



Credit: Jamie Sariyavong

Lincoln Landing, Lockport

Looking for LINCOLN

By Kit Bernardi

Lawyer Abraham Lincoln spent his pre-presidential years on the Eighth Judicial Circuit and as a congressman traveling on horseback, riding in horse-drawn carriages and later aboard trains across 10,000 square miles of vast tallgrass prairies and wetlands in Central Illinois. During his career spent in the region, Lincoln met some of his dearest friends and forged professional

political alliances that propelled him to the American presidency.

Now, although visitors exploring the Illinois & Michigan Canal Heritage Corridor see mostly farm fields instead of Lincoln-era landscapes, they still discover his rich legacy through historic sites, museums and folklore.

Route 66



Livingston County Courthouse, Pontiac



Looking for Lincoln exhibit, Pontiac



Strevell House, Pontiac



Mural telling the story of Lincoln and the Strevell House, Pontiac



Looking for Lincoln exhibit at First Presbyterian Church, Pontiac

PONTIAC

While working as an itinerant circuit attorney, Abraham Lincoln practiced law and cut his political teeth in Central Illinois county seat courthouses including Pontiac's in Livingston County. A downtown wall mural portrays Lincoln's Pontiac connections.

Visitors to Pontiac gain rich insights into Lincoln's life following the town's portion of the state-wide Looking for Lincoln Trail. Pontiac's nine sites marked by informative storyboards tell of Lincoln's experiences including arguing cases and debating his future 1858 senatorial seat and 1860 presidential candidacy opponent Stephen A. Douglas, stumping during the 1860 presidential campaign and staying overnight at lawyer-friends' homes.

Looking for LINCOLN

continued

Sites include the Presbyterian Church and the Strevell House, currently under painstaking restoration. Lincoln was an overnight guest of Jason W. Strevell. In 1840, Lincoln and Douglas opposed one another trying Livingston County's first jury trial held in a log building on the serene Vermilion River. The rivals also engaged in an impromptu debate outside the Pontiac courthouse where a statue of young lawyer Lincoln stands.

OTTAWA

Abraham Lincoln's first of seven U.S. Senate seat debates against Stephen A. Douglas occurred in Ottawa, LaSalle County's government seat. Held on August 21, 1858 in Washington Square amidst festive fanfare, a reported 20,000 attendees came to hear the "Railsplitter" and "Little Giant" square off on abolishing slavery. The square's massive bronze statues poised on a platform among fountains portray animated Lincoln and Douglas seemingly paused in mid-debate.

Anchored by leafy Washington Square, Ottawa's National Historic District encompasses 1800s buildings including the Italianate Style Reddick Mansion built before the Civil War. Lincoln traveled to Ottawa to argue court cases in the LaSalle County courthouse and was friends with Ottawa attorney T. Lyle Dickey. The Lincoln-Douglas debate and other Ottawa historical events are portrayed in colorful murals downtown.

The horse-drawn, elegant black leather carriage Lincoln rode in from the Rock Island train station to the Ottawa senatorial Douglas debate is exhibited in Utica's LaSalle County Historical Society Museum. The museum in a former Illinois & Michigan Canal warehouse built



Washington Square, Ottawa

in 1848 also displays a silver tea set Lincoln purportedly sipped from at Ottawa Mayor J.O. Glover's home after the debate. The cruet set from LaSalle Mayor Alexander Campbell's home adorned his dining room where Lincoln supped as they likely discussed his congressional run, evidenced by the exhibit's copy of a letter Lincoln wrote dated June 25, 1858 confirming a \$500 campaign contribution promise Campbell made back in 1851.

MORE Lincoln

SITES

These towns also connect their history to Abraham Lincoln's.

LOCKPORT

Long before the first boat passed through the Illinois & Michigan Canal locks, Abraham Lincoln supported the canal project from concept to completion. The **Will County Historical Museum and Research Center** is located in the 1837 Illinois & Michigan Canal's headquarters building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1852, Lincoln was appointed a canal commissioner. Canal-front history park Lincoln Landing interprets his canal connections.

JOLIET

At a political rally held on October, 1856 in former Demmonds Woods on Joliet's West Side, Lincoln made a speech for the new Republic Party, of which he co-founded, supporting its presidential candidate General John C. Fremont and congressional candidate,



Reddick Mansion, Ottawa

abolitionist Owen Lovejoy from Princeton. A bronze Lincoln orator statue marks the historic site at the corner of Charlotte Street and Plainfield Road.

PRINCETON

On Bryant Woods Drive, a plaque marks the site where Lincoln gave a speech on July 4, 1856 in woodlands surrounding Princeton city father John H. Bryant's home. Brother of 19th century American poet William Cullen Bryant, John Bryant was one of Bureau County's earliest settlers, an ardent abolitionist and a delegate who nominated Lincoln for president at Chicago's 1860 Republican Convention. In 1862, Lincoln appointed Bryant a congressional district internal revenue collector position.

LASALLE

When U.S. Representative Lincoln and his family journeyed home to Springfield, Illinois from Washington, D.C., they traveled aboard an Illinois & Michigan Canal boat from Chicago to LaSalle, disembarking on October 8, 1848. At age 23, Lincoln re-enlisted in Ottawa for military service and marched through LaSalle County as a militiaman in the Black Hawk War of 1832.

HENNEPIN

Hennepin, named after the historic 1890 Hennepin Canal, is Putnam County's government seat. Circuit



Inside the Reddick Mansion, Ottawa

court lawyer Lincoln likely tried small claims cases in the Putnam County Courthouse built in 1825, one of the few courthouses still existing from Lincoln's circuit lawyer career. Inside the columned courthouse's vestibule there's an engraved replica of a letter Lincoln penned on October 3, 1845 to locals Williamson and Madison Durley recapping their conversation while they dug potatoes on their farm then located near the courthouse.

The Putnam County Conservation District on the Illinois River Road preserves tallgrass prairie, oak-hickory forests and wetlands reminiscent of the landscapes Lincoln once traveled. Here, it's easy to imagine Lincoln sitting in the shade, his back against a tree, open law book on his knee.

"The Lincoln Special" On May 2, 1865 thousands of mourners lined the St. Louis and Alton Railroad tracks as Abraham Lincoln's funeral train called "The Lincoln Special" traveled to Springfield through Illinois & Michigan Canal Heritage Corridor county communities including Lemont, Lockport, Elwood, Wilmington, Braceville, Gardner, Dwight, Odell, Cayuga, Pontiac and Ocoya.



Putnam County Courthouse

Credit: Instagram GirlsRoadTrip