



SEEING NEW SALEM



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SEEING NEW SALEM

AN EXPLORATION OF LINCOLN'S NEW SALEM STATE HISTORIC SITE

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Photographs and Text by
Mark Gordon

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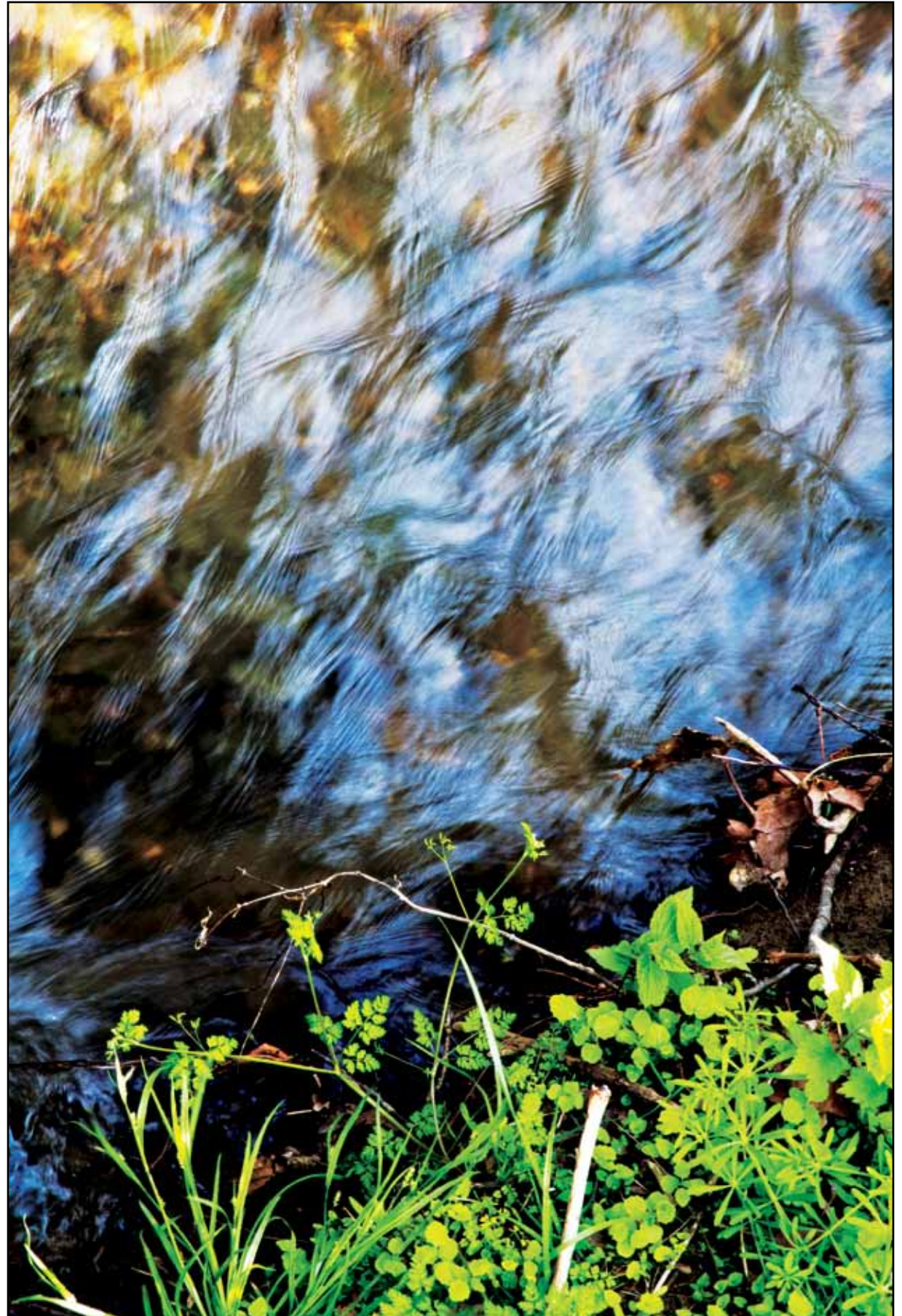
This is a book about seeing.

Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site serves as the backdrop and is the inspiration. For those that visit, the intent is to provide a richer and more complete experience, by encouraging visitors to look closely at the details of the Village and its surroundings.

But, whether or not one ever makes it to the site, this book is intended to inspire people to pause and appreciate the world around them, wherever they may be. If it is successful, everyone should be able to take a few lessons and some inspiration from the book, regardless of whether or not they have been to the restored New Salem Village.

This is not a history of Lincoln's years in New Salem or a guide to the restored village; although to fulfill its intended purpose, a little history and a bit of guiding are necessary. Knowing something about the homes, businesses and people that populated New Salem is not necessary to enjoy the beauty of the park, but understanding something about the history of the village and its significance in Lincoln's life will deepen the experience.

Stories about Lincoln's time in New Salem are intended to help visitors better imagine what the village was like in the 1830s and how Lincoln's brief years in New Salem molded and helped propel him to the presidency. To see the village with one's mind, as well as with one's eyes.

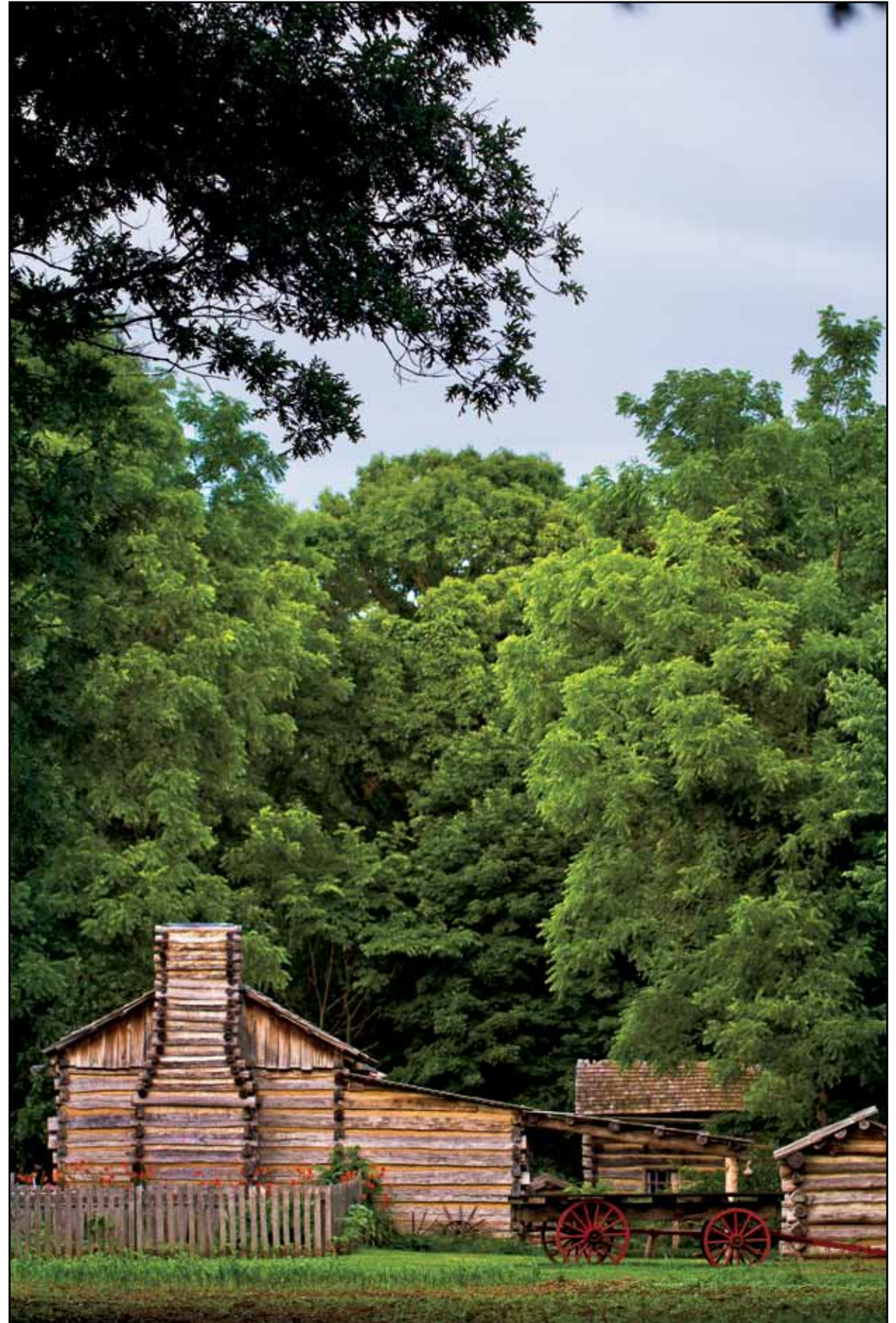


Stream, View from Entrance Bridge



Red Bud in Bloom

This book is a personal visual journal of the village and park in all seasons and grows out of a desire to share it with others. The hope is to help everyone see the park in a new light.



Robert Johnston Residence



Family Visiting Trent Brothers Residence



Walk the lanes of New Salem and see the beauty crafted by nature and by the hand of man. Enjoy it in all seasons and all times of day. The flowers bursting into bloom in the spring. The sunlight trickling through the leaves in the summer. The golden hues of autumn and the quiet beauty of new fallen snow in winter.

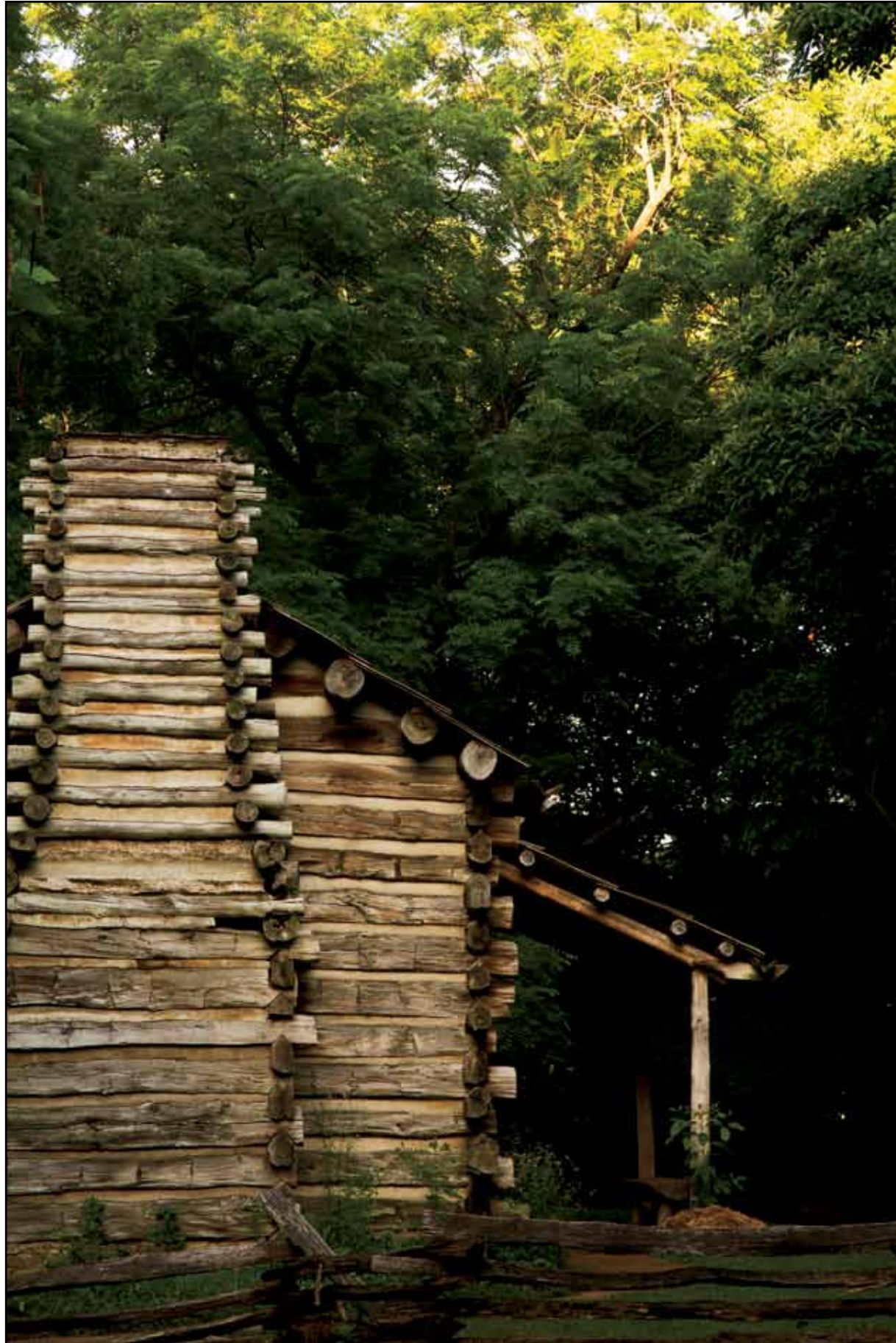
Few people pick grey or brown as a favorite color. But spending some time in New Salem could change that. Who could possibly imagine that browns and greys could be so incredibly varied and appealing? The muted hues of the log homes, trees, earth, and grasses perfectly complement the colors of every season.



