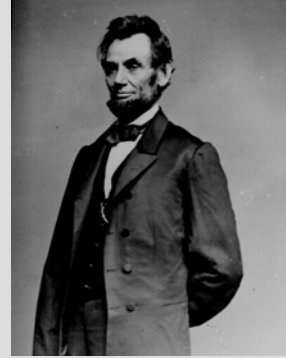


# Lincoln's Louisville

## Lincoln's Louisville: Local Influences that Altered American History

By Steve Wiser, AIA

Abraham Lincoln was a native Kentuckian. His strong ties to the state though didn't occur until he settled in Springfield, Illinois. In Springfield, Lincoln established significant relationships to Kentucky, particularly Louisville, that would influence the remainder of his life.



*A young  
Joshua Fry Speed*

Lincoln's Louisville connections began on April 15, 1837. On this date, he met Joshua Fry Speed, a transplanted Louisvillian and an enduring personal friendship evolved. Lincoln walked into Speed's Springfield general store and sought to purchase merchandise. Not having enough money to pay, Lincoln's wit and humble nature impressed Speed, who then befriended Lincoln, allowing him to share room and board.

After the death of his father Judge John Speed, Joshua relocated back to his Farmington estate outside Louisville in 1841 to assist his mother Lucy in managing the family plantation.



*Mary Todd, 28  
years of age*



Abraham Lincoln, despondent over his failing efforts to court Mary Todd, wrote to his friend Joshua saying that a change of scenery might do him good and that he would visit Speed. In late August 1841, Lincoln arrived in Louisville.

Louisville's population was about 21,300 and was the country's sixteenth largest city. It was a town of low-rise structures, mainly developed from the Ohio River south to Prather Street (whose name was changed to Broadway in the 1850's), on the east to Bardstown Pike, and the city of Portland on the west.



*1832 Map of Louisville*



*1840 View of Louisville waterfront*

## Lincoln's Louisville



*Jefferson County Courthouse began construction in 1836 and was completed in 1860.*

Under construction was the massive Jefferson County Courthouse. Being a lawyer, Lincoln most likely saw it, and inquired about its design.

He may also have entered the just completed (1837) Bank of Louisville for a financial transaction, (which is now Actors Theater on West Main, between Second and Third). These are the only two remaining prominent buildings from this era in downtown.



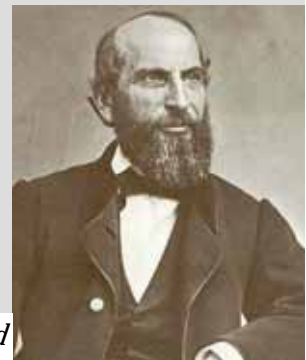
As Lincoln journeyed out Bardstown Pike, he went past a rural landscape of farms and agricultural fields. Cave Hill farm would not become a cemetery for another seven years. Other structures along Bardstown Pike that still exist from 1841 include "Hayfield" (*right*) on Tyler Lane. It was built circa 1834 by Col. George Hancock. And, Bray House at 2227 Bashford Manor Lane, constructed in 1796 by Samuel Bray.



Farmington, built in 1815, is the last of these four structures standing in 1841 that Lincoln would have encountered. Containing Jeffersonian aesthetic features, the design is associated with Thomas Jefferson. The family matriarch, Lucy Fry Speed, was related to Dr. Thomas Walker, who was a guardian to a young

Thomas Jefferson. No direct link though has ever been documented confirming Jefferson's involvement with the design.

While in Louisville, Lincoln is known to have visited the downtown law office of James Speed, brother of Joshua, near Fourth and Green (now Liberty) Streets. James would later become Attorney General for Lincoln in December, 1864.



*Right: James Speed*

## Lincoln's Louisville

Lincoln departed in early September 1841 after spending three weeks. Illinois courts were in recess during his visit and they were soon to reconvene, so he returned to resume his legal work. Lincoln's courtship to Mary Todd was revitalized and they were married on November 4, 1842.

