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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## New Salem Celebrates Lincoln's Arrival

In 1828 entrepreneur John M. Camron bought land on the Sangamon River near Petersburg. Later, he dammed the river to build a saw and grist mill for the new town of Salem, Illinois. Good thing, too. If he hadn't, central Illinois might never have seen the likes of Abraham Lincoln.

That dam forced Lincoln into Salem 175 years ago. New Salem, as it's now called, has planned some special events this summer to celebrate the anniversary of his arrival in 1831.

Lincoln was 22 years old then and he'd been living with his family near Decatur, Illinois, according to David Hedrick, site manager for Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site. A businessman named Denton Offutt was in that area and must have hired Lincoln to pilot a flatboat for him from central Illinois to New Orleans. Lincoln had worked on a flatboat once before, as his father had, so he had experience.



### Rocking the Boat

Offutt hired a couple other men as crew and told them he'd have the boat waiting at Beardstown. But he didn't. Then he told them he'd have it waiting at Sangamo Town (which was located 7 miles downstream from Springfield, though the river runs north in that area). Again, he didn't. (Offutt was a bit of a schemer with lots of grand, and often unfinished, plans. After he left New Salem, he became wanted in another state, Hedrick says.)

"So Lincoln and his two partners arrived at Sangamo Town to find the boat wasn't even constructed," Hedrick says. "They contracted with Offutt to build this boat and each was paid \$12 for it." It took them

about a month.

At Sangamo Town Lincoln hired John E. Roll to help, according to Roll's recollection from the August 25, 1895 Chicago Sunday Times-Herald. Roll made pins for the boat's construction, he said. "We launched her there (at Sangamo Town) and she got a good deal of water in her, and we got her down as far as Salem dam, and there she stuck, with her bow over the dam." This was only a day or two into their long trip.

Accounts vary, but the date was around April 19, 1831. "Lincoln is credited for his mechanical ability and ingenuity to get this boat over the mill dam," says Hedrick, New Salem site manager. He borrowed an auger from Salem's cooper, Henry Onstot, who made buckets and barrels. "Lincoln unloaded some of the cargo off the boat and shifted some to the other

end and drilled a hole in the portion that was sticking over the dam."

"Looks like a funny way to get water out of a boat, to bore a hole in the bottom," Roll said in the 1895 paper, "but if the bottom is sticking out in the air, it is all right, I guess."

With the boat free, Lincoln and his crew continued their journey. They dropped Offutt off in St. Louis and continued to New Orleans. After unloading their cargo and selling the boat there for construction lumber (which was the practice for all flatboats), Lincoln headed back to Salem.

### Making Central Illinois Home

"Somewhere between getting stuck on the mill dam at New Salem and Offutt's departure at St.

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## NEW SALEM

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*Photo Courtesy of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site*

Louis, Offutt and Lincoln had decided that New Salem had potential to be a place to work and live, and the story is Offutt offered Lincoln a job,”

Hedrick explains. “Offutt said he’d go back to New Salem, open a store and he’d hire Lincoln to clerk it.” Neither had seen the town before their boat got stuck there.

Lincoln took a steamboat up to St. Louis and walked the rest of the way to New Salem, Hedrick says. But that wasn’t unusual since there were no other modes of transportation.

He worked in Offutt’s store, but it didn’t last a year.

“All the time (Lincoln) was running the store he had been studying law,” Roll said in the 1895 article. “He would walk up here to Springfield, twenty miles,



*Photo Courtesy of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site*

and borrow books from Major Stuart and read them, and bring them back... One time I remember I saw him out here on the Salem road

walking along and reading one book, with another under his arm. He got tired and sat down on a log to rest. And while he rested he went on reading.”

New Salem was a kind of proving ground for Lincoln. There he tried several occupations and grew into adulthood. “Lincoln had many challenges at New Salem (including getting stuck in the flatboat),” Hedrick says. While he failed at many of the enterprises he tried there, Lincoln overcame his failures and challenges. “He served in the Black Hawk War, he failed at the store business, he lost his first election when he ran for office, but he came back and ran again and was elected state representative.” He also worked as post master and deputy surveyor at New Salem.

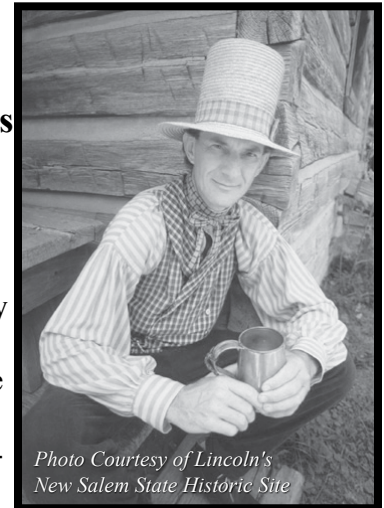
Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield in April, 1837 after the legislature, largely upon his encouragement as a representative, voted Springfield the state’s new capital.

“This New Salem town that only lasted about 10 years played a pretty important part of his life,” Hedrick says. “If that flatboat had sailed comfortably over the dam and they didn’t stop, I’m confident he never would have been back here.”