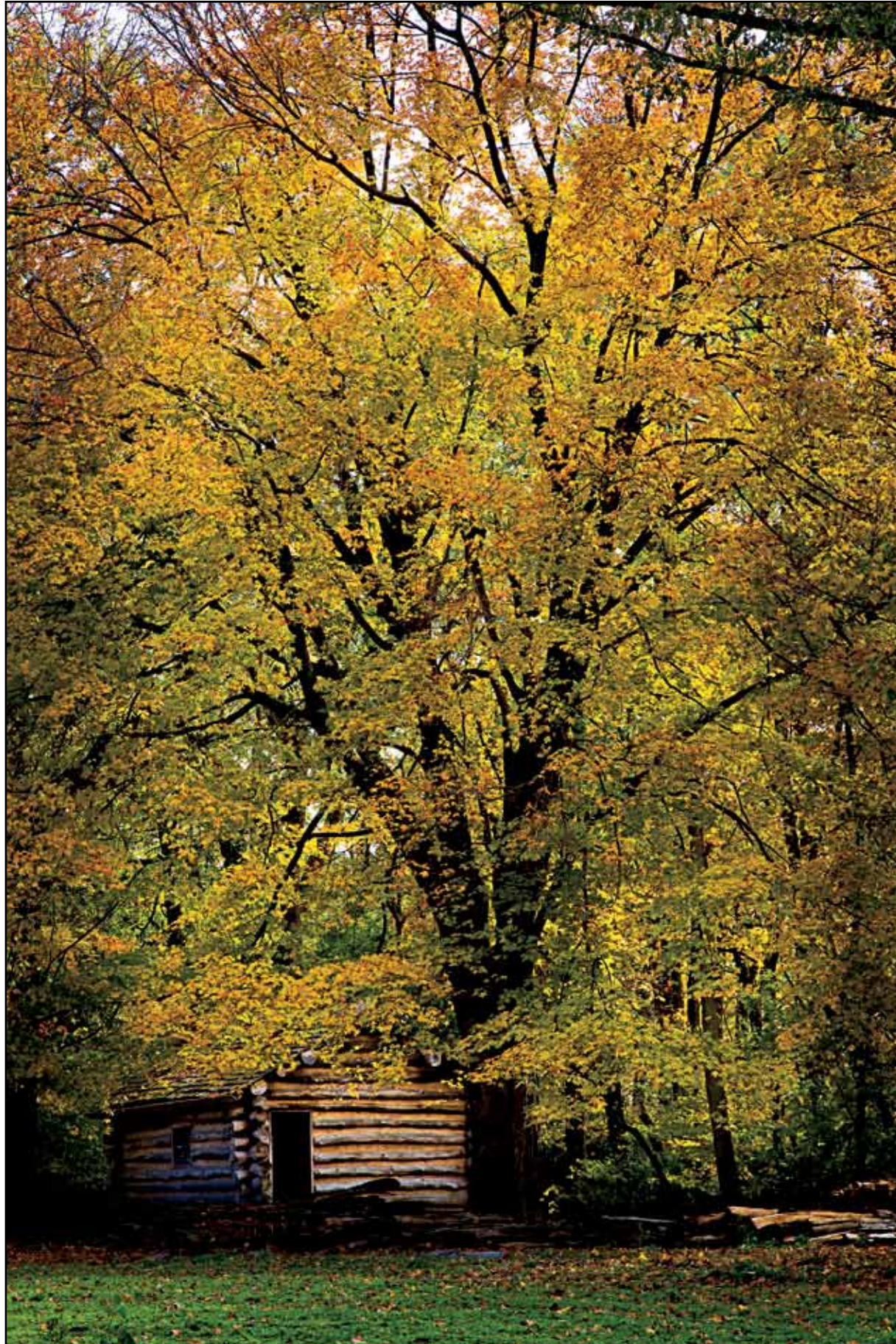
Spring Leaf, Columbine, Corn, Dame's Rocket



Dame's Rocket, Dr. Francis Regnier Office



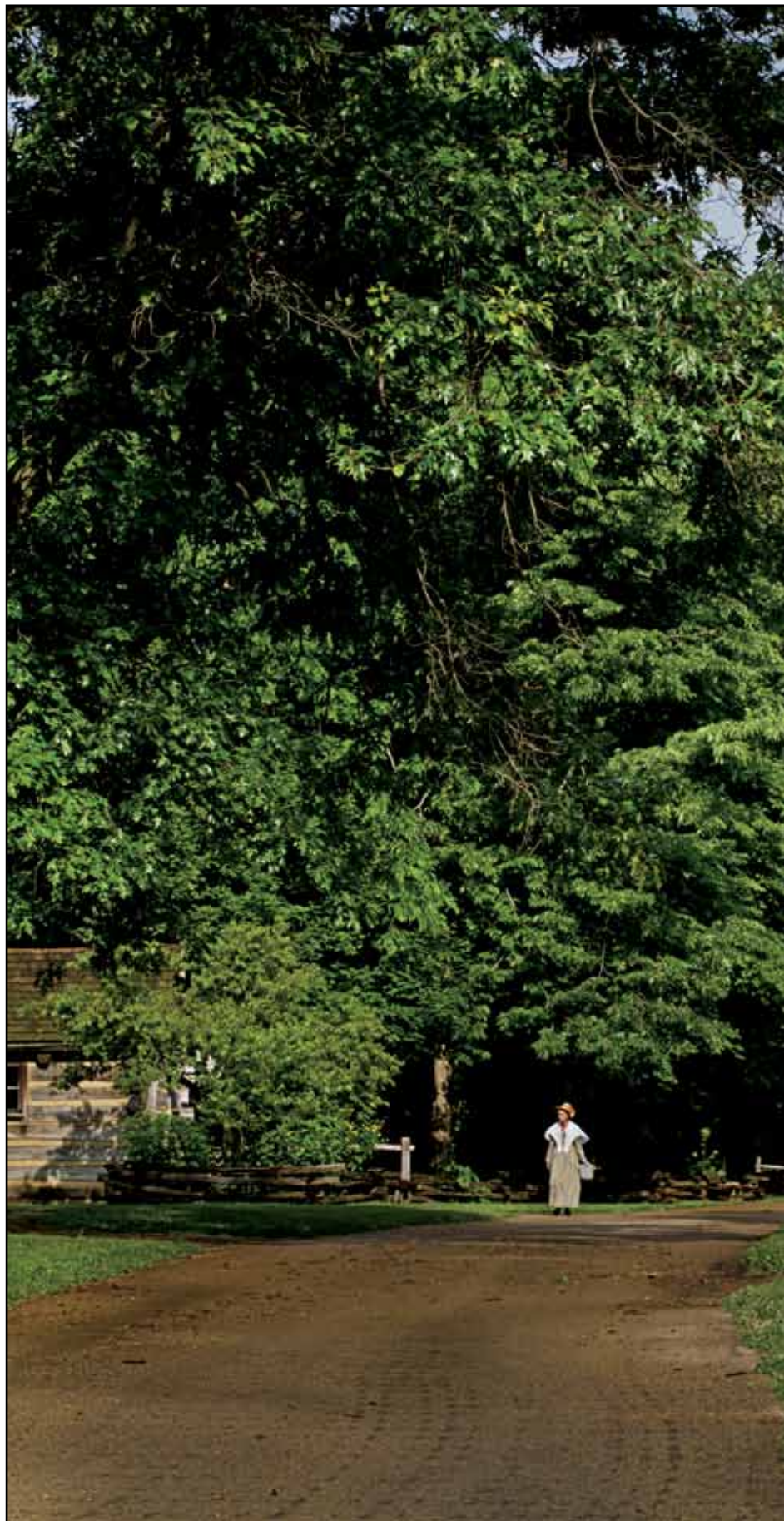
Rowan Herndon Home in Summer



School House in Fall



Rowan Herndon Home in Winter



Visiting New Salem can be addictive. For a photographer, it is easy to find something new and worth capturing on every visit. But, even without a camera, it is possible to take away a new impression and insight on every visit.



Miller's Blacksmith Shop



Photographers are easily seduced by sweeping vistas of mountains, valleys and waterfalls. New Salem has none of those.

Instead of breathtaking views, it is imbued with the simple elegance of the heartland. New Salem gives the visitor the opportunity to look and see, freed from daily distractions. And, that may be its greatest gift.

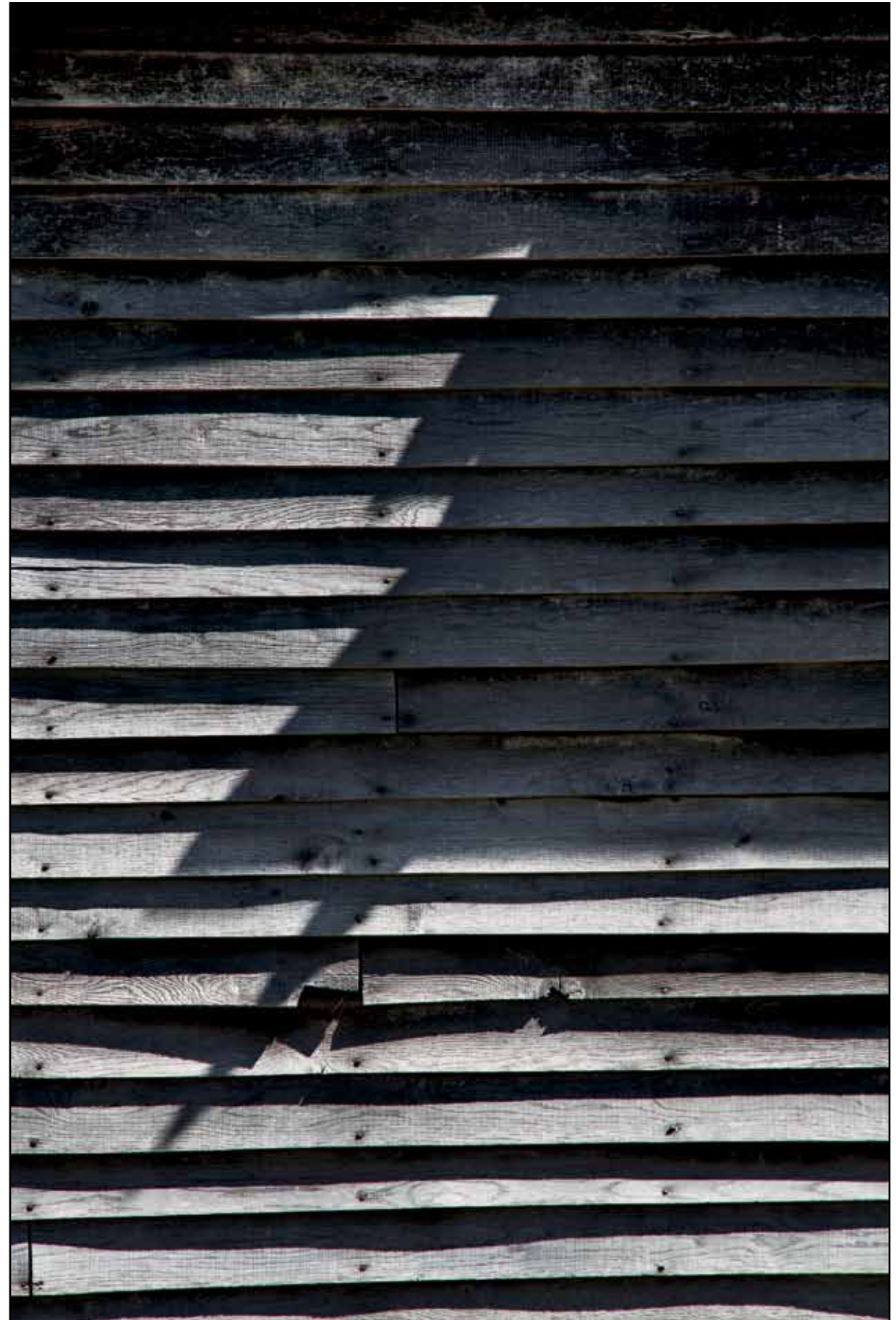
We can never forget a visit to the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone or Niagara Falls. But, it can be hard to carry the soul of those grand sights with us back to our everyday lives.

New Salem is different. Once we train our eyes to appreciate the light and shadows and forms and colors here in this small refuge, we can find them everywhere. Spend some time and see the beauty of the landscape here in the great middle of America.

Today, New Salem's lanes are lined with trees and the sunlight plays among the leaves, but when the Village was active, it was part of the great American prairie. When approaching New Salem look out over the surrounding farmland and imagine what it must have been like for the earliest settlers surrounded by the vast prairie with nothing to obstruct their vision from a horizon that seemed to go on forever.

New Salem today is a sanctuary. That was not the case in Lincoln's time. When Lincoln walked the lanes of New Salem, it was as a commercial village, perhaps dull by today's standards, but to its residents it was, at least for a few brief years, a bustling frontier community rising up out of the wilderness. There were just about a hundred residents when Lincoln arrived. Yet, it was the largest community he had ever lived in.

See the village as it was in the 1830s. A good visit to New Salem will transport you back through time. Allow yourself to forget the rush of modern life and imagine an era when the biggest entertainment might be watching a group of three young men trying desperately to dislodge a flatboat from the mill dam before all their goods were lost in the river. It was just such a show that brought most of the town to the Sangamon River bank in late April of 1831.



Shadows, McNamar Building/Second Berry-Lincoln Store



In today's world and using today's standards, we do not appreciate the challenge and the accomplishment of those who settled the heartland in the 19th century.

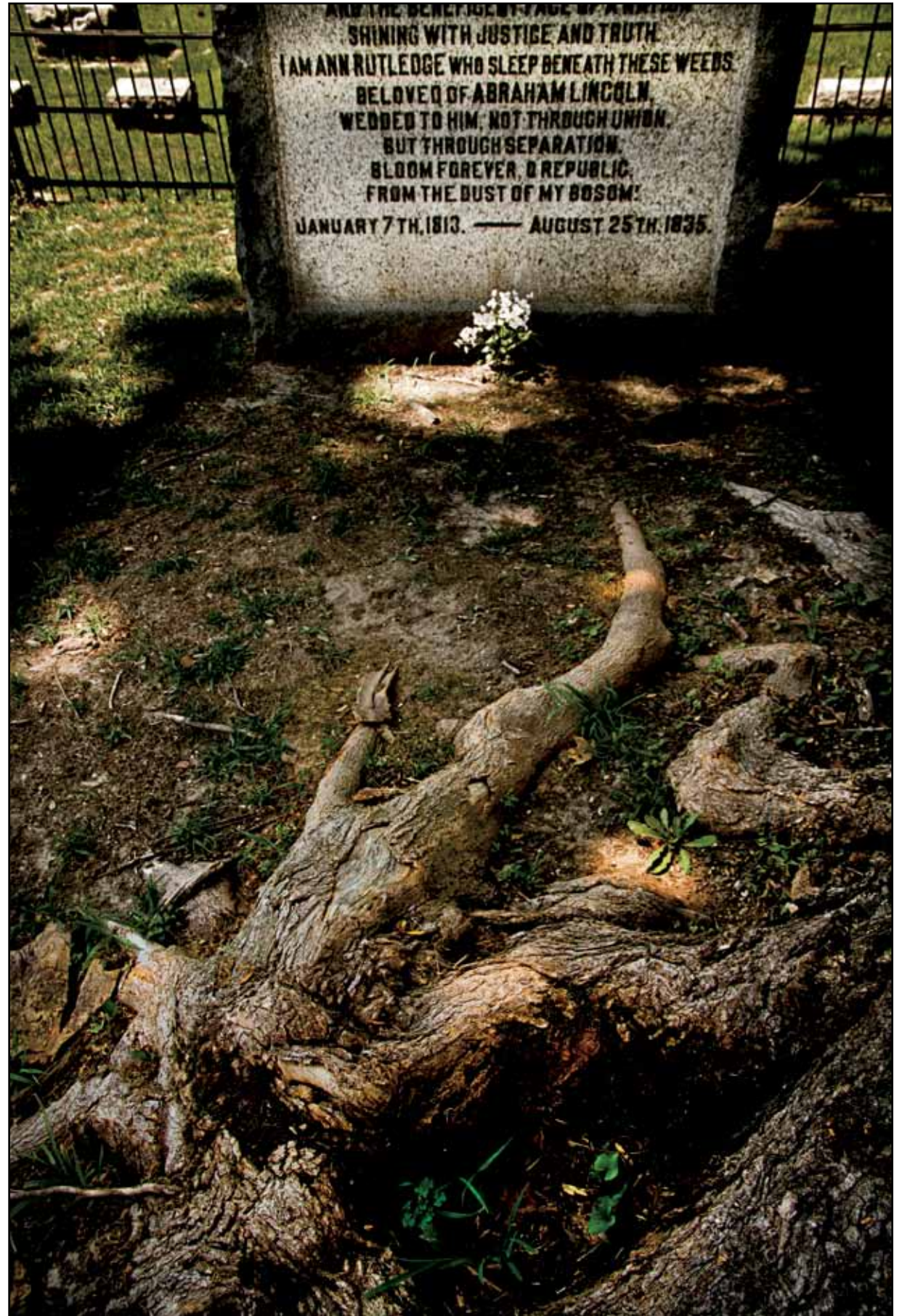
This was wilderness and the wilderness is always a dangerous place. We romanticize and deify nature. It is tempting to imagine nature as some gentle, benign, nurturing goddess. But, the pioneers who settled the heartland understood how indifferent and unforgiving nature was and how insignificant their lives were in the vast emptiness of the prairie.

