

Authentic Landscape or Field of Dreams?



Interpreting Authenticity at

Lincoln's New Salem State

Historic Site

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Introduction

In hindsight, much can be made of the way in which Abraham Lincoln arrived at New Salem, Illinois, where he was to live for more than half a decade before making Springfield his home. In the spring of 1831, the 22-year old came upon the newly founded village aboard a flatboat bound for New Orleans. As the boat and its cargo floated downstream heading for the Illinois River and on to the Mississippi, it came upon a small dam. The water being low, the boat was forced to seek the deepest water in the middle part of the river, but became high-grounded on the dam. It took several townspeople to assist the crew to free the boat from its hitch, allowing it to continue its journey. (Metaphorically, young Lincoln, drifting on a path of least resistance, was caught in the current of his own destiny, and, requiring time to develop stronger fortitude before being swept on to greater challenges, was made to pause long enough to negotiate a gauntlet of character-building experiences that would serve him well in the years ahead). The boat's owner and entrepreneur, Denton Offutt, having spent time there because of this inconvenience, decided New Salem was a good place to open a store and hired the young Lincoln as his clerk. And so, in the late summer of 1831 after the return trip from the southern port, Lincoln arrived at the place he would call home for the next six years.¹ By the time Lincoln left for Springfield in 1837, the town had already started to decline. Only founded in 1829, New Salem was eventually abandoned by 1841 due to the creation of Menard County and Petersburg as the County Seat. The town would have been lost to posterity, like hundreds of other pioneer villages across the country, were it not for their future famous resident, Abraham Lincoln. The high bluff where the town once stood – now a pasture – laid fallow for many years, not having any attention except from its owner, Jacob Bale, himself a former denizen of the berg. Only when Lincoln was nominated for the presidency

¹ Old Salem Lincoln League, *Lincoln and New Salem*. (The Old Salem Lincoln League: 1918), 19; Thomas, *Lincoln's New Salem*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988.

in 1860 did his campaign workers find fertile soil in New Salem as part of Lincoln's roots, and created the now famous "Honest Abe," "Lincoln the Rail-Splitter," "Man of Humble Beginnings" persona. After his assassination in 1865, Lincoln's first biographer and former law partner, William Herndon, took up in earnest the process of collecting as many oral history accounts by those who knew the Great Emancipator. From that time forward, attention turned to Lincoln's pre-presidential years, and the fascination in New Salem took on a life of its own. Locals started coming to the place that helped mold Lincoln from a backcountry, nearly illiterate youth into a budding politician and lawyer with great potential awaiting in the new capital of Springfield and 24 years later, Washington, D.C.

Over the course of 180 years, the physical and cultural geography of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site has been made, remade, undone, and remade again. The reconstruction of the village that exists now is very different from the one that served as an actual pioneering commercial center in the middle of the Sangamon Prairie. Many scholars have written about the authenticity of cultural and historic landscapes, so placing Lincoln's New Salem within that larger context is a valuable exercise in understanding how the struggle of defining the term, "authentic" has contributed to the park's current interpretation. Those who had a hand in its reconstruction and preservation have had their own definitions of how to best recreate and represent this historic town. All have striven for a version of authenticity that best portrays – in their minds – the village's history to a fact-starved, Lincoln-obsessed culture. However, many varieties of authenticity exist, causing debate among historians and the general public who feel a certain accuracy must be portrayed that does not violate their personal value judgment of the site.

After reading many primary and secondary sources about authenticity, landscapes, and Lincoln's New Salem, careful analysis has led to asking and answering two significant questions: 1) What does it mean to be historically or culturally "authentic?" and 2) How much change can

occur to an historic landscape and still maintain a sense of authenticity to a particular period of time? My contention is that of the constructivist mindset. While empirical evidence is foundational in creating a baseline of “authenticity,” a complete recovery of an historic site is impossible. In the end, the evaluation and value judgment of the landscape’s authenticity is conducted by the individual viewer. What each visitor takes away from the experience is more important than cold, hard facts because he draws upon his own experiences, thereby causing the connection to resonate more intimately, creating a deeper memory. This paper will outline the key terms and concepts of landscape, as well as the varying definitions of authenticity. These ideas form the basis of the discussion about the continual evolution of the interpretation of this once rural vernacular landscape as it was transformed from a pioneer village into one of the most frequented Lincoln sites in Illinois and the country.

Historiography

It is important to first understand the definitions used by the governing authority of most of the cultural and historical landscapes in the United States as well as Lincoln’s New Salem. The National Park Service, founded in 1916, has defined cultural landscapes as, “A geographic area...associated with a historic event, activity or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.”² This entity has established and requires very strict guidelines as to what is considered “historic” and how an artifact is to be preserved, rehabilitated, restored, or reconstructed. Regarding the meaning of reconstruction, their website states, “Reconstruction is defined as the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its

² US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Park Cultural Landscapes,” accessed December 8, 2015, http://www.nps.gov/cultural_landscapes.

appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.”³ These definitions certainly pertain to Lincoln’s New Salem. By the time activities were undertaken to officially rebuild the village, more than 75 years had passed since the town’s desertion. Nothing remained except for “...cellar depressions, cabin foundations, and toppled chimneys”⁴ so reconstruction was the only option. The bare bluff that was once the village began its reversion back to “life” long before the National Park Service became involved in 1941. The late nineteenth century brought an interest in this village-turned-pasture when the local Chautauqua Society created a tradition of annual pilgrimages to the site to honor the martyred President. Not long after, the idea of reconstructing the most prominent buildings on their original foundations was accepted. Even then, conflict arose among former residents of the town as to the layout of roads and buildings. The original survey noted lot lines, but no corner rooted in an absolute location – a cardinal sin in surveying methods. Several mental maps were asked to be made by former residents, which, at the time of their creation, were many decades after the town’s dissolution. These maps were used to help ascertain the location of many of the buildings and roads, but “the drawings, surveys and plats of New Salem, made at different times...do not fully agree as to the location of all the buildings.”⁵ Residents Parthena Hill, R.J. Onstot, and Ida Tarbell were just a few who drew their own maps, but from different perspectives, none to scale, and artistic license taken by all. However, “...they do give an idea of the positions of the various cabins with respect to one another.”⁶ Several others’ maps were also considered when the village was under complete reconstruction by the State of

³ US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Guidelines for Reconstructing Cultural Landscapes: Standards for Reconstruction,” accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/reconstruct>.

⁴ Illinois Department of Conservation, *Lincoln’s New Salem State Park Master Management Plan*, by Lincoln’s New Salem Committee, (Springfield, 1981), 1.

⁵ Old Salem Lincoln League, 102.

⁶ Benjamin P. Thomas, *Lincoln’s New Salem*, rev. ed., (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 157.

Illinois and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the early 1930s. The fact that even those who lived at New Salem could not agree on the building and road placement introduces the idea that authenticity is subjective.

Joseph Booton, chief draftsman of the State of Illinois's Department of Public Works and Buildings and lead researcher for the reconstruction of New Salem, wrote a book detailing the reasons behind his decisions for resurveying the town lots and the cabin placement. His deductions were made using logic and basic suppositions about the people of frontier Illinois in that time period. He then applied those assumptions to New Salem. One of his guiding principles was that "[t]he restoration work should always take precedence over the public features and while the latter are important to the comfort and convenience of the visitor and employees, under no circumstances should they be allowed to encroach upon the town itself."⁷ Authenticity was a key goal of Booton's. But when gaps were found in the historical record regarding the construction of the cabins, he decided upon three conventions when rebuilding the structures: 1) the residents of New Salem were "sensible pioneers" when it came to the location of doors and windows and the desire for southern exposure to the sun as well as placing fireplaces on gabled ends of the building for structural support, 2) each house represented the socio-economic status of its owner, and 3) the builders erected "neat and tidy" houses due to their proficiency of building pioneer homes – an improvement over those found in earlier pioneer villages in Kentucky, Indiana, and Southern Illinois.⁸

Historians continuously argue about the definition of "authenticity" –and that it is, in part, narrowly defined as original structures sitting atop their original foundations. Modernists, like Ada

⁷ Joseph F. Booton, *Record of the Restoration of New Salem, New Salem State Park near Petersburg, Illinois, 1932-1933* (1934; repr., Springfield: State of Illinois, n.d.), 11.

⁸ Richard S. Taylor and Mark L. Johnson, "Inventing Lincoln's New Salem: The Reconstruction of a Pioneer Village," (Illinois Historic Preservation Agency: 1993), 48-49.

Louise Huxtable, support that definition. In her aggressive criticism of “Colonial Williamsburg and its progeny...,” she asserts, “It is hard to think of a more dangerous, anomalous, and shoddy perversion of language and meaning than the term ‘authentic reproduction’... These are the con words of American culture. Something that is authentic is the real thing; and a reproduction, by definition, is not.”⁹ She goes on to state that living history museums and Disneyland are not that far removed from each other, each blending fact with fiction and selecting versions of the past, sanitized from the “...gritty accumulations of the best and worst we have produced.”¹⁰ She continues by disparaging those places that combine originals with the restored: “It has become common practice for originals, reconstructions, and reproductions to be mingled in museum displays; one must read the labels to know what is real and what is not. But since few bother, the distinctions, and their meanings, are often lost.”¹¹ Huxtable has little faith in the public to interpret what they are seeing as authentic or not.

Catherine Howett decries Huxtable’s scathing indictment of Colonial Williamsburg’s historic creation. She contends, “One would almost think in reading the Huxtable essay, that there had never been, centuries before Williamsburg, vibrant cultures that chose to imitate – yes, and to re-create to the best of their imperfect knowledge – the environments and architectural styles of earlier peoples and earlier times.”¹² Furthermore, she defends the viewing public from Huxtable’s accusation of lacking intellectual curiosity by saying, “[Huxtable’s] view merely accepts the limitations of current interpretive programs and needlessly despairs of the public’s ability to

⁹ Ada Louise Huxtable, “Inventing American Reality,” *The New York Review of Books*, (December 3, 1992, accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1992/dec/03/inventing-american-reality>).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² Catherine Howett, “Integrity as a Value in Cultural Landscape Preservation,” in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, ed. Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 199.

appreciate the issues and options involved.”¹³ Howett concludes with the idea that, “Perhaps the whole field of cultural landscape preservation needs to be renamed *cultural landscape interpretation*. It would be helpful, certainly, to unload the inaccurate connotations of *preservation* and put the emphasis on an expanded understanding of *interpretation*....”¹⁴

Edward Bruner, in his article “Lincoln’s New Salem as a Contested Site,” discusses the many definitions of authenticity, and supports the idea of an authentic reproduction so despised by Huxtable. He points out that the myth of Lincoln has influenced the “real” Lincoln, in that the impact of Lincoln’s early surroundings were over-inflated in the attempt to draw tourists by building on the already-large edifice of the Lincoln legend. He states, “There is a tension... between the popular and the academic, and indeed this tension represents an arena of conflict... for on the one hand the historians are influenced by popular representations, but on the other hand they are engaged in a conscious ongoing argument against the mythic popular Lincoln.”¹⁵ Regardless, the essence of authenticity is created and preserved by those doing the viewing.