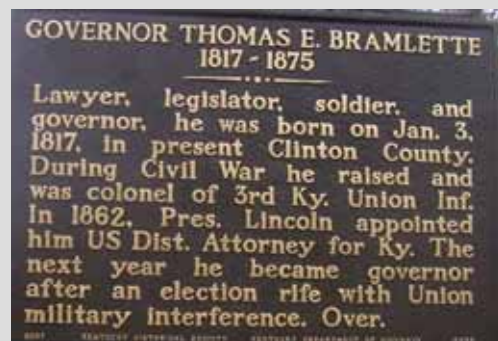
Lincoln never returned, but he did visit his in-laws, the Todd's, in Lexington three times (1842, 1847, and 1849). Joshua maintained communication with Lincoln and visited him in Washington. He used his wealth and political power to keep Kentucky from seceding to join the south.



When Lincoln became president, Joshua recommended several of his friends for cabinet posts. One was James Guthrie. Guthrie was "Mr. Louisville", a prominent civic leader. He helped create the University of Louisville, Jefferson County Courthouse, Portland Canal, first bridge across the Ohio River, and the L & N Railroad. Guthrie served as Secretary of the Treasury under President Franklin Pierce. He declined a position in Lincoln's administration due to his age, but he lobbied Lincoln as part of a peace initiative to prevent the Civil War.

With its border location, Louisville played a prominent role in the Civil War. Thousands of Union troops were headquartered in the city. Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman met at the old Galt House to plan the 'March thru the South', which ultimately decided the war. Over 5,000 Union soldiers, who died in various regional battles like Perryville, are buried in Cave Hill Cemetery. Also buried here are over 200 Confederate troops who died in local prisons.

Thomas Bramlette is buried as well in Cave Hill Cemetery, within a few feet of General George Rogers Clark, the founder of the city. Bramlette was Kentucky governor (1863 to 1867) during the Civil War. He had numerous disagreements with Lincoln's policies and how they were implemented in 'neutral' Kentucky.



A simple reminder of Lincoln in Cave Hill can be found on a small headstone inscription that reads "Ludwig Abraham Lincoln Klein, 1861 - 1865". While the parents of young Ludwig admired Lincoln enough to use his name for their child, the overwhelming majority of Kentuckians did not.



By Steve Wiser, AIA

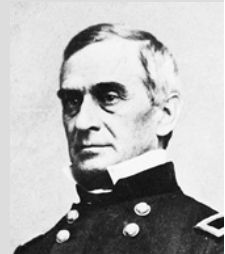
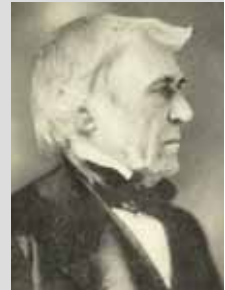
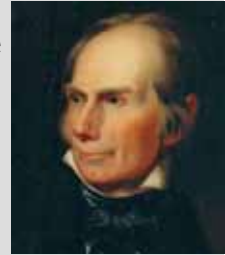
[www.WiserDesigns.com](http://www.WiserDesigns.com) [WiserAIA@Hotmail.com](mailto:WiserAIA@Hotmail.com)

## Lincoln's Louisville

In the election of 1860, Lincoln received about 1% of the state vote for president, and the election of 1864, he came in second to George McClellan, a Union general that he had dismissed.

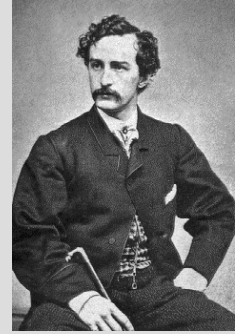
Additional Louisville connections to Lincoln include:

- Lincoln's political mentor was the legendary Kentucky U. S. **Senator Henry Clay**, who was a Whig, the fore-runner to the Republican Party that Lincoln would soon head. Clay's son married Julia Prather who was the daughter of wealthy Louisville businessman Thomas Prather (of which the previously mentioned Prather Street was named for.)  
•
- **Zachary Taylor** was another political leader that Lincoln had become allied with while he was a U. S. Representative from 1847 to 1849. When Taylor became president, he offered Lincoln a political position in the Northwest Territory, which he declined. Taylor is buried near his family home Springfield, off Brownsboro Road.
- **Robert Anderson** was the Union commander at Fort Sumter when Confederate forces attacked it to begin the Civil War. Anderson was a Louisville native, whose father Richard (a Revolutionary War veteran) built 'Soldier's Retreat' off Hurstborne Parkway. Anderson also had a young Lincoln serve with him during the Blackhawk War.
- **Henry Watterson**, the famed publisher of the Courier-Journal, was born in Washington, D. C. He claimed that, at 21 years of age, he stood near Lincoln during his first inaugural address.
- **John B. Castleman**, whose statue stands prominently in Cherokee Triangle, was a confederate rebel and rode with John Hunt Morgan's raiders. He was captured in Indiana, and at the request of a Castleman relative, Lincoln intervened and spared Castleman from execution.