Today it is too easy to dismiss or belittle the accomplishments and courage of the pioneers who lived here.

Lincoln knew from painful, personal experience the hazards of frontier living. His mother died; poisoned because she had the misfortune to drink the milk of cows that ate the deadly snakeroot plant. An unnecessary and easily preventable death that decimated entire villages simply because no one knew better.

Regardless of which side you may come down on regarding the story of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, the hard fact is that her death from typhoid at age 22 is notable only because the young man who was courting her at the time later became America's greatest president.

Ann Rutledge Gravesite, Petersburg





Horse Plowing Demonstration, Antique Farm Show



It is popular today to bemoan the taming of the prairie, which turned wilderness into cropland. But, to accomplish what these pioneers accomplished at the time required tremendous courage and strength of will.

They knew full well that nature would not yield easily to their desires. It is easy to pontificate from the comfort of our sanitized and civilized existence, but we must remind ourselves that we enjoy our safe and too-sedentary lifestyle because of those who came before us.

Abraham Lincoln and his fellow New Salem residents could afford no similar luxury.





Could Lincoln have succeeded anywhere?

Or, was there something that made New Salem special? Was it just by chance that this rough, poorly educated and unformed youth, who happened to have "accidentally lodged" in New Salem, would eventually become the man that many consider to be the greatest American president?

It is impossible to know the answer. Ultimately, it doesn't matter. This is where Lincoln landed...and it was this small community that formed him into the man that would lead the country through its greatest crisis and preserve the union.



Lincoln, the Surveyor



Sign Detail, First Berry-Lincoln Store



Split Rail Fence Near First Berry-Lincoln Store



Scale, First Berry-Lincoln Store

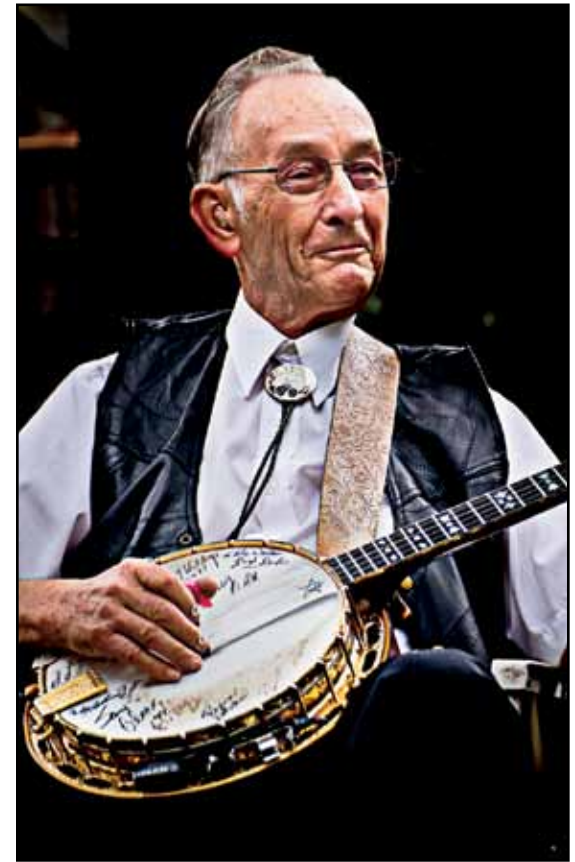
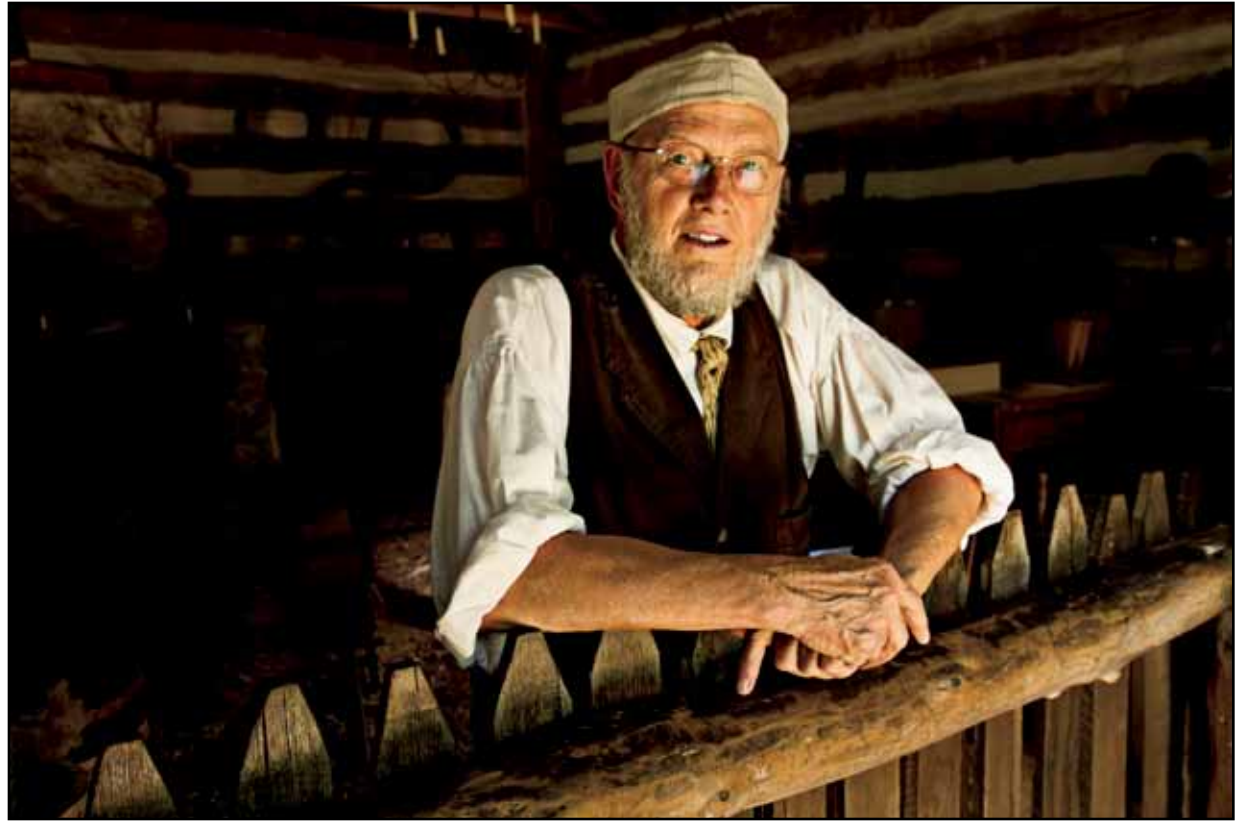


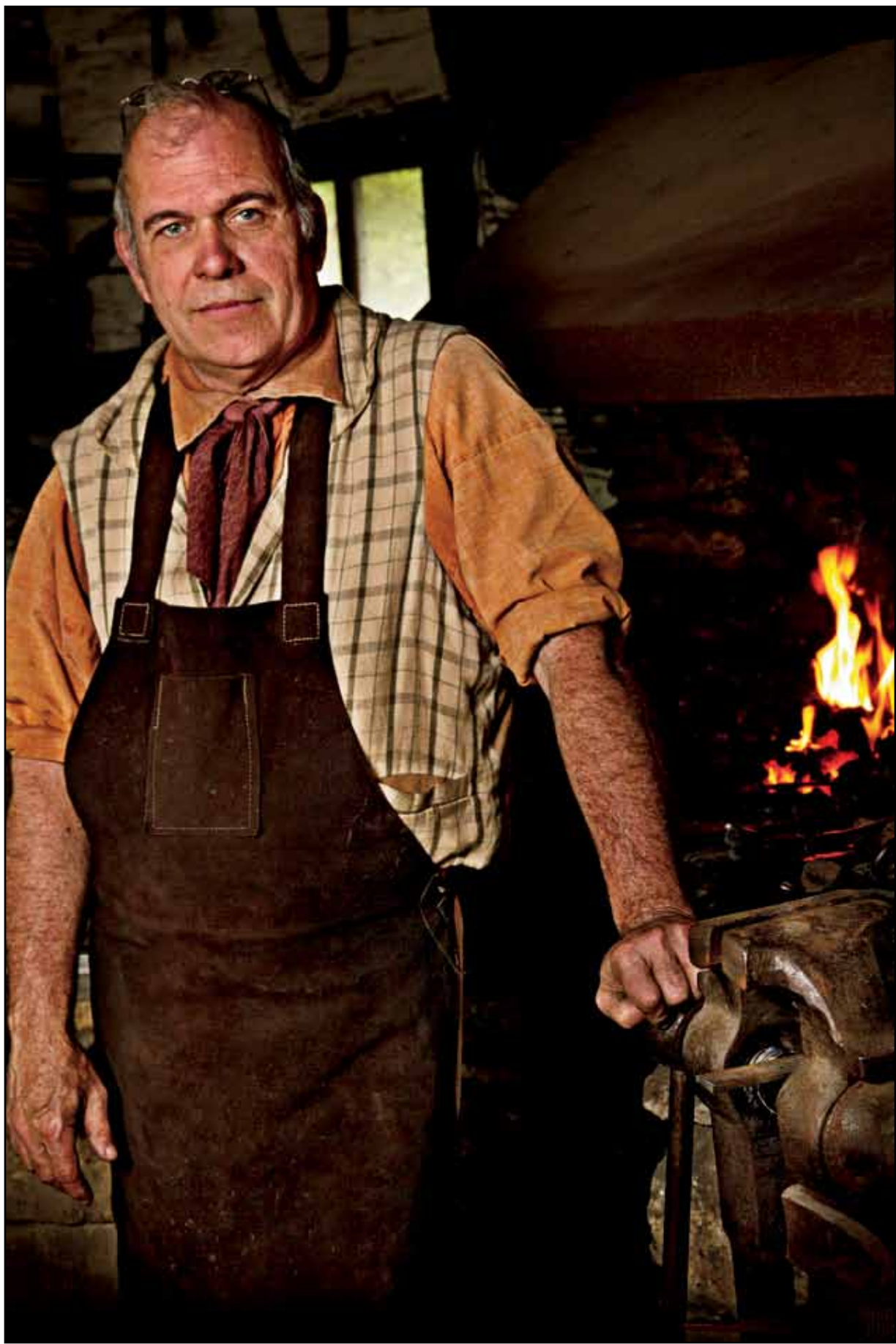
Lincoln himself apparently believed that New Salem had played a pivotal role in his development. Throughout his career, Lincoln returned to his experiences in New Salem and the lessons he learned there. When he was asked to write a brief autobiographic statement for the 1860 presidential campaign, he devoted much of it to his six years in New Salem.

Even after he was elected president, he cited his election as Captain of his company in the Black Hawk War as the most satisfying election of his career.

The residents of New Salem and its surrounding area seemed unusually qualified to mold the young Lincoln and set him on his course.

Dr. John Allen had graduated from Dartmouth College. At least five residents had attended Illinois College in Jacksonville. Jack Kelso, who shared half of a dog trot house with his brother-in-law Joshua Miller, knew the writings of Burns and Shakespeare. Mentor Graham opened and ran a school. James Rutledge, tavern owner, mill partner and one of the founders of New Salem, had started the New Salem Debating Club, where village residents met to debate the major issues of the day.