In his subsequent article published a year later, Bruner states, “...the meaning of any expression is not property inherent in the wording or in the dictionary, but rather is dependent on the perceptions and practices of those who use the expression.”¹⁶ In fact, he delineates authenticity using four definitions: 1) what does a [present-day] person say of 1830s New Salem? 2) What would an 1830s person say of [present-day] New Salem? 3) Is it original? and, 4) Is it duly authorized or legally valid, as discerned by an authoritative body?¹⁷ Throughout his essay, he

¹³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

¹⁵ Edward M. Bruner, “Lincoln’s New Salem as a Contested Site,” *Museum Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (October 1993): 17, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.uis.edu:2048/doi/10.1525/mua.1993.17.3.14/full>.

¹⁶ Edward M. Bruner, “Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of PostModernism,” *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 2 (June 1994): 399, accessed November 22, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uis.edu:2048/stable/pdf/681680.pdf?acceptTC=true>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 399-400.

points out the trivial, explicit violations of the second sense of authenticity (e.g. the false chinking between the cabins' logs, manicured lawns, the existence of trees creating a park-like setting, etc...) as described by his post-modernist opponents. Through his constructivist lens, however, he states, "Tourists are not monolithic, and neither is the meaning of the site. There are many New Salems.... Tourists construct a past that is meaningful to them and that relates to their lives and experiences, and this is the way that meanings are constructed at historic sites."¹⁸

As critiqued earlier by Huxtable, Colonial Williamsburg is criticized for focusing too much on one of Bruner's questions of authenticity: Is it historically accurate so that a person from that period would recognize it? Handler and Gable write in their work, *New History in an Old Museum*, "Mimetic realism, the reigning historiographical philosophy at Colonial Williamsburg, destroys history. To teach the public that the work of Colonial Williamsburg is to reconstruct the past as it really was erases all the interpretive work that goes into the museum's story."¹⁹ They make the point that, "There is no such thing as an original building...Colonial Williamsburg, like every other museum and historic site, is a present-day reality. It is not, nor can it be, the past brought to life. It is not, nor can it be, 'authentic.' The dream of authenticity is a present-day myth."²⁰ These statements can easily apply to Lincoln's New Salem, since the likenesses between the two historic sites bear more resemblances than differences.

Terminology and Concepts

Certain terms offered by academicians are essential in understanding the starting point of dealing with such a space as Lincoln's New Salem. Marina Moskowitz recognizes that the definition of landscape is a slippery one because of its use in many contexts. However, she quotes

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 410.

¹⁹ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

John Stilgoe, who best defines landscape as, “...land modified for permanent human occupation, for dwelling, agriculture, manufacturing, government, worship, and for pleasure.”²¹ She also acknowledges the importance of landscape interpretation because it “...has the potential to broaden the scope of historical enquiry beyond those persons who had the skill and power to leave a written record.”²² This is important when dealing with a space that has very few primary documents available for analysis.

Delving a bit more specifically into types of landscape, Richard Longstreth speaks about what *cultural* landscape is. He states that it is comprised of “...natural and man-made components of the environment and ways they have changed over time” as well as “...how they relate to one another,”²³ positively or negatively. It is important to recognize this duality because they both contribute equally to the creation of a landscape’s history, just as positive and negative experiences play a role in creating our own past. Longstreth goes on to discuss the many histories of several landscapes, specifically, Fort Ticonderoga in New York. From pre-European contact through present-day, this site interacted with indigenous people, the French, English, and Americans. Its many uses can be well traced, from military missions to personal habitation to public destination. Over the centuries, the cultural significance has grown and taken on a multi-layered meaning. As he states, because of its storied past, “[t]he challenge facing Fort Ticonderoga and many places like it is how to maintain and interpret so multifaceted a legacy.”²⁴ Who decides which history is more important? What attention is afforded the “less significant” events of a

²¹ Marina Moskowitz, “Backyards and Beyond: Landscapes and History,” in *History and Material Culture: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2009), 70.

²² *Ibid.*, 71.

²³ Richard Longstreth, “Introduction: The Challenges of Cultural Landscape for Preservation,” in *Cultural Landscapes*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

landscape's past? Whose interpretation of "landscape" is used? These answers are dependent upon what message is intended to be conveyed.