## Lincoln's Louisville

- **Bland Ballard**, whose family operated Ballard Mills on Logan Street, was named a federal judge by Lincoln.
- **John Wilkes Booth** appeared at Louisville's Woods Theater (northeast corner of Jefferson and Fourth) from January 17th to January 30th, 1864. He appeared in several different plays such as Richard III and Macbeth. Booth was advertised as Louisville's favorite young tragedian. He was only 26, but within just over a year, his name would be forever linked infamously to Lincoln.



*Great friends:  
Abraham Lincoln  
and  
Joshua Fry Speed  
(1861)*



- And, perhaps the most fateful link: **what if Lincoln was never born?** This scenario might have occurred if Lincoln's father Thomas had been killed during an Indian raid just outside Louisville near Long Run Creek. In May, 1786, Thomas was assisting his father (also named Abraham) in planting a cornfield when Indians attacked. Abraham was mortally wounded while Thomas and his two brothers survived. Thomas' brush with death almost changed the course of American history.

Lincoln's early years were spent near Hodgenville, Kentucky, and he grew up in southern Indiana, with his adult years in central Illinois. He had numerous notable acquaintances and experiences. But, his connections to Louisville, Kentucky, perhaps had the most impact on his life's achievements.

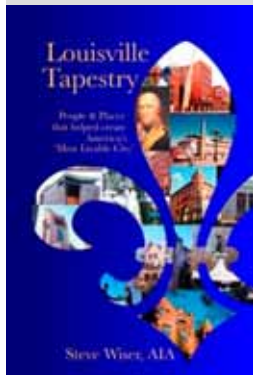
From the friendship with Joshua Speed and courtship of Mary Todd, to maintaining Kentucky part of the union and where the decisive strategy to end the Civil War was plotted, Louisville had a central role in shaping Abraham Lincoln's historic legacy.

*Appreciation and credit is extended to the following for assisting in this article: Thomas Noland; John Kleber; Kentucky Historical Society; Bryan Bush; and Lee Squires.*

*(Steve Wiser, AIA, is a Louisville architect and historian. He can be contacted at WiserAIA@Hotmail.com or via his website at www.WiserDesigns.com )*

## Lincoln's Louisville

Interested in learning more about Louisville architecture and history?  
Then purchase one or all 3 of the following items prepared by Steve Wiser:



**“Louisville Tapestry: People & Places who helped create America's Most Livable City”, 144 pages, over 100 b & w images, 2009.**

**Cost: \$15 (includes shipping and handling)**

From the Olmsted Parks and landmark architecture, to fascinating tales on notable businesses and personalities, this book explains how the city evolved to its current state. Great for both native Louisvillians as well as new residents!



**“Louisville Landmarks & Legends”, 25 minute DVD video, over 200 color images, 2008**

**Cost \$10 (includes shipping and handling)**

This DVD features Louisville's legendary business leaders and landmark businesses such as Col. Sanders, John Schnatter, J. Graham Brown, Al Schneider, and Tom Simons, along with landmark businesses like Humana, UPS, Hillerich & Bradsby, and Churchill Downs, among many others. In 25 minutes you learn many important aspects of Louisville!



**“Louisville 2035”, 144 pages, over 100 b & w images, 2008**

**Cost: \$8 (includes shipping and handling)**

What will look like in 25 years? This is Steve Wiser's conjecture of how the city will evolve. It also contains many historical backgrounds on the city's past developments and civic leaders. Several of these proposals have already started to happen! Find out more in this intriguing futuristic vision.

**To order, mail a check payable to “Steve Wiser”  
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**Steve Wiser is a Louisville architect and historian.  
For more info on Steve, click on his website  
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