## Anniversary Plans

It’s only fitting then, that New Salem celebrate Lincoln’s arrival by building a flatboat. This is no easy task. There aren’t any flatboat plans and there are no sketches of Lincoln’s flatboat. “Everybody wants to know if it’s going to be exactly like Lincoln’s and we don’t know,” Hedrick explains. “There’s really no evidence to tell us what Lincoln’s flatboat looked like or exactly how big it was.”

Theirs is going to be about 30 feet long and 12 feet wide. “We’ve looked at a lot of photographs and drawings, and there are really no two alike. So we’re incorporating some of the principles that appear to be present in some of these drawings.” Staff have also consulted an archaeologist who researched a flatboat discovered on the Ohio River and visited a flatboat



*Photo Courtesy of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site*



*Photo Courtesy of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site*

built in Kentucky. "But it's filled with Styrofoam," Hedrick laughs. "It's very buoyant, but it's terribly historically inappropriate."

Staff and volunteers hope to start building the flatboat this month and hope to have it finished in time to be displayed at the dam this summer.

On July 8th, New Salem will also sponsor a reunion for direct descendants of New Salem residents. The day will be full of activities open to the public as well, including period entertainment, demonstrations, wagon rides, a picnic, an archaeology walk, and an evening performance of the musical, "Abraham," among other events.

For more information, contact Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site at 217/632-4000, or visit its Web site at: [www.lincolnsnewsalem.com](http://www.lincolnsnewsalem.com).



## Primary Results are In

On April 21, the Illinois State Board of Elections posted the official results of the March 2006 primary elections. (Detailed results are available at the Board's Web site: [www.elections.il.gov](http://www.elections.il.gov).)

State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka and Governor Rod Blagojevich won their respective party's nominations for governor. Topinka beat the Republican's second-place candidate, dairy businessman Jim Oberweis, by about 47,000 votes. Ron Gidwitz, former head of the Illinois State Board of Election, State Senator Bill Brady, and Andy Martin also ran for the Republican nomination.

Blagojevich handily beat former Chicago Alderman Edwin Eisendrath to win his party's candidacy.

The lieutenant governor winners are DuPage County State's Attorney Joe Birkett for the Republicans and Lt. Governor Pat Quinn for the Democrats. Birkett faced State Senator Steve Rauschenberger, Kane County Recorder of Deeds Sandy Wegman, and attorney Lawrence Bruckner in the primary.

In the State Treasurer race, Chicagoan Alexander Giannoulis will be the Democrat's candidate; he beat Knox County State's Attorney Paul Mangieri. State Senator Christine Radogno will be the Republican's candidate; she was unopposed.

In the Secretary of State race, incumbent Jesse White will be the Democratic candidate and Dan Rutherford will be the Republican; each ran unopposed in the primary.

Incumbent Daniel Hynes will be the Democratic candidate for the Comptroller's race and Carole Pankau will be the Republican; neither had an opponent in the primary.

Incumbent Lisa Madigan will be the Democratic candidate for the Attorney General's office and Stewart Umholtz will be the Republican candidate; each was unopposed.

*Here are the statewide vote totals:*

### **Governor:**

<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
Topinka - 280,701	Blagojevich - 669,006
Oberweis - 233,576	Eisendrath - 275,375
Brady - 135,370	Davis - 16
Gidwitz - 80,068	
Martin - 6,095	

### **Lt. Governor:**

<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
Birkett - 342,950	Quinn - 819,005
Rauschenberger - 202,905	Schadow - 17
Wegman - 90,255	
Bruckner - 41,307	
Cole - 14	

### **Treasurer:**

<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
Radogno - 576,174	Giannoulis - 536,329
	Mangieri - 331,672



## Capitol Matters: The Donners Depart

One hundred sixty years ago, an ill-fated and now infamous group of settlers from Springfield and the Midwest left the capital city for what they hoped would be a better life in California.

The so-called “Donner Party” departed from Springfield on April 14, 1846. While accounts differ, one traveler (Eliza Donner Houghton) said they



Artist rendering of the "Donner Party" from the Library of Congress American Memory Collection

departed from the current Statehouse grounds, where they'd spent the night.

After a harsh, and in some cases, fatal journey, the exhausted party was stranded in the Sierra Nevada mountains

just one day short of its destination. The emigrants were trapped there by the worst winter in years. Half perished. Some survivors were accused of cannibalism. Archaeologists have disproved some of those accusations recently.



*Eliza P. Donner Houghton*



## Transitions

**Richard Norton Smith** left his job as head of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) on March 20. He will join George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia as a scholar-in-residence. **Tom Schwartz** is the ALPLM interim director.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation created a seven-member search committee in March to work with Heidrick and Struggles, an executive search firm, to find a new director. Candidates' names will eventually be presented to the Foundation Board and to the governor, according to ALPLM spokeswoman **Jill Burwitz**. “No decision had been made whether two directors will be selected or whether the positions will be combined. The search can take up to several months.”

Former **State Representative Herbert Huskey**, an Oak Lawn Republican, passed away March 22. He was 89.