For example, Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick explain that cultural landscapes are not only historically significant sites, but also include agricultural and manufacturing landscapes, as well as urban/suburban/rural vernacular landscapes. These consist of "[t]he yards, lawns, and gardens that people create to beautify and give order to their own exterior environments..." and are "...among the most ubiquitous features of the national landscape."²⁵ In his own essay, Melnick discusses landscape as an instructor, and states, "...we must learn to 'read' [landscapes] and to consider the forces that caused them to develop.... This process is like learning to read a language.... We must learn the 'grammar' of the landscape and allow the landscape to be a teacher."²⁶

Though his work was published in 1960, Kevin Lynch develops language that makes it easier to discern certain components of a city. These elements are timeless and can be applied to past, present or future landscapes. There are five components, but three of them are most important in this study: landmarks, paths, and edges. Lynch defines landmarks as a "...simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain." Paths are "...channels along which the observer... moves.... and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related." Edges are "...breaks in continuity.... Such edges may be barriers... or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together."²⁷ These three components

²⁵ Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick, "Introduction: Why Cultural Landscape Preservation?" in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, ed. Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 5; Moskowitz, 69.

²⁶ Robert Melnick, "Considering Nature and Culture in Historic Landscape Preservation," in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, ed. Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 35.

²⁷ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1960), 47-48.

will be applied to New Salem's roads, fences and treelines, and one key building: the Rutledge Tavern.

Lastly, Dolores Hayden discusses in her work, *The Power of Place*, territorial histories based on race and gender. Regarding women, she states, "...the body, the home, and the street have all been arenas of conflict. Examining them as political territories...helps us to analyze the spatial dimensions of 'woman's sphere' at any given time....And just as gender can be mapped as a struggle over social reproduction..., the same is true of race [and] class..."²⁸ In the instance of New Salem, the women of the village had social roles and were expected to remain within the bounds of those expectations. It is also true of those of a lower socio-economic class who lived in New Salem but are not represented in the present-day reconstructed village whatsoever.

Tour of Lincoln's New Salem²⁹

To better understand the layout of the historic site (refer to Figure 1), a descriptive walk-through can easily point out different aspects of the landscape. Afterwards, I will analyze some of the features discussed on the "tour," set within the context of the language and concepts previously described.

As you enter the village from the western edge, you first notice a set of weather-beaten log buildings on the right and a split-rail or worm fence with supports. Gazing down the paved road, you also see large shade trees, mowed grass, and other log structures, all enveloped within a thick treeline of hardwood trees. The topography of the top of the bluff is relatively flat. The initial vista gives the sensation of walking into a quiet, well-kept park. The two buildings closest to the road – the Onstot residence and cooper shop – are open and, during business hours, have costumed

²⁸ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1997), 22-23.

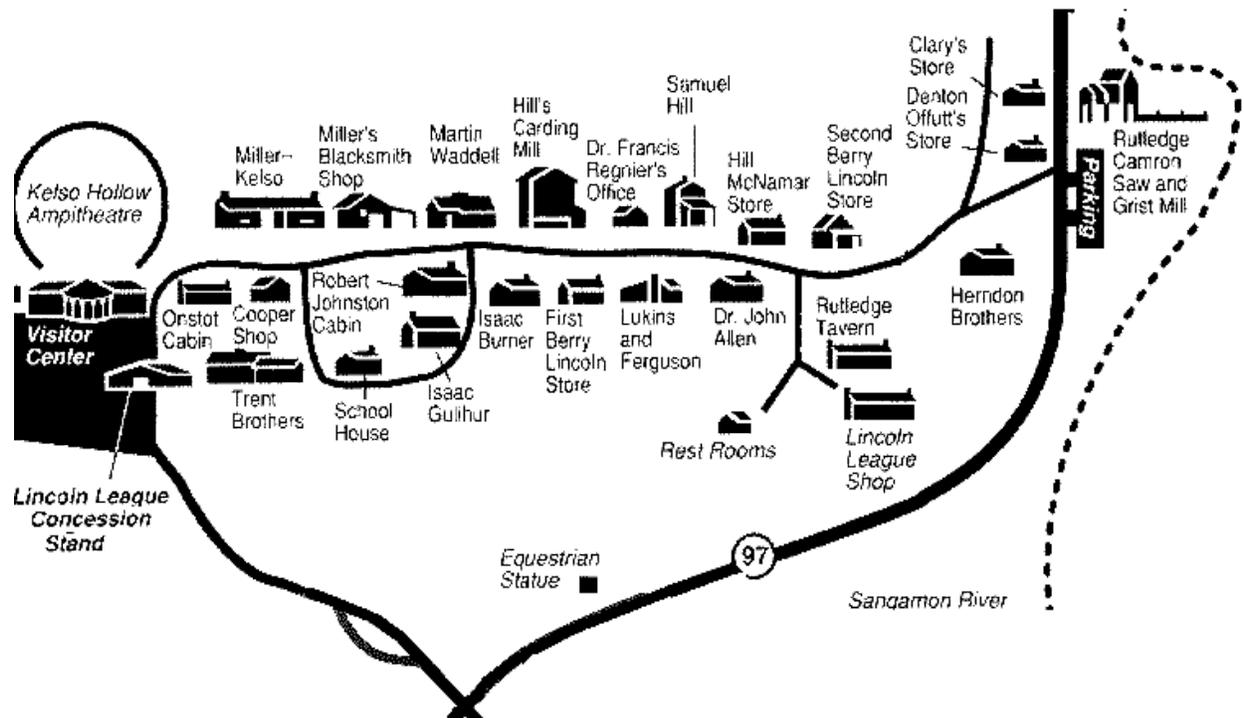
²⁹ Information in this section can be found at:

<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/newsalem/salemtour.htm> as well as the pamphlet, "Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site, published by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 2010.

interpreters inside.³⁰ Several other homes are usually open also and are occupied by mostly volunteer costumed interpreters, ready to describe the lives and occupations of the men as well as the chores of the women who resided there. Rather than attempt an awkward first-person approach, they speak in third-person and simply describe life in the 1830s and answer questions posed by the guests. The homes are all furnished with period articles, and some have original artifacts that were donated back to the historic site by descendants of those who lived there.

