockade and home just southeast of present-day Lexington. In Lexington, we went through Henry Clay's rebuilt home (the original was eaten by termites) and saw where Mary Todd Lincoln grew up before going to live with her married sister, Elizabeth Edwards, in Springfield, Illinois. Before the day was over, we moved west through Frankfort, Kentucky's capital, and checked in at a Holiday Inn in the suburbs of Louisville. For dinner, we splurged for a roof-top event at Louisville's Galt House, where we celebrated Lindsay Greenplate's 70th birthday and had a beautiful view of the Ohio River below.

On our fourth day, we first visited Churchill Downs and then the home of Zachary Taylor, 12th president of the United States, before seeing the country home of the sister of George Rogers Clark, hero of the American Revolution and older brother of William Clark (of the Lewis and Clark Expedition). In his final years, George lived with his sister because he was penniless. We went south to Bardstown, where we rode a dinner train and then retired to the grounds of Federal Hall, where Stephen Foster visited in 1852 and was inspired to write "My Old Kentucky Home." An open-air theatre on the grounds has a Stephen Foster pageant through the summer months, and we attended the very first evening of 1994. The Governor of Kentucky and his wife, the former actress Phyllis George, were seated two rows in front of us. A burned-out sealed beam headlight on the Suburban made it difficult to find our way after we got lost leaving the pageant, but we finally found our motel at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, where we spent the night.

The next day, we visited Lincoln's 1809 birthplace near Hodgenville and also the cabin a few miles away where he grew up. Heading northwest, we crossed the Ohio River where Thomas Lincoln had taken his family in 1816 to settle in southwestern Indiana, and we retraced the early Lincoln family route to this boyhood home of our 16th president. Here Abe's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died in 1818, and his father Tom went back to Kentucky to find another wife who would raise Abe and his sister Sarah. Widow Sarah Bush Johnston, the mother of two sons, came back with Thomas to Indiana and became a beloved stepmother to the Lincoln children. Abe's sister Sarah died in childbirth nearby, and the family moved again, this time to eastern Illinois, near Charleston. Young Abe lived with them until 1830, when, at the age of 21, he set off on a flat boat delivering hogs to the market at New Orleans. On our 1994 trip, we did not visit the Charleston location. After our Indiana Lincoln visit, we spent the night at Vincennes, where a young Virginian, William Henry Harrison, was appointed Governor of the Indiana Territory in 1795.

The Harrison home in Vincennes was unlike anything in the west when it was built before 1800. Harrison had been raised in an affluent family in Tidewater Virginia (his father, Benjamin Harrison, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence), and he was used to nice things. He had fine furnishings, china, and crystal shipped by riverboat up the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers to his new home. Today, it is restored and much the way Harrison lived in it until about 1820. Harrison's later home was at North Bend, Ohio, on the Ohio River just downstream from Cincinnati. The Lincolns had crossed the Wabash into Illinois at Vincennes about 1828. We moved northwest from Vincennes to Vandalia, the second capital of the new state of Illinois in the 1830s (the first was at Kaskaskia on the Mississippi). A grand State House was built here in 1836, which stands today in excellent condition. In 1839, nine members of the Legislature including Abraham Lincoln were successful in their petition to move the capital from Vandalia to Springfield. In 1994, we, too, ended our day at Springfield, where we visited the many Lincoln sites including the restored village of New Salem for the next two days. We even bought a new sealed beam headlight for the Suburban.

Our trip home was planned for two days, with an overnight stop in western Ohio. However, Amos Bassett said he had an ancestor by the same name who was buried in a country cemetery on the Illinois-Indiana line where we would be crossing. We found the cemetery, and all of us searched. Finally as we were about to give up, the headstone was found: "Amos E. Bassett." As we moved on east of Indianapolis, I asked if the group would be interested in one more historic inn to spend the night. It was south of our route, but not by much. The response was positive, so we spent our last night at the Golden Lamb in Lebanon, Ohio, where six presidents had previously slept. I had learned of the place from Charles Kuralt's Bicentennial Series on TV, where the tavern was mentioned in his history of Ohio. I think all of us enjoyed the 10-day trip.