

## Civil War and Reconstruction: Lincoln Was Here

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### Article

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (Achieve3000, February 7, 2008). Most people are not aware that a summer cottage used by President Abraham Lincoln still stands. It is about three miles (4.8 kilometers) from the White House. Even Lincoln experts thought that it had long since been torn down. In the late 1990s, however, the cottage was rediscovered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Then, in 2000, President Bill Clinton declared it a national monument. Now, the home has been restored. It opened to the public as a museum on February 18, 2008.

Lincoln's presidency lasted from 1861 to 1865. During that time, the land around the cottage was a sprawling property surrounded by farms. The house was two stories high and had four bedrooms. Historians say that Lincoln and his family used the summer home for several years of his presidency, including during the Civil War.

Why did the Lincolns use a summer cottage? In part, Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln used the home as a refuge after the death of their 11-year-old son Willie. Also, the family needed a relaxing place to go. The cottage received cool breezes and provided relief from the city's warm climate. In addition, the cottage gave Lincoln a retreat from the pressures of being a wartime president.

"I'm convinced personally that he would have stayed here year-round if he could have," said Frank Milligan. He is the head of the new museum. "[Lincoln] didn't like the White House. We do know that."

Until a few years ago, historians knew little about the home. The original furniture was missing. There were no photographs of the inside to help them recreate what the cottage looked like. Also, government records provided few clues about what went on inside the home. To decorate the cottage, officials found some Civil War-time furnishings. The furniture was not used by Lincoln but by others during that time. Historians used diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts to piece together the Lincolns' life inside the cottage.

Visitors to the cottage can get to know who Lincoln was as a person. Sound clips and videos of actors recreate stories from the cottage. Some historians believe that Lincoln may have written the Emancipation Proclamation there, though others do not agree.

"[Lincoln] paced these floors thinking about [whether to free the slaves]," Milligan said. Lincoln knew what an important act it was.



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

*During his presidency, Abraham Lincoln spent summers with his family at this cottage in Washington, D.C.*

"If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it," Lincoln said. He was talking about the Emancipation Proclamation.

Visitors to the cottage can learn about family life at the home. They can also find out about Lincoln's daily journey on horseback to the White House. The president tipped his hat to poet Walt Whitman regularly as he passed by.

It was risky for Lincoln to travel alone through Washington, D.C. during the war. Washington is close to Virginia, which was then controlled by the South. At first, Lincoln rode alone through the city streets. Later, troops were sent to ride with him. In spite of this, someone shot at Lincoln in 1864. He ended up with a bullet hole through his top hat.

Officials are expecting about 45,000 visitors in the first year that the museum is open. The cottage is a fair distance from the National Mall. That is where most of the city's popular museums and memorials are located. Still, officials hope they can draw people to the cottage.

"It is off the beaten path, but I think that's one of the real values to it," said Richard Moe. He is president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "It gets people off the National Mall . . . and that's what Lincoln did. I think it will be a real destination."

*The Associated Press contributed to this story.*

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### **Dig Deeper**

As you read, President Lincoln had a lot on his mind as he walked the floors of his summer cottage. He had worked his way to being elected president, and now, the North was at war with the South. The South had formed its own nation—the Confederacy—with its own president, Jefferson Davis.

Lincoln and Davis were born in the same state. However, their paths would be very different.

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky in 1809. When he was a boy, his family moved to Illinois. Young Abe attended school for only about a year, but he loved to read and learn. In 1834, Lincoln was elected to the Illinois state legislature. In 1846, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He served one term in Washington. Then, he returned home to Illinois, where he became a successful lawyer. Throughout Lincoln's lifetime, Americans were divided over whether slavery should be legal. Soon after he was elected president in 1860, states in the South seceded, or separated, from the Union. In 1861, the Civil War began. Lincoln's goal was to bring the nation back together.

Lincoln was a master politician. He knew how to deal with difficult people and situations. His greatest speeches, including the Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural Address, helped define the meaning of the Civil War and the purpose of the United States of America. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), which was an important step toward ending slavery in the U.S. In 1865, days after the Civil War ended, Lincoln was shot and killed. His assassin, John Wilkes Booth, was a Southerner who was angry over the result of the war.

Confederate president Jefferson Davis was also born in Kentucky, in 1808. Then, his family moved to Mississippi. He became a soldier as a young man and later became a plantation owner. He served in Congress before returning to the U.S. Army to fight in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). During the 1850s, Davis served as Secretary of War in President Pierce's cabinet. Before and after his time in this role, he represented Mississippi in the United States Senate. When Mississippi left the Union, Davis resigned from this post.

At first, Davis had hoped to be a general in the Confederate army. He was not happy to have been elected president. Still, he agreed to serve. Davis did his best to hold the Confederacy together, but he faced big challenges. The Confederacy had a smaller army and far fewer industrial resources than the Union. The Confederate Congress and state leaders frequently disagreed over how the Confederacy should be governed. Helped greatly by the strong military leadership of General Robert E. Lee, the South

held its own against the Union, winning many of the war's early battles. Later in the war, however, the tide began to turn, and the future of Davis' Confederate government was in question.

A month after Lee's army surrendered, Davis was arrested. He was a prisoner for about two years. He was released without a trial. Later in life, he traveled, was briefly president of an insurance company, and wrote a book called *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*. Jefferson Davis died in 1889.

## **Dictionary**

**destination** (*noun*) a place that a person hopes to reach

**Emancipation Proclamation** (*noun*) a paper in which President Abraham Lincoln freed U.S. slaves

**monument** (*noun*) a famous place or building

**restore** (*verb*) to bring something back to the way it was

**sprawling** (*adjective*) large; spread out