Behind the Onstot structures are a couple others, one being a barn, which has large farming implements inside, but is inaccessible to the public. The zigzag fence encloses a pasture large enough for livestock grazing, and it seems as though a milking cow or horse could appear from around the corner of the barn.

Figure 1. Map of Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site



<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/newsalem/newsmap.htm>

³⁰ Interestingly, the cooper shop is said to be the only original building resting on its original foundation in the village. It and the home were disassembled in 1835, moved to Petersburg and reassembled there, since it was cheaper than building new. The shop, discovered as a residence in 1922, was purchased by the Old Salem Lincoln League and had it moved back to the place it had been nearly 90 years earlier.

The other home – the Trent residence – is not open to the public but sits against the southern treeline, the roof's shingles moss-covered, looking rustic and appropriate for the atmosphere the park is trying to create.

From the Onstot's, traveling east on Main Street, the next set of buildings are a short but noticeable distance away, passing by a large garden area, which, in the spring, is plowed with a team of draft horses. Rows of corn, wheat, and other crops are planted, not to show that that area was used as such, but rather to demonstrate agricultural practices of the time period. The cultivated plot of land is fenced off with the typical worm fencing, as seen throughout the park. On the opposite side of the road, along the treeline, runs another fence before the slope dives off into the northern ravine. Despite having steep gullies framing the village to the north and south, the density of the trees and underbrush gives the impression of a darkening forest stretching off in all directions, the village a sheltered oasis in the middle of the plains.

Further to the east and beyond a slight bend of Main Street sits one of the featured buildings of the site: the first Lincoln-Berry Store. Nearly always open and occupied by a storekeeper interpreter, the shelves are stocked with the typical wares and necessities of living in a pioneer village, complete with small kegs of brandy, vinegar, and whiskey. The back of the store has a fireplace and a table and chairs for story-telling and visiting. It is here where tourists pose many direct questions about Lincoln and tales are offered by the interpreters about acts of honesty, wit, and wisdom by the future President as he entertained and served his patrons. Though this store had many other owners throughout its life at New Salem, it is tied to Lincoln nearly exclusively. [What is “more” authentic: the history of the building itself or the commingled history of Lincoln with the building, ignoring all other aspects/owners of the structure?]

Not far down the street is an intersection where you can turn right or continue going east, as the main street seemingly narrows as the trees grow closer to the road. Continuing on, the road starts to gradually descend and bears left slightly as you travel past another large pasture on the right and a growing ravine on the left. Down this path you find Denton Offutt's store and Clary's Grocery, as well as access to the stairs that lead down to the saw and grist mill and the Sangamon River. Offutt's store is where Abraham Lincoln held his first job as a clerk after returning from a flatboat trip to New Orleans in 1831. Very little interpretation is offered by staff or signage at this eastern edge of the village.

Back at the intersection turning right, you find the Rutledge Tavern on the left, a featured building of the site. It was the home to one of the town's founders, who was also the father to Ann Rutledge, the alleged romantic interest of young Abe. This one-story building is typically open and consists of two large rooms, each with its own entrance. The door to the left takes you into the "kitchen" and eating area. There, a large fireplace with a food prep table and a female costumed interpreter – sometimes two – welcomes visitors as food is prepared 1830s-style. Oftentimes, a stew is simmering over an open flame or a pie is baking in a Dutch oven, nestled in the red coals of the fire. It is here that the roles of pioneer women are a central topic of conversation, as the volunteers explain how food is prepared, meals are served to the boarders, and the sleeping arrangements are made. Men slept overhead, a trapdoor accessed by a ladder nailed to the wall where bedrolls or straw mattresses were the only cushioning available. Women slept in the adjoining room, where two large full-sized beds would have been shared by family members. A second fireplace on the gabled wall would have kept the prairie winter cold at bay.

Lastly, at the "T" intersection of the two roads, sits the second Berry-Lincoln Store. Like the first store, it had several occupants and owners, but is associated mostly with Lincoln. This larger framed structure was purchased by the two after the first store failed. Although the

inventory was larger and possibly had more exposure due to its location, it, too, flopped in less than a year. This second botched investment saddled Lincoln with debt that took him well over a decade to repay.

