

LINCOLN LORE

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BACKGROUND, ORIGIN, AND RECONSTRUCTION OF LINCOLN'S NEW SALEM

Forty-nine years ago this past week the first step in the reconstruction of New Salem was taken in the purchase by William Randolph Hearst of the 62 acre tract of ground where once stood the abandoned village of Lincoln's early Illinois years. Much confusion is caused by the terms Old Salem and New Salem as both names do not refer to the same location. The Old Salem Chautauqua Colony was located on the other side of Sangamon River at least a mile from the town where Lincoln once lived. The Chautauqua group was interested in Lincoln, however, and erected on their grounds a structure called The Lincoln Memorial Building. More confusion was caused by an organization established in 1817 calling their group the Old Salem Lincoln League, although their primary object was the restoration of New Salem.

The historical significance and reconstruction of New Salem can best be visualized by listing chronologically important episodes in the background, origin and development of the project.

1828, July 29—John Cameron and James Rutledge entered land on which New Salem became located.

1829, Jan. 22—Cameron and Rutledge received permission to build a dam and construct a mill.

1829, Oct. 23—Original plat of the town of New Salem was filed in Sangamon County recorder's office.

1829, Dec. 24—First house lot sold.

1829, Dec. 25—Post Office established.

1830—Henry Onstot built first shop.

1831, April 19—Abraham Lincoln first viewed the town.

1831, July—Lincoln decided to make New Salem his home.

1836, Feb.—Town of Petersburg surveyed by Lincoln.

1837, April 15—Lincoln left New Salem to make his home in Springfield.

1839—Petersburg made county seat of Menard.

1840—More than half of the residents of New Salem moved to Petersburg.

1845—Only two buildings left at New Salem now called "an abandoned town."

1874—Old settlers of Menard County had first meeting where New Salem once stood.

1884—Correspondent of *Chicago Tribune* visited location. He said, "there is not a house in sight."

1891—Profile of Lincoln was carved by Frank Phillips in a sycamore, one

of the three trees on the site where the Lincoln-Berry store once stood. The tree was destroyed in 1918.

1895, Dec.—*McClure's Magazine* reports study of New Salem site by J. McCann Davis.

1898, October 1—Old Salem Chautauqua Association incorporated, the organization taking the initiative in the restoration of the town.

1902—T. G. Onstot published his book *Pioneers of Menard and Mason County* featuring New Salem.

1906, Aug. 18—Site of New Salem consisting of 62 acres purchased for \$11,000 by William Randolph Hearst.

1907, Aug. 7—Old Salem Chautauqua printed program "gratefully acknowledges the noble generosity and public spirit of the Hon. William Randolph Hearst in the purchasing and donation to the chautauqua association of the historic home of Abraham Lincoln at Old Salem (New Salem) where Lincoln lived, kept store and was himself postmaster."

1917, Feb. 15—First meeting of newly organized Old Salem Lincoln League held in Christian Church at Petersburg.

1917—Old Salem Chautauqua Association reorganized.

1917—Old Salem Chautauqua Association with all old settlers invited to furnish information about the early town.

1918, Jan. 4—Old Salem Lincoln League granted a charter.

1918, March 18—League published a pamphlet entitled *Prospectus of the Old Salem League*.

1918, April 3—Old Salem Chautauqua Association jointly with Mr. Hearst deeds the 62 acres to the state.

1918—State purchased additional 20 acres.

1918, July 30.—Old Salem League observed "House Raising Day" and constructs replicas of The Rutledge Tavern, Lincoln-Berry Store, Offut Store, Hill-McNamara Store and Dr. Allen's residence. (Later these were razed to make way for more authentic structures).

1918—The Izaak Walton Club built mill dam and acquired the necessary land which would be submerged.

1918, Sept. 6, 7—Old Salem Lincoln League put on centennial pageantry.

1919, April 3—New Salem State Park created by act of legislature.

1921, Feb. 12—Birthday celebration with tribute to Hearst for his gift.

1921, May 20—Dedication of Museum building.

1922—Onstot Cooper shop removed from Petersburg and rebuilt at New Salem by Old Salem League.

1931—Illinois General Assembly appropriated \$50,000 for improvements at Park.

1932, Oct. 21—Proposals on construction solicited by state.

1932, Nev. 4—Contract let for the construction of 12 cabins.

1932, Nov. 17—Cornerstone of Lincoln-Berry store laid as first of the reconstructed buildings.

1933, Feb. 12—Bust of Lincoln dedicated on the 100th anniversary of his appointment as postmaster of the town.

1933, Oct. 26—Dedication of these 13 cabins:

Henry Onstot's Residence
Onstot's Cooper Shop
Miller and Kelso Residence
Robert Johnson Residence
Martin Waddell Residence
Dr. Francis Regnier's Office
Peter Lukins' Residence
Samuel Hill's Residence
Dr. John Allen's Residence
Hill-McNamar Store
Berry-Lincoln Store
Denton Offut's Store
Clary's Grocery

1936—Wagon Wheel Inn erected by state at entrance of park.

1937, June 17—Dedication of Rutledge Tavern, Trent Brothers' Cabin and Isaac Gollither's Cabin, also pageant presented entitled "The Salem Years."

1938—The Isaac Burner Cabin and Onstot Cooper's Shop constructed.

1939—Miller's Blacksmith Shop with "smithy" tools completed.

1940, Feb. 12—Post office known as Lincoln's New Salem established.

1940, Sept. 26-28—First folk festival "Out of the Wilderness" depicting Lincoln's New Salem days.

1942—New Salem Grist and Saw Mill completed.

1945—By this date, Rowan Herndon's Residence, Hill's Carding Mill and Wool House, the First Lincoln-Berry Store and the Mentor Graham School and Church structure were completed.

1951—New Salem Lodge, a modern motel erected opposite entrance to park.

1954, June 21—Heroic bronze statue of Lincoln by Avard Fairbanks dedicated at New Salem.

1955—The most recent printing of the folder *New Salem State Park* issued by the state of Illinois notes: "Thirteen cabins, plus the Rutledge Tavern, and ten shops, stores, industries and a church and school cabin have been reproduced and furnished as they were in the year 1830."