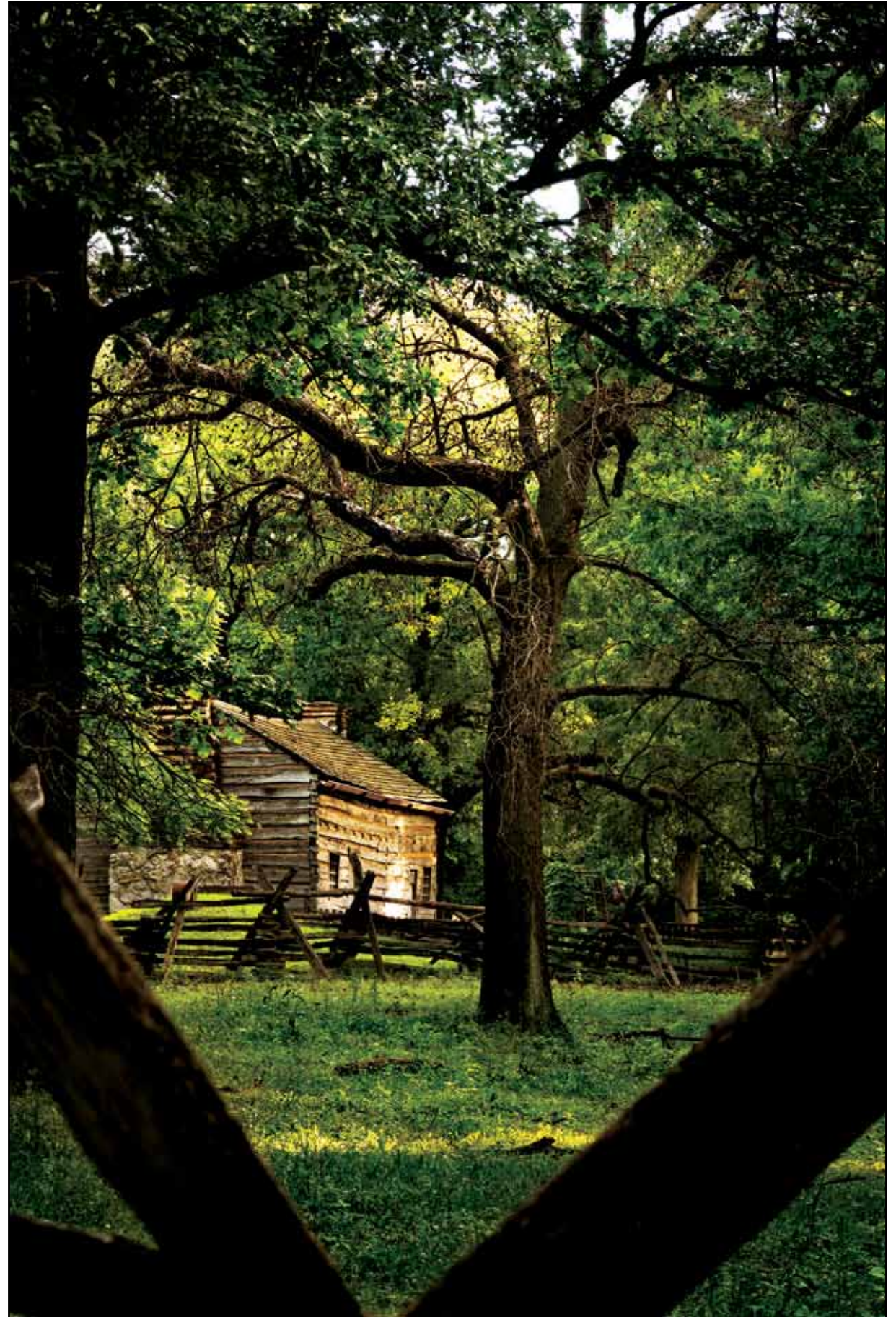




For single, unattached young men like Lincoln, small villages like New Salem served as surrogate families. Lincoln didn't know what he wanted to do when he arrived in New Salem, only that he didn't want to farm or spend his life as a laborer.

In New Salem he had the opportunity to try many different occupations. The odd jobs he took to survive afforded him valuable experience and helped him move up the social and economic ladder.

And, of course, in a frontier village like New Salem, that ladder was short. A young man of similarly deficient means in the East would have likely been condemned to a life of menial labor.



Rutledge Tavern



Fall Harvest Festival



Hummingbird Banding Day

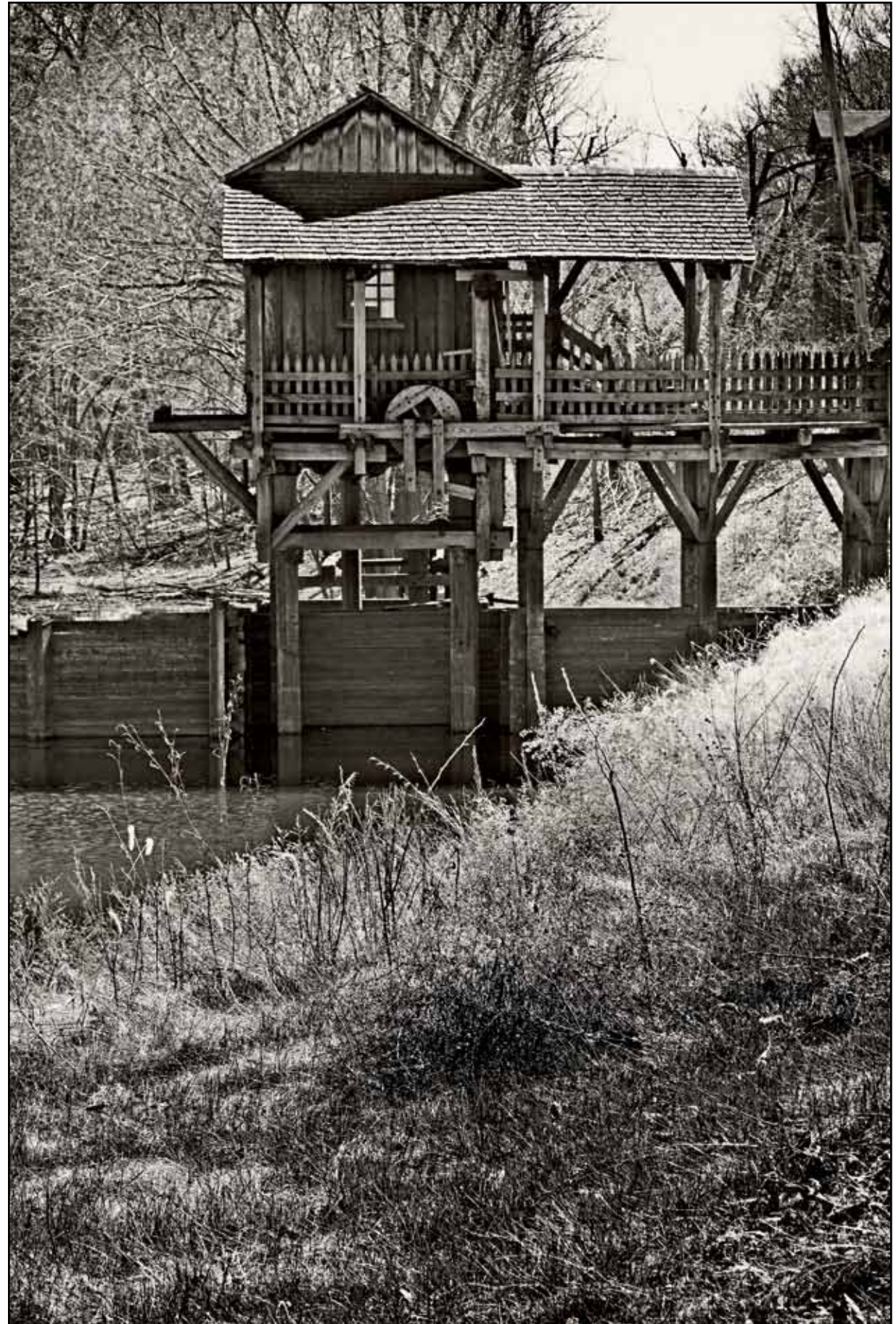


"He assured those with whom he came in contact that he was a piece of floating driftwood; that after the winter of deep snow, he had come down the river with the freshet; borne along by the swelling waters, and aimlessly floating about, he had accidentally lodged at New Salem. Looking back over his history we are forced to conclude that Providence or chance, or whatever power is responsible for it, could not have assigned him to a more favorable refuge."

– Herndon's Life of Lincoln

This is where it began. It was here, at the grist and saw mill in late April 1831, where Abraham Lincoln, his step brother John Johnston, and his cousin John Hanks ran aground on the mill dam while trying to take a flatboat of goods to New Orleans. The three young men, Hanks was the oldest at 29, Johnston was 21 and Lincoln, 22, had been hired by Denton Offutt, a frontier entrepreneur who was "enterprising and enthusiastic, but also boastful and vain" according to historian Benjamin Thomas.

Lincoln and Hanks had built the flatboat themselves, cutting and preparing the lumber at a small settlement just north of Springfield. Now, it looked as though the entire project would be headed for disaster, as the boat became hopelessly stuck on the dam and began taking on water, threatening the cargo of corn, barreled pork and live hogs.



The story told by residents and retold by historians is that Lincoln took charge, getting the goods to shore. He then climbed up the bank to the village of New Salem; borrowed an auger from the cooper, Henry Onstot; drilled a hole in the boat, allowing the water to drain out; repaired the hole; got the flatboat over the dam; loaded the cargo back up; and headed off to New Orleans.

But not before Offutt had a chance to look over the village, declare that he would build a store there and if young Abraham were willing, make him a clerk in the store.

And, that was how it began for Lincoln in New Salem.

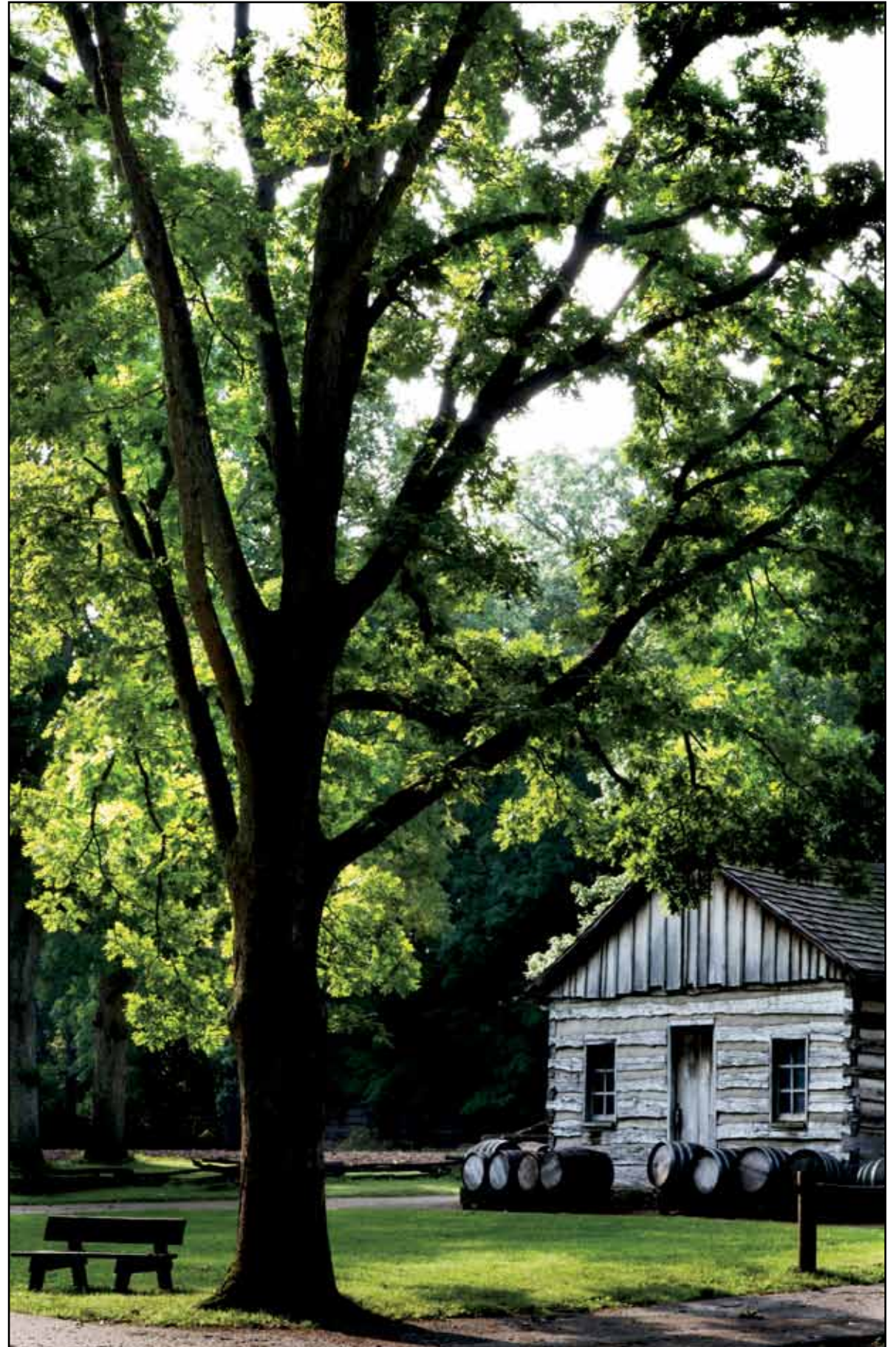


Mill Door Detail

It would be hard to overstate the importance this tiny community played in Lincoln's development. He may have arrived as a piece of floating driftwood, with virtually no formal schooling and no experience at any jobs other than farming, odd jobs and – counting the trip he was embarking upon when the boat became stuck on the dam – two flatboat trips to New Orleans.

But, when he left six years later, it was as an attorney and state legislator credited with playing a key role in engineering the transfer of the state capitol from Vandalia to Springfield.

The path that would eventually lead to the presidency started with that walk up the banks of the Sangamon River to Henry Onstot's Cooper Shop.



Cooper Shop in Summer



Cooper's Tools

If you visit the Cooper Shop you may be told that it was also Lincoln's "law school." The wood shavings that covered the floor after a day of scraping and shaping served as handy fuel for the fire in the hearth and an ideal spot for a young man studying law books to spend the evening reading by the light of the fire.