Discussion

“Authenticity” is a term to be loosely applied to Lincoln’s New Salem, as is true for any living history museum. While empiricists search for hard evidence tied to the 1830s, there will forever be more gaps than record. Many scholars have made the point that rebuilding New Salem does not equate to reconstructing the past. Historians Richard Taylor and Mark Johnson state, “We can no more rebuild the village that Lincoln knew than we can breathe life into the man himself. New Salem and its foremost citizen have vanished, gone forever beyond recall... It is an imaginative approximation of the 1830s village fabricated from bits and pieces of available evidence held together by creative supposition.”³¹ Michael Hough supports the same notion in his book, *Out of Place*, stating, “The cultural and environmental links are gone. They remain empty shells cast upon the shores of the present – objects isolated from the processes that shaped them...”³²

Sometimes, patina – which gives the allusion of authenticity – is a veneer inconsistent with an accurate portrayal. For example, the moss-roofed log home as described in the tour section, would not have been so in 1840. The house, having existed for less than ten years, would not have been old enough to develop that amount of covering. Scott Magelssen, writing of Plimouth Plantation, declares, “While enormous amounts of research and implementation go into the reconstruction of a period building, such buildings may eventually last longer than those they

³¹ Richard Taylor and Mark Johnson, “Inventing Lincoln’s New Salem: The Reconstruction of a Pioneer Village” (unpublished typescript: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1993), 2-3.

³² Michael Hough, *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 156-157.

reference.”³³ Such is the case at New Salem, where the home in question was in the village no more than eight years, but has been a replica of that building for more than eighty. However, more important but less overt examples of empirical inauthenticity exists at New Salem.

With Respect to a Key Landmark

The Rutledge Tavern has had its share of controversy from the outset. Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, and farmer/Presbyterian elder Harvey Ross disagreed profusely on the size and shape of the Tavern, the prominent structure that served as a bed and breakfast in the village. Herndon, in his biography of Lincoln, describes the Tavern as “...a small log house with four rooms....”³⁴ Ross, however, remembered it as a “hewed log house, two stories high, with four rooms above and four below....”³⁵ Herndon’s description came from interviewing several former residents of the village, but Ross’s came from personal experience, having spent the night there several times where Lincoln too was a regular boarder. Memories that are decades old or passed from person to person degrade authority, leading to disagreements on what was factually accurate.

The Rutledge Tavern would continue to be a bone of contention between scholars as well, extending through the twentieth century. Joseph Booton, the head architect and draftsman for the reconstruction of the village disagreed with resident’s written accounts regarding the placement of the Tavern. Formal records were unclear and reliance fell upon personal testimonies and the previously mentioned mental maps, along with the earlier authority of a hand-drawn illustration found in the 1874 Menard County Atlas, called the “Ruins of Salem Hotel, Lincoln’s Boarding

³³ Scott Magelssen, “Undoing History – Authenticity, Tourism, and the Precise and Vulgar Continuum: The Staging of the Past Through Performance and Display as Historiographic Operation at Living History Museums in the United States” (master’s thesis, University of Minnesota, 2002), 252, accessed October 23, 2015, ProQuest database.

³⁴ William H. Herndon and Jesse Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1889), 1:110, accessed November 12, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/herndonslincolnt01inhern#page/110/mode/2up>.

³⁵ Harvey Lee Ross, *The Early Pioneers and Pioneer Events of the State of Illinois* (Chicago: Eastman Brothers, 1899), 100, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuo.ark:/13960/t9h41mp9f;view=2up;seq=118;size=150>.

House.”³⁶ Specifically, Booton would dismiss the official grievances of Ms. Ida Bale, descendent of former resident Jacob Bale. Not only did she contend the restored Tavern was of fabricated size, but also that it stood in an entirely different location – adjacent to Main Street, directly across from the second Lincoln-Berry Store.³⁷ Other accounts placed the Tavern at this location, but Booton chose to leave it where it had been originally reconstructed by the Old Salem Lincoln League in 1918.³⁸ Could his pride have prevented him from submitting to a woman’s opinion? After all, the time period is the 1930s, and although a full century had passed since New Salem’s era, bringing greater freedoms to women in this country, conceding to a female could have opened the floodgates to a plethora of criticisms of his decisions regarding reconstruction. This idea ties in with the writings of Dolores Hayden, identifying the territorial histories of gender. In the 1830s, women, whose opinions were not often sought by men, would have been relegated to chores of the house, yard, and garden, with the occasional errand to the store. For the most part, however, life for women would have been largely contained in and around the residence. These are the physical boundaries and social production of space of which Hayden speaks and could have extended another 100 years.³⁹

Most disconcerting about the Rutledge controversy was what would be discovered more than half a century later. This landmark debate attracted the attention of archaeologist/author Robert Mazrim, who performed numerous digs at New Salem in the 1990s in hopes of resolving the decades-old authenticity dispute once and for all with the unearthing of irrefutable evidence. During extensive research at the State Archives, Mazrim discovered unlabeled photographs of an identifiable site where Booton, in 1936, had excavated the other controversial location of the

³⁶ Taylor, 34.

³⁷ Ida Bale, *New Salem as I Knew It* (Petersburg, IL: Petersburg Observer Co., 1939), 16.

³⁸ Taylor, 34.

³⁹ Hayden, 22-23.

Rutledge Tavern – the same area argued by Ms. Bale. Mazrim, permitted to reopen Booton’s dig, expected to find evidence of his earlier work. Instead, after digging over four feet deep, he found nothing but the bottom six inches of a cellar floor, indicating that all the original soil had been removed and replaced with clean fill, essentially destroying the entire archaeological record.

