

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.

Work Report: On Tuesday, January 31, 14 volunteers were on hand as follows: Mark Bodestab (in charge), John Bacino, Anne Cleary, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Jerry Lucas, Tom Marshall, Brent McDougall, Mark Russell, John Schubel, Mac Taylor, Larry Tennity, Jay Williams, and Ron Yabroff. The sheet of Masonite was cut and fit onto the top of the steel table, being prepared for a work bench. The '37 Packard was started and moved on its own power to the museum for temporary storage while the garage floor is painted and cured. A problem developed in the starter switch, which will be addressed. The Lionel train crew completed the helix-controller installation, and they are developing an operating manual for the trains. Also, they began the installation of more plexiglass fencing to protect trains on the high line and also the young public.

The basement was cleaned further by the A.V.R.R. crew in preparation for painting. On the Model 87, the boiler try-cock was re-aligned and the burner mudded up further where the superheater ends come through to the outside. The batteries on the Rauch & Lang electric were checked and water was added.

On Wednesday, February 1, four volunteers were on hand: Richard Bernard (in charge), Bill Schwoebel, Lou Mandich, and Tom Marshall, with Steve Bryce and Mark Russell passing through. The right rear tire on the Model T Ford was repaired with replacement of the inner tube; all was mounted, and pressure was put up to about 60 lbs. A section of the carriage house floor was cleared for scraping, cleaning and repainting. The steel bench was moved inside for painting and for the fastening down of the new Masonite top.

The tire pressure was checked on the '37 Packard, and the tires were inflated to about 35 lbs. Running board measurements were fine-tuned for the new linoleum on the 1912 Stanley Model 87. The proper aluminum trim is being sought. Several fluorescent light fixtures in the carriage house were checked, but we don't appear to have the right kind of tubes to make them light.

On Thursday, February 2, seven volunteers answered the call: Ted Kamen (in charge), Bob Jordan, Jim Personti, Steve Bryce, Larry Tennity, Lou Mandich and Tom Marshall. The steel bench was painted grey. The starter button on the '37 Packard was removed, and it was obvious that the Bakelite insulation therein had deteriorated, preventing proper electrical contact. A fibre spacer was fabricated and installed along with some epoxy to replace the Bakelite, which should solve the problem. On this car, the vacuum motor for the windshield wipers needs rebuilding, which was studied by Jim and Lou. Either a replacement motor or new gaskets should solve the problem.

The previously mounted tire on the Model T Ford was checked, and all is good. An attempt was made to replace the fluorescent tubes in the carriage house, but it was believed that the fixtures do not match the tubes presently available. Holes were drilled in the steel table for fastening down the plywood and the Masonite top.

On Friday, a portion of the carriage house floor, previously unpainted for many years, was cleaned and painted. A number of FAHP volunteers dropped by during the day. Bill Rule discovered a small leak in the return line on the heating system in the carriage house. Jerry Novak found that our fears about the fluorescent tubes were unfounded, as he purchased the correct tubes to fit our old fixtures and installed them. Bob Koury installed several new ties on the A.V.R.R. trestle that had been cut to size by Tom Smith of State Parks. Rose Ann Hoover dropped off supplies for our Annual Meeting on February 7. Tom and Bucky tried to repair the leak in the heating system, which will be addressed again over the weekend.