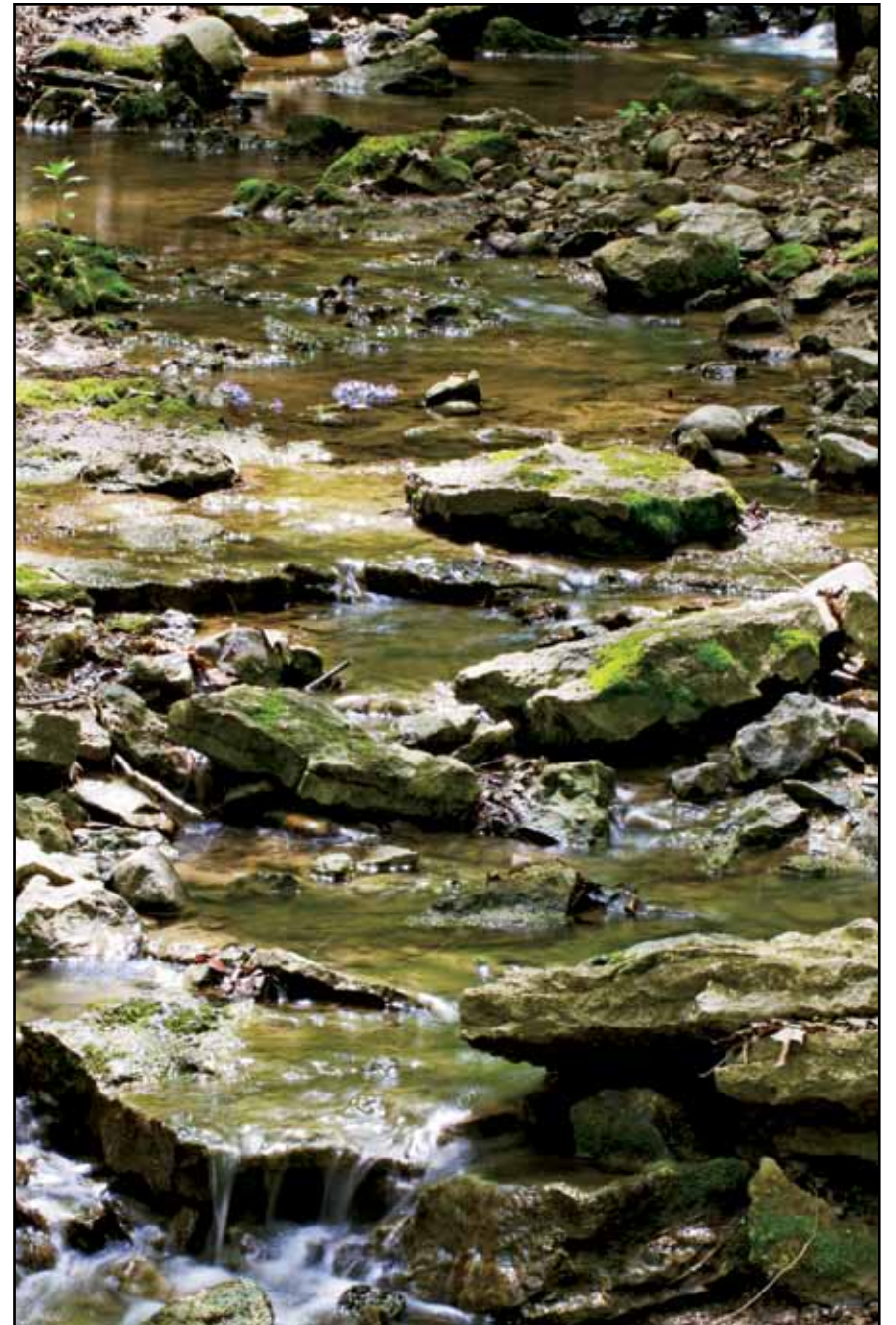
Onstot's Cooper Shop is the only original building in New Salem. When the village folded, it was taken apart and moved to Petersburg, the new County Seat, and eventually recycled into a home. Its log walls were covered over and forgotten until it was rediscovered and moved back to New Salem in 1922.

The flatboat that Lincoln and his kin took to New Orleans was itself a piece of floating merchandise, because the boat could be taken apart and the lumber sold. After selling the cargo and the boat, Lincoln began the trip back to New Salem and the job at Offutt's new store.

It was the trip to New Orleans that gave rise to the story of Lincoln's disgust at seeing a slave auction where a young

girl was made to trot before the buyers, like a horse being evaluated to determine if she was fit and sound.

From New Orleans, Lincoln bought passage on a riverboat back to St. Louis and then walked about 125 miles to Coles County where his father and stepmother had moved. After seeing them, he set off on foot again, walking more than 100 miles from eastern Illinois to New Salem.



Flatboat
Stream, Mentor Graham Trail



Summer Corn



It is hard enough to imagine walking that distance today along roads through settled and developed countryside. It is even more difficult to imagine walking through a country that was sparsely populated and largely undeveloped.

Where did Lincoln sleep? How did he find his meals? Did he walk alone, or did he meet up with fellow travelers? What did he carry with him? Did he stop in villages to have his shoes repaired or his shirts washed?

These, and hundreds of other routine details of life have been lost. To speculate on these ordinary particulars of day-to-day existence is to see and better understand the context of New Salem. If we were to encounter the Abraham Lincoln of 1831 walking through the countryside, his pants too short and his shirt soaked with sweat, would we have opened our door to him, or blown out the candles and drawn the curtains?



Submerged Leaves and Frog Along Mentor Graham Trail

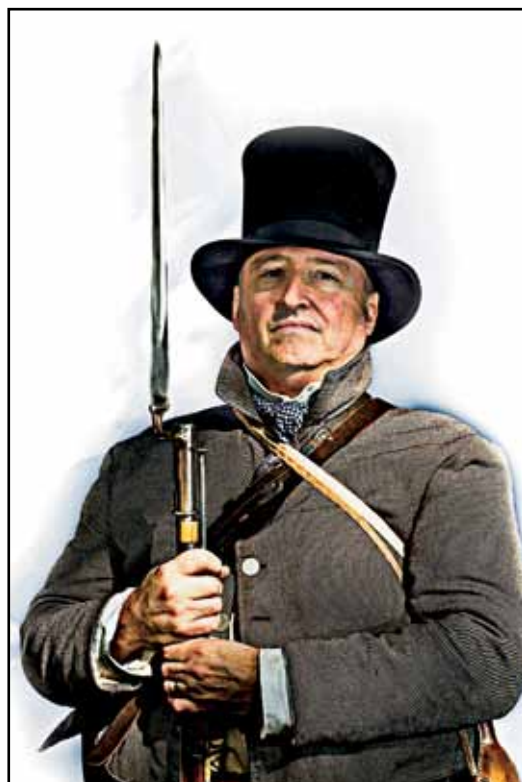
There does not exist a single photograph of Abraham Lincoln or any other resident of New Salem during the time when the village was active.

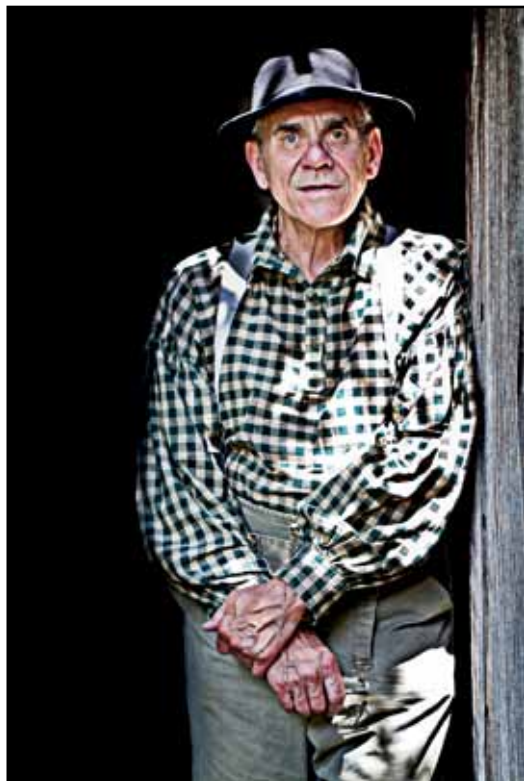
That, we know for certain because of the simple fact that by the time the photographic process reached the United States in late 1839, New Salem was rapidly being abandoned.

So, to imagine the occupants of the village as Lincoln knew them, we have to turn to those who visit, volunteer and work in the village today. But, if we look into their eyes and study their faces, it does not take much to see that we are looking at the faces of those who shared this community with a young man who had landed here anxious to put his childhood behind him and begin life as an independent adult.









In this book, residents of New Salem are pictured in color, as Lincoln would have known them. This was a village full of life and hope and promise. Those who came here came for the opportunity. Regardless of their background and history before, New Salem offered them a chance. This was a village that took in a young, rough Kentucky boy and turned him into a successful legislator and lawyer.

Lincoln was a young man in New Salem, but not much younger than many others. Mentor Graham, who taught school there, was just nine years older than Lincoln, as was Samuel Hill, the most successful businessman in New Salem. It was Hill, who with John McNamar, started the first store in New Salem and later built the carding mill.

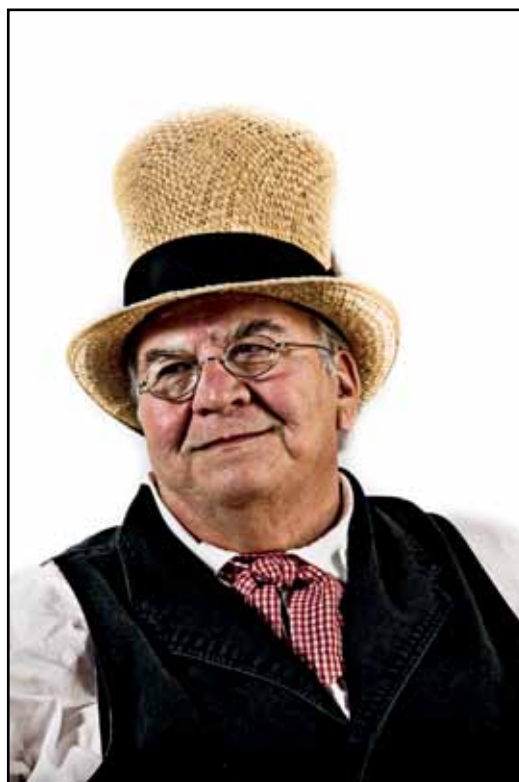
Isaac Gulihur, who served with Lincoln in the Black Hawk War, was born in June 1815, which meant he was not yet 17 when he enlisted. Jack Armstrong, the leader the Clary's Grove Boys, was born in 1804. Dr. Francis Regnier, one of the two physicians in New Salem, was just two years older than Lincoln. William Berry, Lincoln's partner in their ill-fated stores, was born in 1811, two years after Lincoln.

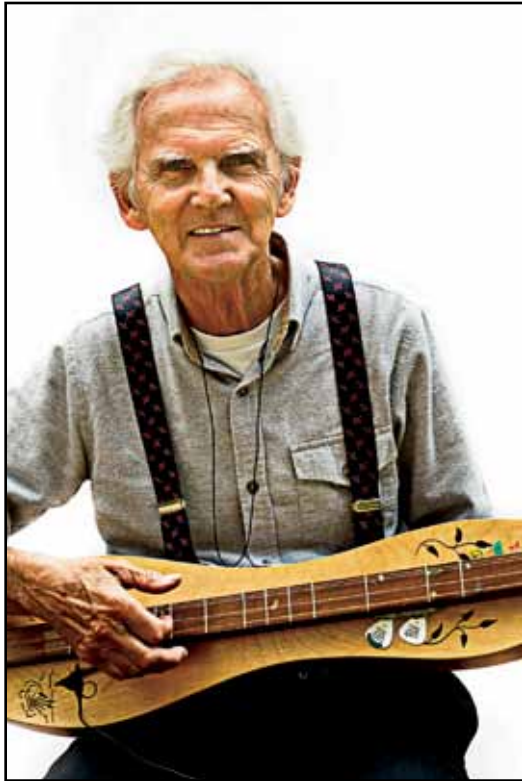
Even Judge Bowling Green was less than 40 years old when he allowed Lincoln, not yet licensed to practice law, to argue minor cases before him.









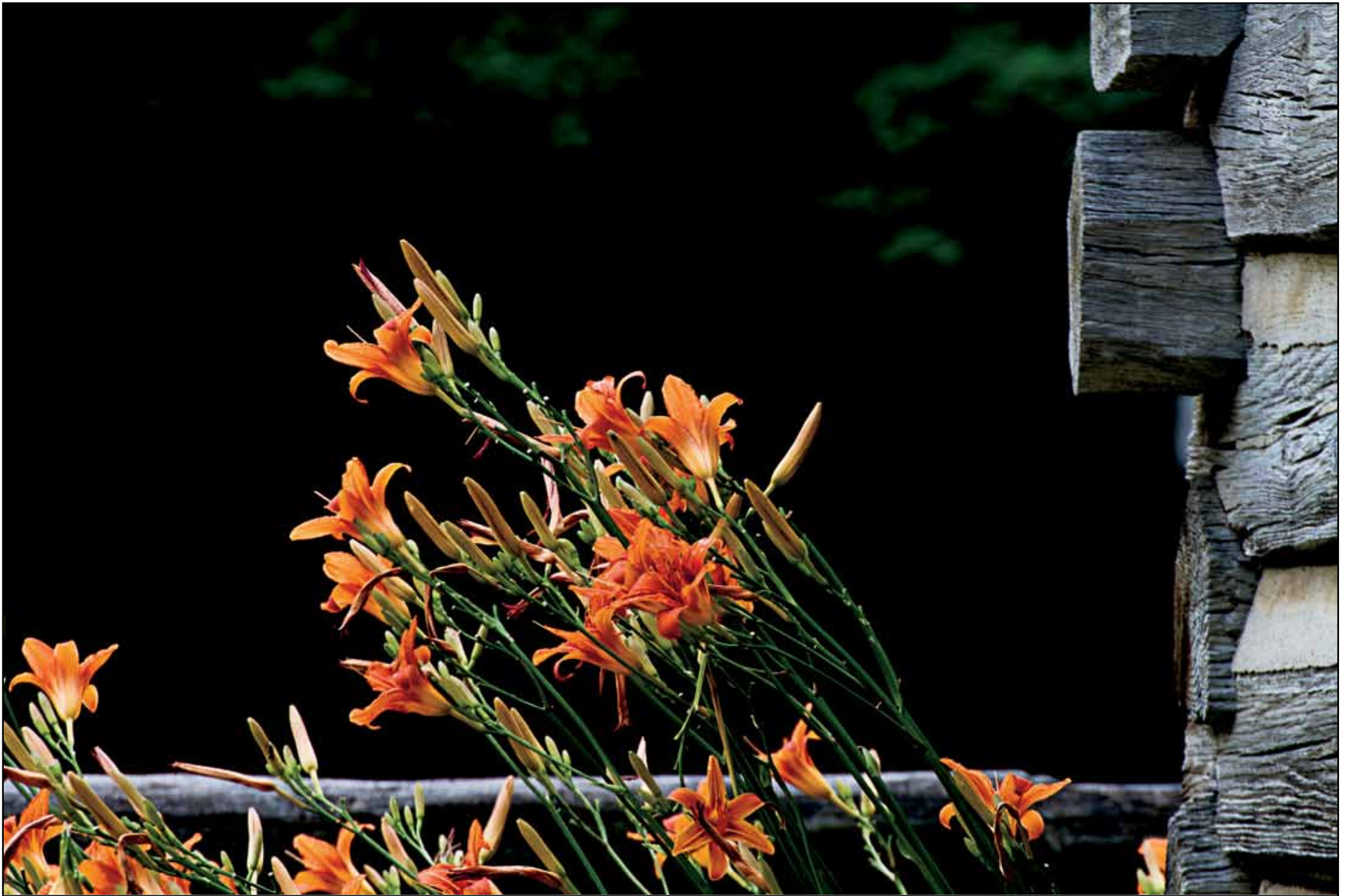


To consign these residents to dry, faded pages of history by draining their faces and clothes of color seems unfair.

New Salem was full of life during the 1830s. That was how Lincoln knew it and that is how visitors should see the occupants of the village.