Mazrim writes,

The old cellar was not simply filled back in after the pictures were taken in 1936, however. Upon the removal of the feature fill, the intact vertical clay walls of the feature were intentionally cut away, creating a large basin that was centered on the original center of the cellar feature. The shoveling away of undisturbed clay subsoil surrounding the feature would have been no small feat, and may have been accomplished mechanically. In doing so, all traces of the original feature (down to fifty-two inches below ground surface) were completely erased. The resulting crater was then filled with clean imported soil, leaving no traces of nineteenth century activity on the site.⁴⁰

He felt lucky to have located the very bottom of a cellar floor, and many artifacts were discovered, but no conclusive evidence was found that this had been the actual site of the Rutledge Tavern.

The question of 100% authenticity regarding the placement of the Rutledge Tavern remains unanswered. Barbara Mooney hints at decision-makers well-above Booton when it came to changing the size and location of an existing principal structure. She states that the Lincoln League members who built the original reconstructed Inn a dozen years earlier were “...well-connected to political positions” above Booton’s pay grade and that he “...would have been a fool to offend the political supporters of the administration that paid his salary.”⁴¹ Did Booton call for the destruction of evidence that proved his earlier decisions incorrect? How could a man, supposedly obsessed with “authenticity,” eradicate conclusive evidence? Did “politics as usual” trump the

⁴⁰ Robert Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier: History and Archaeology in the Shadow of Lincoln* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2007), 309-319.

⁴¹ Barbara Burlison Mooney, “Lincoln’s New Salem: Or, the Trigonometric Theorem of Vernacular Restoration,” *Vernacular Architecture Forum* 11 (2004): 27, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20062033>.

historic record? These are queries that will likely never be answered, but call into question the political and social forces at play during the age of Public Works and Civilian Conservation.

With Respect to Major Pathways

The Main Street, that paved single-lane road that runs in an easterly direction when entering the park from the west, is the primary pathway through the reconstructed village. When considering the idea of authenticity, certain concessions must immediately be made. Obviously, there was no asphalt nor the technology available to provide the durable, smooth surface of the street running the length of the present-day park. The road would have been gravel, or more likely, rutted mud during the spring and fall, a frozen tundra in winter and a dusty thoroughfare littered with “road apples” during the hot, humid summer.⁴² For the sake of a pleasant tourist experience, the decision to make the major pathway as accessible as possible is understandable, though nonetheless inaccurate. The placement of the road when reconstructing the village, however, should have been as geographically precise as possible. Given that the 1829 survey was not “...tied up with section lines” proved difficult to find lot corners and the exact location of the road in 1932. Booton does note, however, that the “...width of Main Street is given as sixty (60) feet...”⁴³ This is in stark contrast with the existing road width at approximately fifteen feet. Clearly, it is unnecessary to have a sixty foot wide road through a village only a half-mile long; however, if the cabins are truly sitting atop original foundations, the correctly built road would have eradicated most lawns, as the road would have passed directly in front of each structure. By disallowing the presence of lawns, the landscape would appear more authentic to an actual 1830s commercial village rather than a green, manicured park.

⁴² Handler, 1. These “road apples” or horse droppings were intentionally left on the streets of Colonial Williamsburg in order to add authenticity to a pre-industrial thoroughfare. Though it may be more accurate at the most popular living history museum in the country, it would not be as well-received at New Salem since the road is paved.

⁴³ Booton, 16; Thomas, 156.

Moreover, according to Bale, “[t]his Main Street of the village lay south of the present (1938) ‘restored Onstott house’. The old road could be seen a number of years after the place was first plowed.”⁴⁴ Bale’s contention was reaffirmed in an interview with the current Site Coordinator, Terry Jones, who stated that the road is approximately 20-30 yards off the original roadbed. The current road was once an old pasture road created by Jacob Bale for ease of movement across a barren bluff after the town was abandoned. Why the original road was not overlain by the present one is peculiar.⁴⁵

Another mystery is why an existing road was discontinued and a new one built at the time of the initial reconstruction, in the early part of the twentieth century. In Booton’s explanation for erecting the current Rutledge Tavern, he details the location and direction of the Springfield Road. This was the stage road used to connect Springfield and Havana, New Salem being one of the many stops along the route. “It is quite certain that the old Springfield-Havana road crossed this hill before the town was surveyed [in 1829]...It also seems probable that the location of the Springfield road entered the town from the south, determined the sizes of lots and number of lots and widths of the cross-streets....” He goes on to describe the existence of shallow ravines on the west side of the village that were “...almost entirely filled in by the State so that the present road could cross it.”⁴⁶ This present road is the entrance road that is used to access the park from State Route 97 from the south and west. Why the original Stage road was abandoned and a new one built is not explained by Booton.

In the 1910s, the Old Salem Lincoln League established what Booton was to find more than a dozen years later. “The Springfield road came up the hill from the south... to Main Street

⁴⁴ Bale, 29.

⁴⁵ Terry Jones, interview by author, Lincoln’s New Salem State Historic Site, November 13, 2015.

⁴⁶ Booton, 75-77.

running east and west. Toward the west, Main Street led on to Clary's Grove...⁴⁷ It certainly made good sense to build a tavern at the intersection of two roads: one carrying passengers north and south between Springfield and Havana, the other from the direction of Clary's Grove, west of New Salem. Later in the tome, it is stated that "[t]he new auto road at the north entrance...cost nearly a thousand dollars, but gives easy access to the site of the old village and was a necessary first step in the working out of the plans of the League."⁴⁸ The road of which they write was located where the current stairway leads down to the saw and grist mill, a very steep, hazardous pathway, that, according to Mr. Jones, cars "...had to ascend in reverse because the rear-wheel drive Model T's and A's couldn't push themselves up the incline, but could manage to pull themselves up."⁴⁹ At the time of publishing, little long-term planning had been made as to the future of the park. To spend \$1000 in 1917 on a new road when one already existed (despite its abandonment) is perplexing and detracts from the authenticity of the 1830s village in the name of tourism.

