

Lincoln's 1835 Survey Donated

by Robert E. Church, Executive Director
Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association

The original survey prepared in 1835 by Abraham Lincoln for John Kennedy Kincaid was donated to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

Lincoln and Kennedy were both from Kentucky and were in their mid-twenties when they arrived in central Illinois. Lincoln settled in New Salem where he was a store clerk and a surveyor. Kincaid, an abolitionist educated in Greek and Latin, began buying up property and farmland a few miles east of New Salem.

Deputy Sangamon County Surveyor Abe Lincoln helped Kennedy Kincaid establish the boundaries of his properties midway between Athens and New Salem. The land was to supply Kincaid timber for his homestead. Decades later, the Kincaid family had the survey document framed, and it was passed down through the generations and proudly displayed.

At first glance, the document is no different than any other 19th century piece of bureaucracy—except for the “A. Lincoln” signature down at the bottom of the page in the future president’s handwriting.

Kim Bauer, Lincoln curator, at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, sees more of the man in the document who prepared it.

“It shows that Lincoln can take a complex subject such as surveying, and boil it down to its basics,” Bauer said. “Lincoln had the ability to take a subject and master it within a six-month period after taking it up. It’s a nice example of a larger story.”

Lincoln’s first survey was performed in 1835. Surveying was one of the first jobs where he had an opportunity to go out, meet people, talk to them, and learn what matters to them,” Bauer said.

In 1976, Kincaid’s great-grandson, also named John Kennedy Kincaid, and his wife Margaret, took the survey plat to Springfield and had it appraised. When they were told it was worth about \$20,000, its life as a conversation piece ended. “I took it to the lock box that afternoon,” recalled Margaret Kincaid, whose husband died in 1996.

Kincaid and her family decided to donate

the survey to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. A ceremony was held in the museum’s *Treasures Gallery* where the survey plat will be on display along with the Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address and Lincoln’s original survey plat of the town of Huron, Illinois.

“It needs to be in a place that is humidly controlled,” Margaret Kincaid said. The family has been discussing how the document might be pre-



From left to right: Robert E. Church, Executive Director of the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association and Mrs. J. Kennedy (Margaret) Kincaid, Jr., holding a copy of the John Kennedy Kincaid survey performed by Abraham Lincoln in 1835.

served, and the new museum is “the logical place,” she said. Kincaid also said it’s time for the survey to belong to the public.

Historians have known about the document for years. John Kennedy’s brother, Archibald, also had property surveyed by Lincoln, and copies of the survey plats have appeared in books.

The original survey plat, kept until recently in a safe deposit box in a Petersburg bank, was re-appraised since 1976. Kincaid would not disclose the reassessed value of the document, but she did indicate that had a buyer paid \$20,000 for it in 1976, it would have been a very good investment.

[For more information, call Bob Church at (217) 498-8102 or e-mail iplsa@springnet1.com]