Daylilies Outside Dr. Francis Regnier Office

In our day-to-day lives, we cannot afford to see the world as we do when we make photographs. Thousands of years of trial and, often fatal, error have taught us to scan our world for critical information and to filter out details that most would consider extraneous.

We may no longer rely on those skills to spot a bear in the distance or a member of an enemy tribe in the brush, but we still use that skill every day. Imagine the chaos that would result if we gave the same weight to a wildflower blooming at the base of a stop sign as we do to the sign itself.



At a park like New Salem we can surrender our constant scanning and sorting of information and focus simply on looking. One of the great strengths of photographs is that they transform the world. We may think we are seeing a reflection of life, but in fact, a photograph is never a true copy of the world.

The Museum of Modern Art curator and photographer John Szarkowski identified six key elements in "The Photographer's Eye;" what he called "The Thing Itself," "The Detail," "The Frame," "Time," and "Vantage Point." Another photographer, Stephen Shore, in his "The Nature of Photographs," reduced it to four characteristics – flatness, the frame, time and focus.

One thing to remember is that although we see the world in three dimensions, the camera lens transforms the scene into two.

Far from being a handicap, the single, Cyclops eye of the camera, more than anything else, allows us to break out of our habit of creating a visual hierarchy that ranks objects according to how important they are to us.

In a photograph, the wildflower is no less important than the stop sign, because neither is real and both occupy the same plane.

Similarly, our eyes do not frame a subject in the same way a picture does. When taking pictures we must always choose what we will include and what we will eliminate. If the photographer does not do it, the camera will.

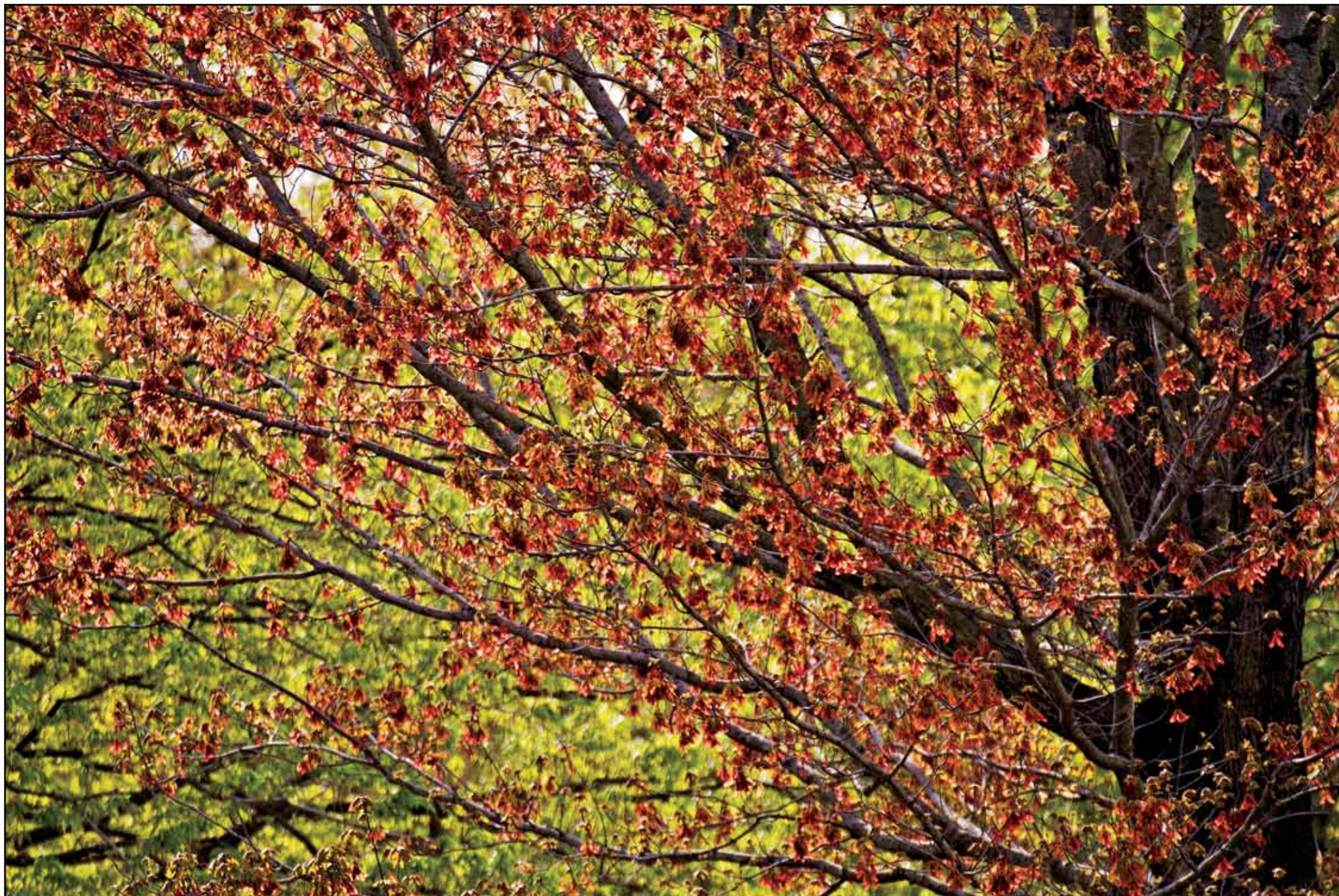
What is in the frame is what is important. There exists nothing outside of the frame (although this is not to say that photographs never imply that more exists out of the viewer's range. In fact, they often do, and sometimes photographs succeed because of the mysteries they do not show.)

Photographs enable us to isolate details and examine them more closely than we might ever do in our day-to-day lives. They allow, even command, that we appreciate the beauty of a fallen leaf or the traces of the broad ax on a squared log.



Casual viewers of photographs may forget that almost every image represents a frozen fraction of a second. The moment that the shutter clicks can never be repeated. Out of the billions of unceasing moments that march us through the universe, the photograph snags a single instant and freezes it for eternity.

As we move across the universe on a planet that is constantly spinning and swirling about the sun, nothing will ever be in exactly the same place ever again.



Maple in Spring



Winter along Main Street



Prairie Grass



We photograph "things" and often we imagine that the thing itself is the subject. But, in reality we are capturing light. The earliest photographers talked about fixing the light. They were keenly aware that the miracle of photography was the ability to capture light and use it to draw an image. There was a reason why William Henry Fox Talbot, one of the discoverers of photography, called his book of pictures "The Pencil of Nature."



No camera lens can reproduce the ability of the human eye to simultaneously keep near and far objects sharp. That, of course, is something that most of us come to appreciate too late in life, as our eyes age and we find ourselves relying on bifocals.

Photographers must, either consciously or unconsciously, choose what objects will be in focus and what will not. By adjusting focus, we can shift attention from one element to another. Rather than letting the viewer decide what is important in the picture, we are telling him or her: "look here, not there. This is what I want you to see, not that."

Two-dimensional, framed, focused images frozen in time allow the photographer to tell you what he or she considers important, to force you to look at the scene as he or she commands. To look at a photograph is to sacrifice control over the way we see the world and surrender to the vision of the photographer.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Mentor Graham Trail



Miller Blacksmith Shop and Home



Leaves in Stream, Mentor Graham Trail

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"Unwilling to see their leader go down, Armstrong's friends rushed in. Lincoln, thoroughly aroused, backed against Offutt's store, denounced them for their treachery and offered to fight any or all of them individually."
– Lincoln's New Salem, Benjamin P. Thomas

The specifics of Lincoln's wrestling match with Jack Armstrong vary, but there is no doubt that the contest which took place next to Offutt's store just a few months after Lincoln arrived marked a critical point in his life in New Salem.

Denton Offutt built his store on the banks just above the Sangamon, next door to William Clary's grocery. Clary's brother John founded Clary's Grove, which in turn had given rise to the group of young men known as the Clary's Grove Boys.

Both stores are tucked into a less-traveled corner of the Village and can easily be overlooked unless visitors are familiar with the significance of what took place here.



Denton Offutt Store



Clary's Grocery

Clary's store was a "grocery," which meant that customers could buy liquor by the drink there. Not surprisingly, it became a favorite of the Clary's Grove Boys when they came to New Salem. We don't know what Bill Clary thought about the new store next door.

They were not really in competition, as Clary probably sold few provisions other than drink. But we do know that Denton Offutt's constant boasting about his young clerk ultimately resulted in a wrestling challenge between Lincoln and Jack Armstrong, the acknowledged leader of the "boys."



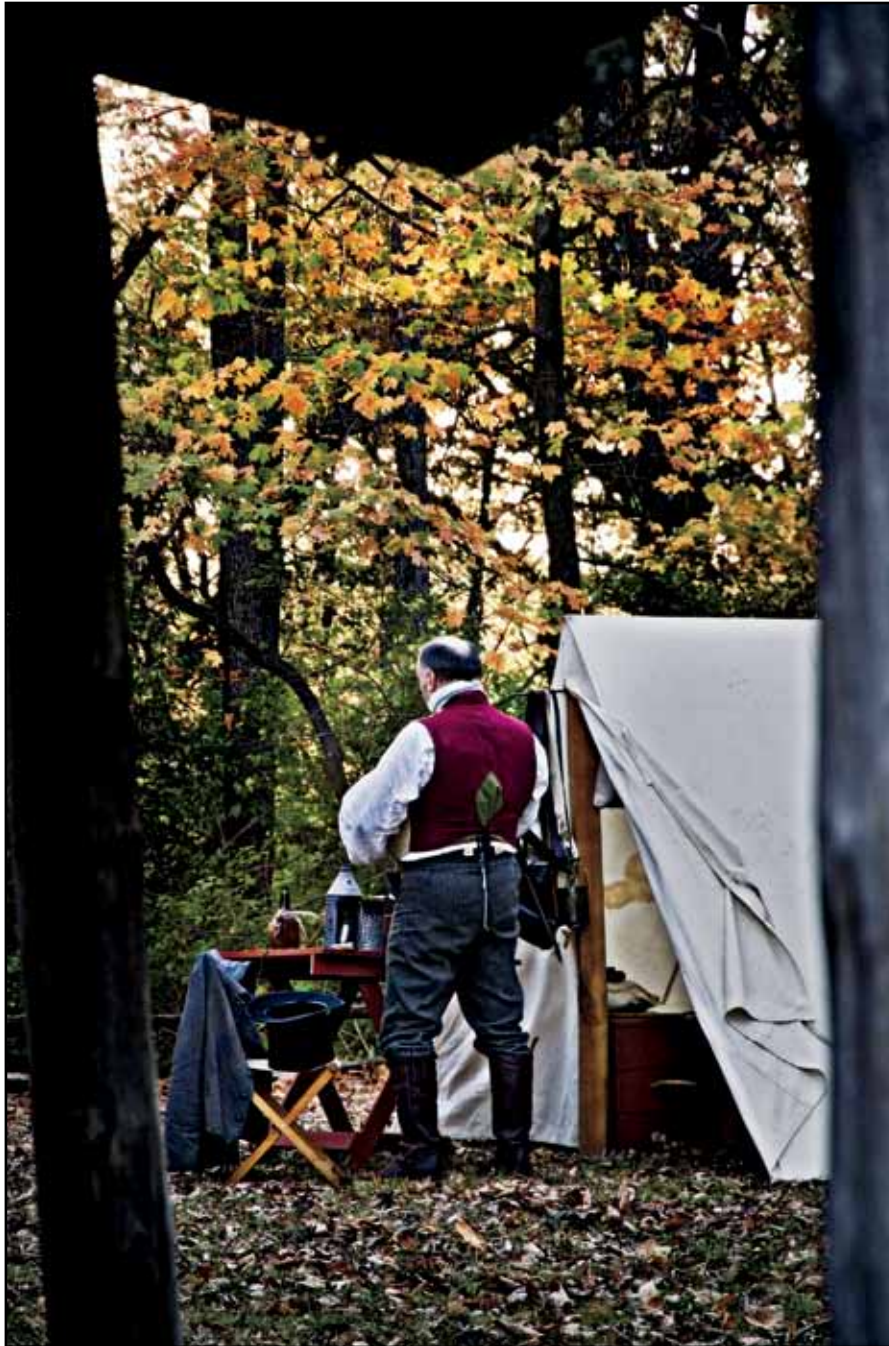
Detail, Clary's Grocery

Historian Benjamin Thomas described them as "a reckless, roistering, fearless crowd." They were, Thomas wrote, "typical American frontiersmen, with physical strength and courage as their ideals."

But, there was clearly far more to the "boys" than the popular image of them as little more than outlaws and drunkards. Armstrong was sufficiently respected that in August he had run for, and won, the office of constable on a ticket that also included Bowling Green as magistrate. In fact, Lincoln had voted for both men when he first arrived in New Salem.

As a frontier youth, Lincoln had experience at wrestling and other feats of strength, but he was not fond of the "wooling and pulling" of wrestling. He may have considered it demeaning for a clerk trying to manage a respectable store, or, with no one to mend either his wounds or his limited and, no doubt, threadbare wardrobe, he may have had more practical concerns.