With Respect to Edges

In the context of cultural landscapes, Lynch defines edges as, "the linear elements not considered as paths: they are usually, but not quite always, the boundaries between two kinds of areas. They act as lateral references."⁵⁰ The edges at New Salem are important because of their influence on perception and traffic.

Authenticity is about more than the presented facts. In particular, one edge that subtly but directly influences perception is the treeline. As noted in the "tour" section, the trees envelope the village and act as a barrier or wall against sensory reminders that would degrade the pioneer

⁴⁷ Old Salem Lincoln League, 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁹ Jones interview, November 13, 2015.

⁵⁰ Lynch, 62.

atmosphere, as well as demark the physical boundary of the 125-acre village. Since New Salem sits atop a bluff with ravines and the Sangamon River below, a view unimpeded by trees would allow the sights and sounds of the twenty-first century to collapse the fragile 1830s façade of a pioneer village framed by period structures and peoples. State Route 97 skirting the eastern edge of the bluff and a tall concrete bridge crossing the Sangamon north of the mill carries automobiles and trucks briskly between Springfield, Petersburg, and Athens. Since the village is high above the river as well as the asphalt ribbon of highway next to it, the sounds of the hurried traffic are hushed and filtered by the thick belt of hardwoods protecting the village from modern annoyances. The village of 1830, though not concerned with traffic sights and sounds, would have been completely devoid of trees for several reasons. The amount of wood required for one household was painfully high. Michael Williams, a historical geographer points out, "...it took between 10 and 20 acres of woodland to supply the fuel burned by one fire annually....A more common figure for annual consumption for a typical rural household was 20 to 30 cords...."⁵¹ Speaking of the southwestern Illinois prairie in the era of New Salem, he goes on to aver, "...the lack of timber could be made up for by hauling supplies from more distant locations...[I]n time, between three and six miles seemed reasonable and acceptable. Hauling became increasingly common, until all local timber supplies were exhausted...The cost of timber [hailed overland more than 200 miles] was prohibitive for most farmers."⁵² Despite New Salem existing for only a dozen or so years, the trees on the bluff, in the ravines, and along the riverbanks would have been taken for fuel and building materials for houses, fences, and furniture. While the reconstructed village now sits

⁵¹ Michael Williams, *Americans & Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 78.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 131-132.

among a tranquil grove of hardwoods with a generous smattering of large shade trees, these are landscape management tangibles that have no role in replicating an authentic 1830s landscape.

On a similar note, the treeline and the zigzag fences act as effective edges to direct the tourists along a certain path. Fencing is placed along the paved road to keep visitors off the grass while at the same time creating an aesthetic colonial charm. These fences, like the moss-covered roof shingles, are weather-beaten and have become actual relics themselves, some starting to show signs of decay and rot – an indicator that today’s fences are for decoration. In the 1830s, these fences were highly functional, used to keep rooting pigs and wandering livestock – another missing dimension of pioneer life – from trampling gardens, not to prettify the surroundings.

The fences and treeline together act as a barrier to another edge – the ridgeline of the ravines to the north and south of the village. By directing foot traffic away from these steep embankments, they act as safety devices, another anachronistic function of these boundaries. In the days of the actual village, the brow of the ridges would be clearly visible due to the lack of trees. That alone would have acted as its own visual boundary. In addition, the livestock and pigs would have been allowed to roam and forage for natural food. Fences would have been a deterrent.

Conclusion

David Lowenthal speaks poignantly about the two opposing ideas of authenticity. “The most detailed historical narrative incorporates only a minute fraction of even the relevant past; the sheer pastness of the past precludes its total reconstruction.” This idea of complete authenticity in the ways of total recall is impossible and if attempted, steals from everyone the opportunity to glean something personal from the past. Lowenthal continues, “[N]o account can recover the past as it was, because the past... was a set of events and situations. As the past no longer exists, no

account can ever be checked against it, but only against other accounts of that past; we judge its veracity by its correspondence with other reports, not with the events themselves.”⁵³

The goal of “authentic” has been and will continue to be of high importance to every professional staff, historian, and student who comes in contact with this memorial to the sixteenth President. But the *essence*, the spiritual authenticity that ties Abraham Lincoln to the site even after he left it 178 years ago still touches people at a level deeper than can be reached by some quantifiable methodology or hand-held artifact. Edward Bruner is quoted in a 1999 article of including a fifth qualifier to his list of what makes a place authentic: “that of intention, of not being deliberately misleading.”⁵⁴ Say what you will of these sites, but the intention is honest and clear. Anything resembling authentic to Mr. Lincoln will continue to draw a crowd – regardless of definition.

⁵³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 214-215.

⁵⁴ Dydia DeLyser, “Authenticity on the Ground: Engaging the Past in a California Ghost Town,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89, no. 4 (December 1999): 613, accessed November 21, 2015, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost.

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