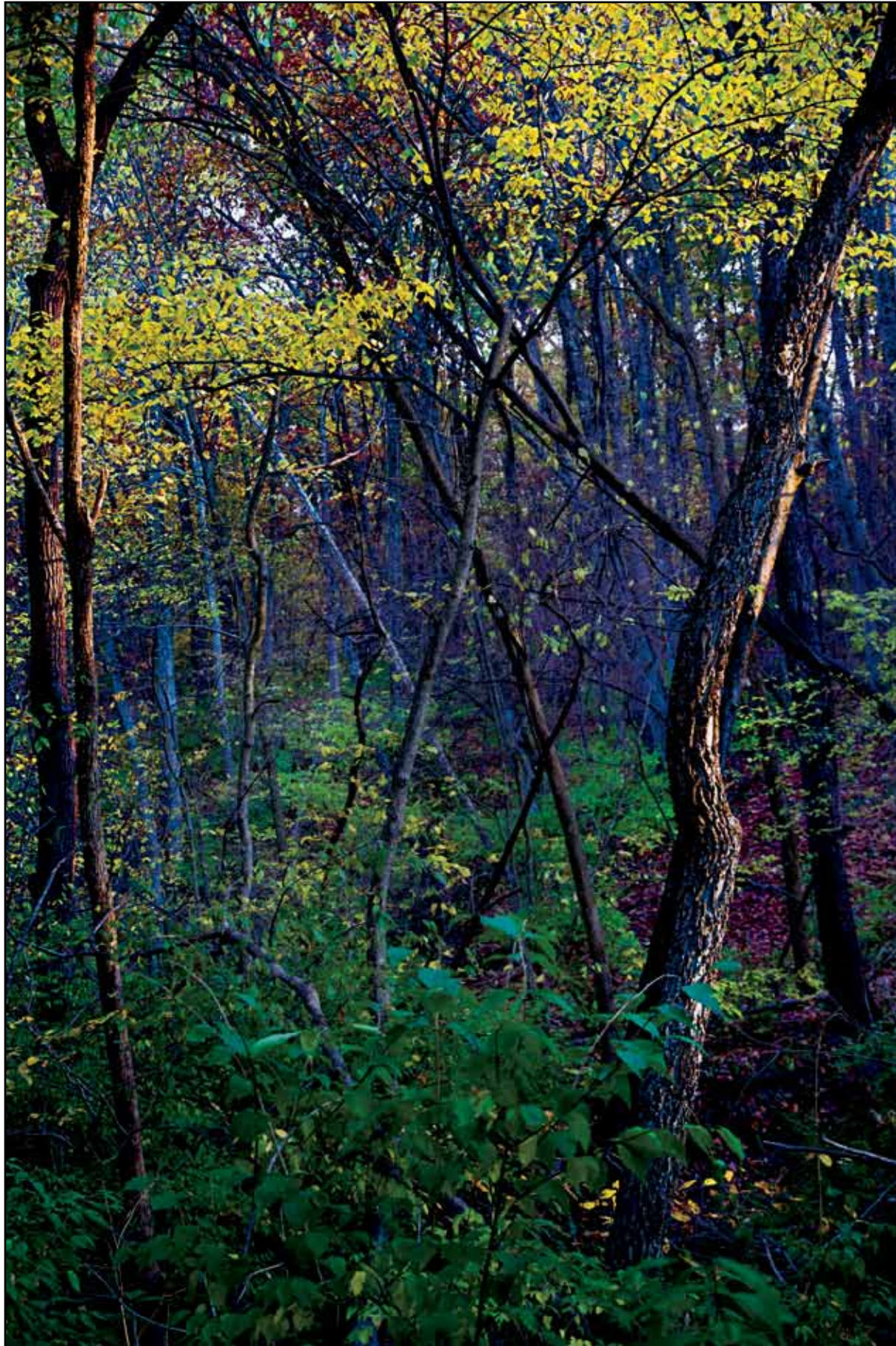
Nonetheless, his employer was the prime instigator of the match and ultimately, Lincoln had to oblige or be thought a coward and an ingrate. The precise details and the results vary, but what is known is that Lincoln emerged from the match having won the respect of one more critical element of New Salem society.



When Lincoln enlisted in the Black Hawk War the Clary's Grove Boys provided a significant portion of his company and assured his election as captain. Jack Armstrong served as his first sergeant.

When Lincoln secured his appointment as a deputy surveyor, it was Jack's wife Hannah who "foxed" his pants with buckskins, to protect his legs from briars while trudging through the brush.

Later, in his campaigns for legislature, the Clary's Grove Boys served as valuable allies and vocal supporters. In fact, their insistence that fellow Sangamon County Democrats support Lincoln, a Whig, in his second attempt for the legislature, helped assure his election.



Autumn on Mentor Graham Trail



National Society of the Sons of
Utah Pioneers Statue

Lincoln's intellectual abilities, his kindness and his ambition, would earn the respect of New Salem's educated and entrepreneurial residents.

But, he would never succeed as a politician without the support of those who earned their living with the plow and the ax.

On a fall day in 1831, backed up against the wall of Offutt's store, staring down his challengers and declaring himself ready to take them all on if necessary, Lincoln cemented that support.



Detail, Lincoln the Surveyor



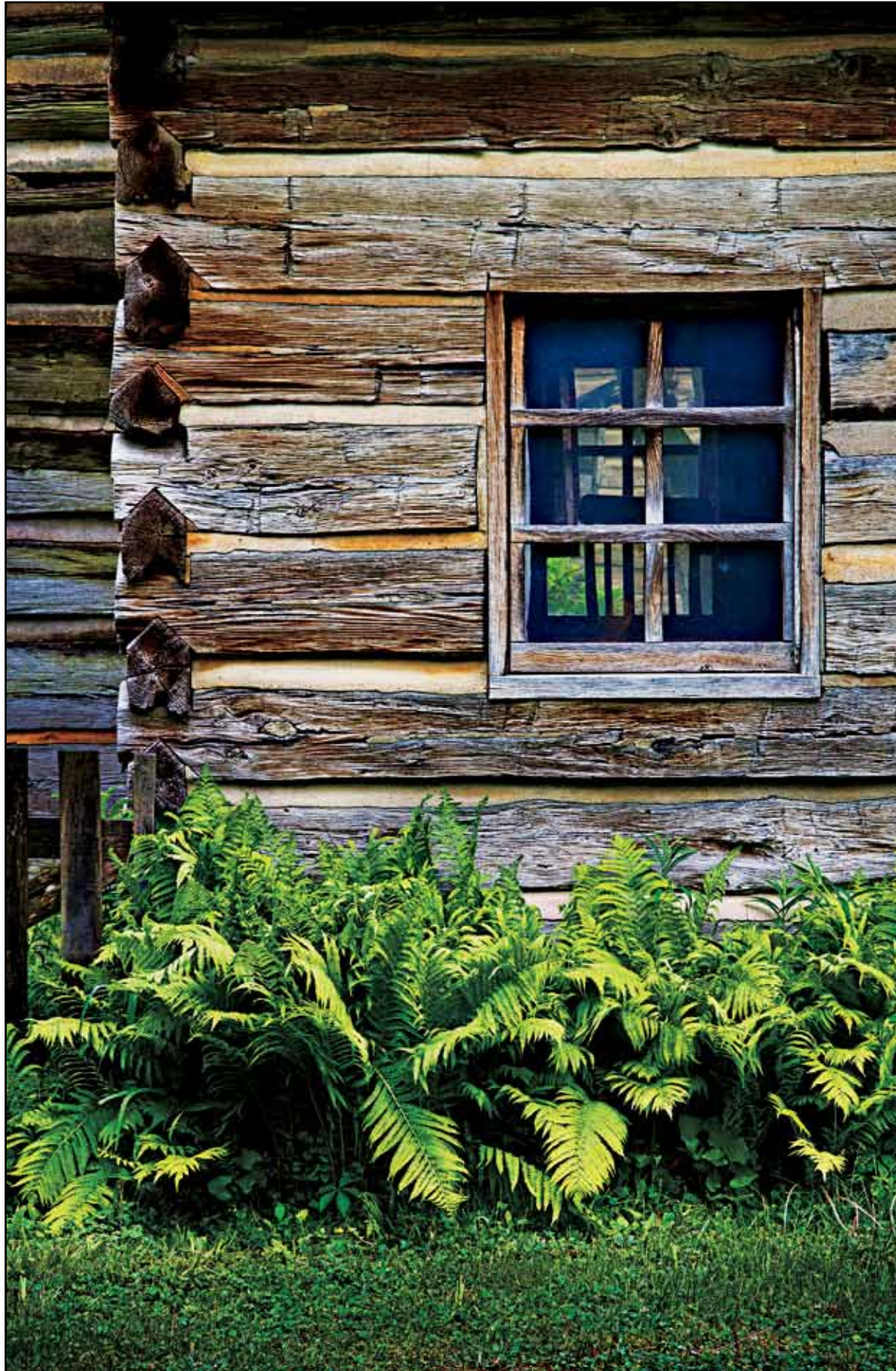
Changes happened quickly in New Salem. Businesses opened, closed and changed hands in rapid succession.

A single paragraph from Benjamin Thomas' history of the village gives a brief sample: "The tavern changed hands several times. November 26, 1832, Rutledge sold it to Nelson Alley for \$200; and in December, 1834, Alley sold it to Henry Onstot, the cooper. Onstot operated it for about a year, then built a new house and cooper shop in the western part of the town and sold the tavern to Michael Keltner. Clary, Allen Richardson, John Ferguson, brother of the cobbler, Alexander Trent, and Jacob Bale and his son Hardin were successive owners of the ferry."

It was a frontier town and to succeed required men to be flexible and inventive. While few would become wealthy, those who took advantage of available opportunities could succeed more quickly than they might in long-established and more rigid societies. When one businessman failed, there was often another ready to buy the enterprise at a bargain price and try to make it work. Those who failed could pack up and leave, as Denton Offutt did in the Spring of 1832.

Lincoln moved to New Salem in late July 1831 as an unschooled laborer. On August 1, he voted (probably for the first time ever) in a local election. Less than six years later he arrived in Springfield, an attorney and Whig Leader in the state legislature, who had been largely responsible for securing the relocation of the state Capitol to his new home.

School House



A timeline of Lincoln's career in New Salem provides a good grasp of how quickly he climbed in the frontier community.

July, 1831 – Lincoln moves to New Salem;

August 1, 1831 – Lincoln votes in his first election;

September, 1831 – Denton Offutt opens his promised store. William Greene is hired to assist Lincoln. Both men move into the store;

March, 1832 – Lincoln declares himself a candidate for the state legislature; In an attempt to demonstrate the navigability of the Sangamon River, a steamboat, the Talisman, travels from Beardstown to near Springfield. Lincoln and others are hired to clear obstructions and on the return trip, New Salem resident Rowan Herndon is hired to pilot the boat and Lincoln is hired as his assistant. Both men receive \$40 and upon safely returning the boat to Beardstown, they walk back to New Salem;



Robert Johnston Residence

April, 1832 – Offutt's store is failing and he would soon abandon New Salem. Chief Black Hawk and about 2,000 followers cross the Mississippi from Iowa into Illinois in the hopes of reclaiming land. The Black Hawk War begins and Lincoln enlists, entering service on April 21. The enlistment lasted 30 days. When it expired, he re-enlisted, eventually being discharged on July 16.

July, 1832 – Lincoln returns to New Salem, still a candidate for the legislature. There is little time to campaign and he finishes eighth in the field of 13. It is, Lincoln later points out, the only time he lost a direct vote of the people. The election does reveal his potential. In his own precinct he receives 277 of the 300 votes cast.

August and September 1832 – With Offutt gone, the election lost and the Black Hawk War over, Lincoln needs to earn a living. He wants to study law, but knows he is not yet ready. When an opportunity to buy into a store presents itself, Lincoln takes it and becomes a partner to William Berry. He purchases his interest on credit, a sign of the trust and respect he had earned from his neighbors.

April, 1833 – The store fails and the partnership is dissolved and Lincoln is in debt and out of work again.

Sometime in 1833 – Lincoln buys a book of legal forms and begins drawing up mortgages, deeds and other papers for his friends. He does not charge for the services, but gains valuable experience in drafting legal documents.

May, 1833 – Lincoln's popularity wins him the political support needed to be named Postmaster, despite the fact that it is a patronage position controlled by Jackson Democrats and Lincoln is a known supporter of Henry Clay. Lincoln must supplement his meager earnings as postmaster with odd jobs.

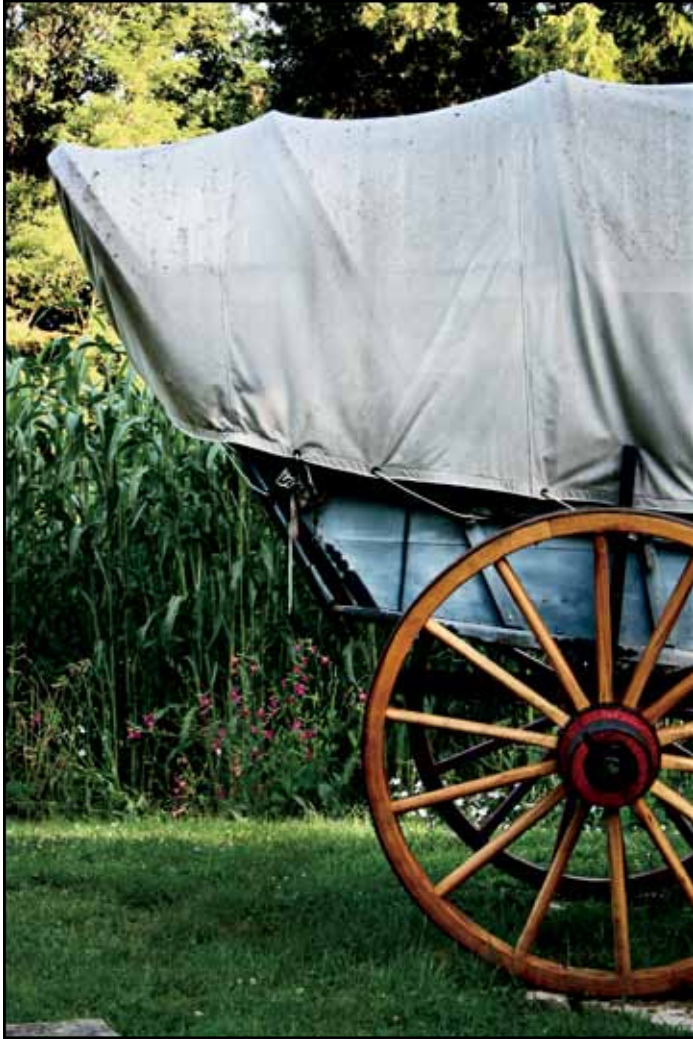


Window, Isaac Burner Residence

Later in 1833 – Lincoln receives an appointment as a deputy county surveyor. Once again, Lincoln's friends overlook his political affiliation and help him win the job, even though the county surveyor is a prominent Jackson Democrat.

April 19, 1834 – Lincoln's name appears on a list of candidates for the state legislature. Lincoln draws only nominal opposition after Democrats offer to support him so that they can concentrate their opposition on a stronger candidate, John Stuart. Lincoln consults with Stuart. Stuart is confident of his own chances and tells Lincoln to accept the support.

August 4, 1834 – Lincoln runs second in a field of 13 candidates. Both he and Stuart receive sufficient votes to be elected to the Ninth Illinois General Assembly. Stuart advises Lincoln to study law and loans him law books.



Just three years after he arrived in New Salem, Lincoln's transformation was nearly complete. He had won his first political office and he had begun, in earnest, to study the profession that would enable him to earn a comfortable living, avoid the manual labor he detested and pursue his passion for politics. New Salem had set him on the course that he would follow for the remainder of his life.

Lincoln advanced quickly, but New Salem also changed rapidly. However, as Lincoln rose, New Salem fell. What first seemed to be an ideal location along the banks of the Sangamon proved to be otherwise when it became clear that the river was too unpredictable and difficult to maintain in navigable condition.

Petersburg, just a few miles to the north, proved a better location for a settlement serving the rural area. Springfield, as the new state capital, also drained trade and population away from the village.



Visiting at the Henry Onstot Cabin







Robert Johnston Residence

As early as 1833, New Salem had peaked. It began a gradual decline. In 1836, the post office was moved to Petersburg. The merchants and craftsmen who made up the bulk of the commercial village had already begun to disperse, taking their businesses with them.

When Lincoln moved to Springfield on April 15, 1837 he was just one more resident who had abandoned the village.

On Feb. 15, 1839, Petersburg became the County Seat when north Sangamon County was split off and became the newly formed Menard County. There was no longer any good reason for most residents to remain in New Salem.



Inside Miller's Blacksmith Shop



Dr. John Allen Residence, Hill-McNeil Store, Barn



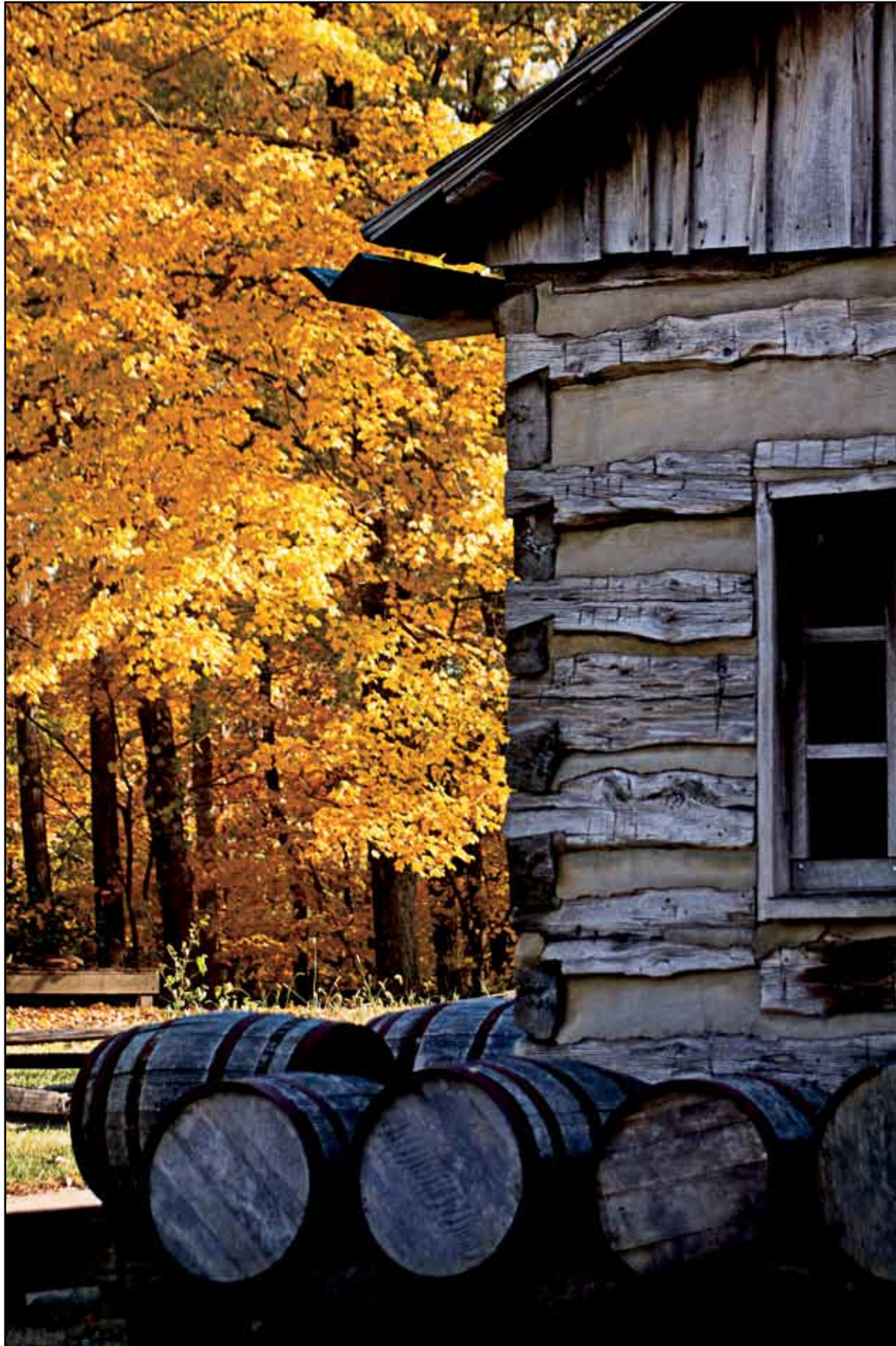
Mentor Graham Gravesite Along Route 97

One of the last to leave was Henry Onstot, the cooper who lent a young flatboat pilot his auger, so that the youth could drain the water from the boat and prevent the loss of its cargo. When Onstot left, he took his shop apart and moved it with him to Petersburg. It eventually became a home; its log skeleton covered over by lumber and plaster as it sat in Petersburg waiting to be rediscovered and returned to New Salem.

By 1867, not a single building remained in New Salem. Cattle may have grazed on some of the land. It would not be long before rabbits, deer, squirrels and other animals would become the only permanent residents.



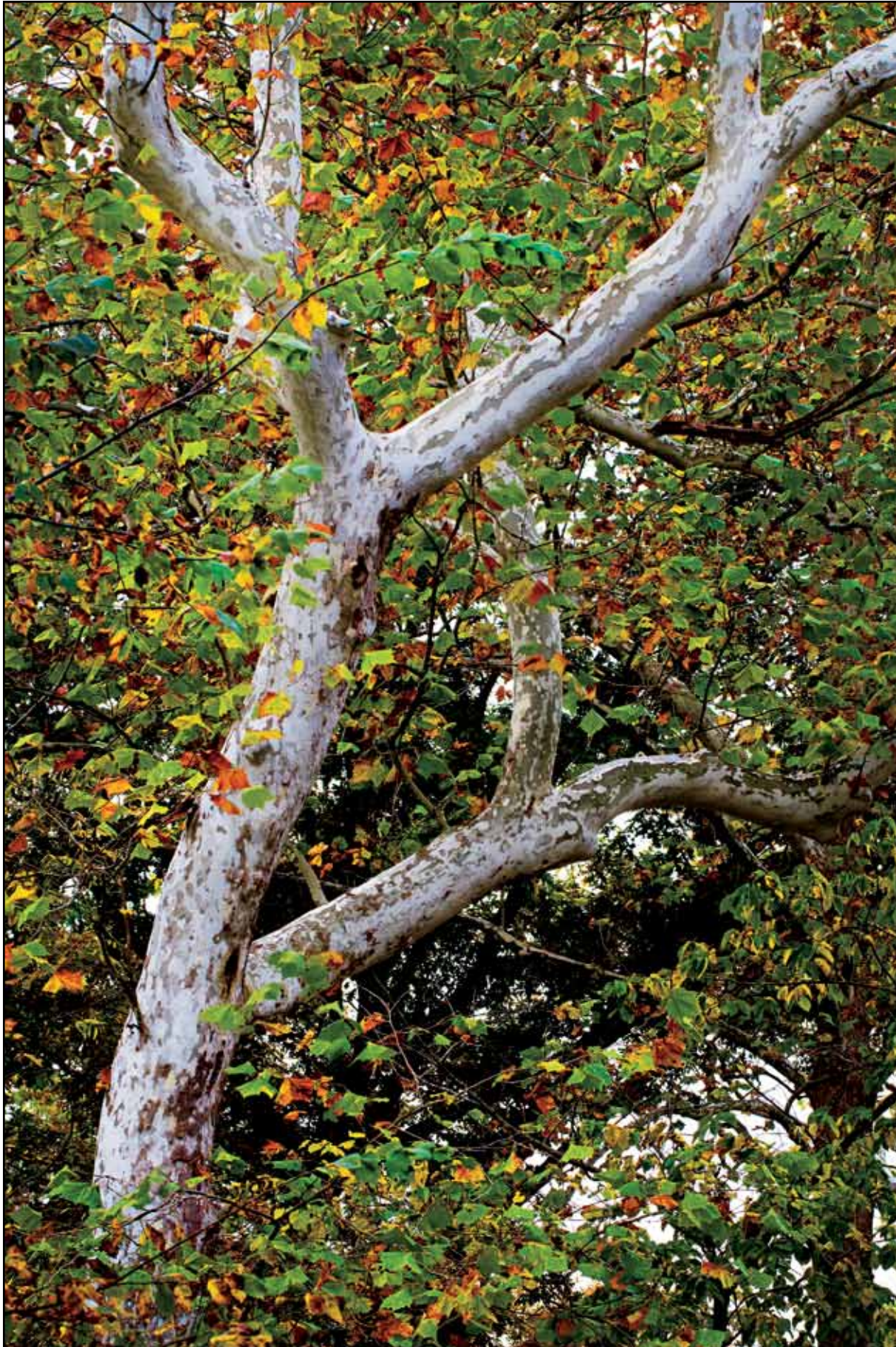
Cooper's Barrels



Onstot's Cooper Shop in Autumn



Robert Johnston Residence



This is a book about seeing.

It is impossible to disentangle Lincoln from New Salem. It is also impossible to disentangle New Salem from Lincoln. Lincoln spent less than six years as a resident of New Salem, yet they were some of the most important and transformative years of his life.

The restored village offers visitors a unique opportunity to walk the same lanes that Lincoln walked. To stand in the same spots he stood. To experience the places that played a critical role in turning a rough, unschooled youth of the American frontier into a successful attorney and politician.

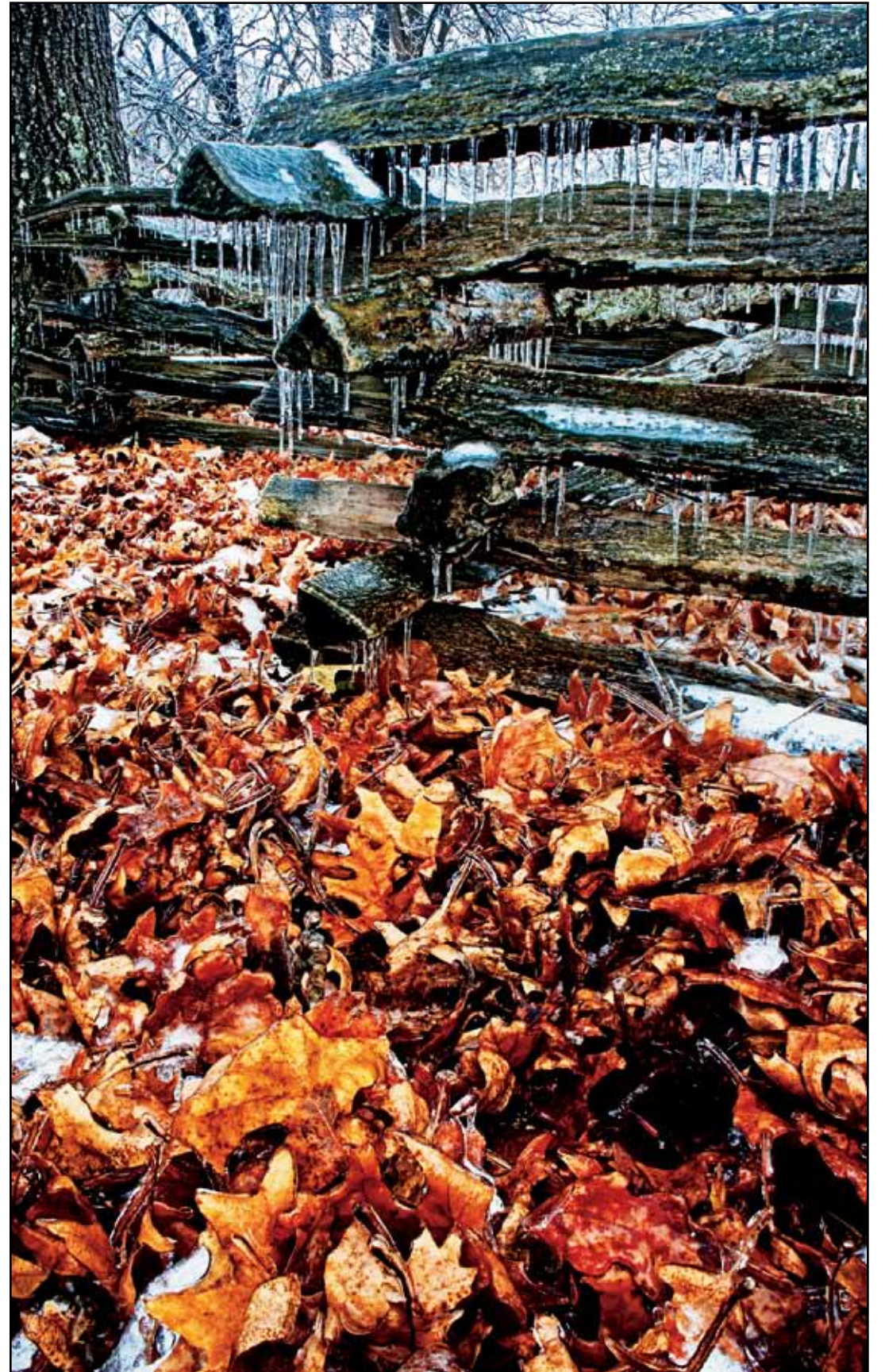
Throughout his life, Lincoln regularly returned to the lessons he learned in New Salem. There is ample evidence that he valued the friendships he had made while living in New Salem. These villagers opened their homes and their hearts to him and gave him the opportunities he needed to perfect his skills.

Some of the best times to visit the village come in the early mornings and late afternoons, after the crowds have drifted away. Walk the paths of New Salem... pause outside Denton Offutt's store...look in on the Cooper Shop...sit quietly in the schoolhouse...stand outside the Lincoln-Berry stores. If time permits, walk along the Mentor Graham trail and listen to the sounds of the woods.

There is nothing that restores the soul quite so much as to walk through this place of peace and quiet beauty as the sunlight ripples through the trees or as the snow falls gently on the homes. To be alone in New Salem with one's thoughts and to soak in the quiet, simple beauty of the prairie is one of the finest gifts that life can give.

To see New Salem is to see Lincoln. And, to truly see Lincoln, one must see New Salem.

Sycamore, Entrance Road to New Salem



May Apple, Dragonfly, Ice Storm