

Mr. Lincoln's Neighbors

Historic Preservation/Restoration at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site

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Lincoln Home National Historic Site was created and authorized by Congress in 1971. The site includes the only house Abraham Lincoln ever owned and the four-block middle-class neighborhood surrounding it in Springfield, Illinois. Most of these homes were single-family residences built during the boom periods of the 1840s and 1850s following the city's selection as the new state capitol in 1837.

Lincoln's twenty-five years of personal and political contacts in Springfield, many with his civically and politically minded neighbors, undoubtedly contributed to the development of the man and the president. With this in mind, the National Park Service established the year 1860, Lincoln's last full one in Springfield before heading for Washington, as the target date for interpretation of the neighborhood and preservation/restoration of the historic structures at the Site.

Preservation/restoration activities at the Site have been undertaken and completed at several homes in the neighborhood. The primary project, of course, has been the Lincoln Home itself, which has been completely restored, both inside and out, for full interpretation to visitors. The other structures, intended to set the character of the neighborhood in 1860, have been, or will be, restored and preserved on the exterior. The interiors are sensi-

tively adapted to fit the needs of the Site's staff, to act as display space, or for office space for other governmental agencies leasing the houses.

Preservation/restoration at the Site has been guided by the typical historical sources and physical evidence used in this field of work. However, with the exception of Lincoln's Home, the Site is dogged by a lack of pictorial evidence of the neighborhood prior to Lincoln's departure. Existing Lincoln-era photographs of structures in the park are limited to Lincoln's Home or partial views of neighboring houses and outbuildings seen in the background of these photographs. Further, there is an eleven-year gap in the cartographic evidence (a 26-year gap in what is considered dependable evidence—the first Sanborn map dated to 1884) corresponding to an era which saw significant improvements to many homes in the neighborhood. This gap also includes the 1860 preservation tar-

get date. By the time dependable sources record these structures, the Lincoln-era house has often been altered by later additions changing the character of these houses. The alterations continued until very near the present time, following more than a century of metamorphosis of the houses to meet the needs of growing families, increased affluence, changing ownership, and altered occupancies (including office, museum, and multi-family dwellings).

Today, the structures are often unrecognizable as Lincoln-era buildings. The loss of fabric makes preservation/restoration to the target date a formidable, if not impossible, task. Each house must be individually studied to address the basic question, "Can the house be restored to the 1860 target date?" If not, what is an appropriate plan of action to provide for an accurate restoration of the house while providing the visitors with an experience befitting the mandate of the Site? Three current projects best exemplify the problems and possibilities on the Site in attempting to restore and preserve the structures to the mandated 1860 target date.

The Harriet Dean House (HS-13) was built as a simple one-room gable-roofed cottage (Figure 1). An increase in the value of the lot suggests an initial construction date of 1849. An 1854 map, and a similar 1858 map, of Springfield (by city engineers) clearly indicates that a small, squarish structure sat on the lot. Physical evidence indicates the limits of the cottage and

provides an indication of the structure's massing and roof configuration. Further, window and door locations are clearly seen in the skeleton frame. The existing windows in this part of the house are undoubtedly in original locations and are likely original fabrics themselves. Archival research suggests that no additions were made to the house until 1867, when a large mortgage appears in the chain of title. The additions apparently enlarged the house more than five times its original size. At the time of the field investigation, this seemed like an unbelievably large undertaking for this neighborhood; however, additional evidence uncovered during construction confirmed the scale of these additions. The next available cartographic evidence, panoramic views of the city dating to 1867, 1870, and 1873, indicate a significantly larger house than that seen on the earlier maps. Past experience at this park has cast a wary eye on the accuracy of these panoramas since the artists apparently took many liberties producing these drawings. However, in this case, these drawings fairly accurately depict what was seen in the house during the investigative work. The first available Sanborn map, in 1884, generally confirms the house depicted in the panoramic views. Later maps indicate only very minor changes to the house with no significant changes being made to the 1867 house. This is borne out in the intact fabric of the standing structure.

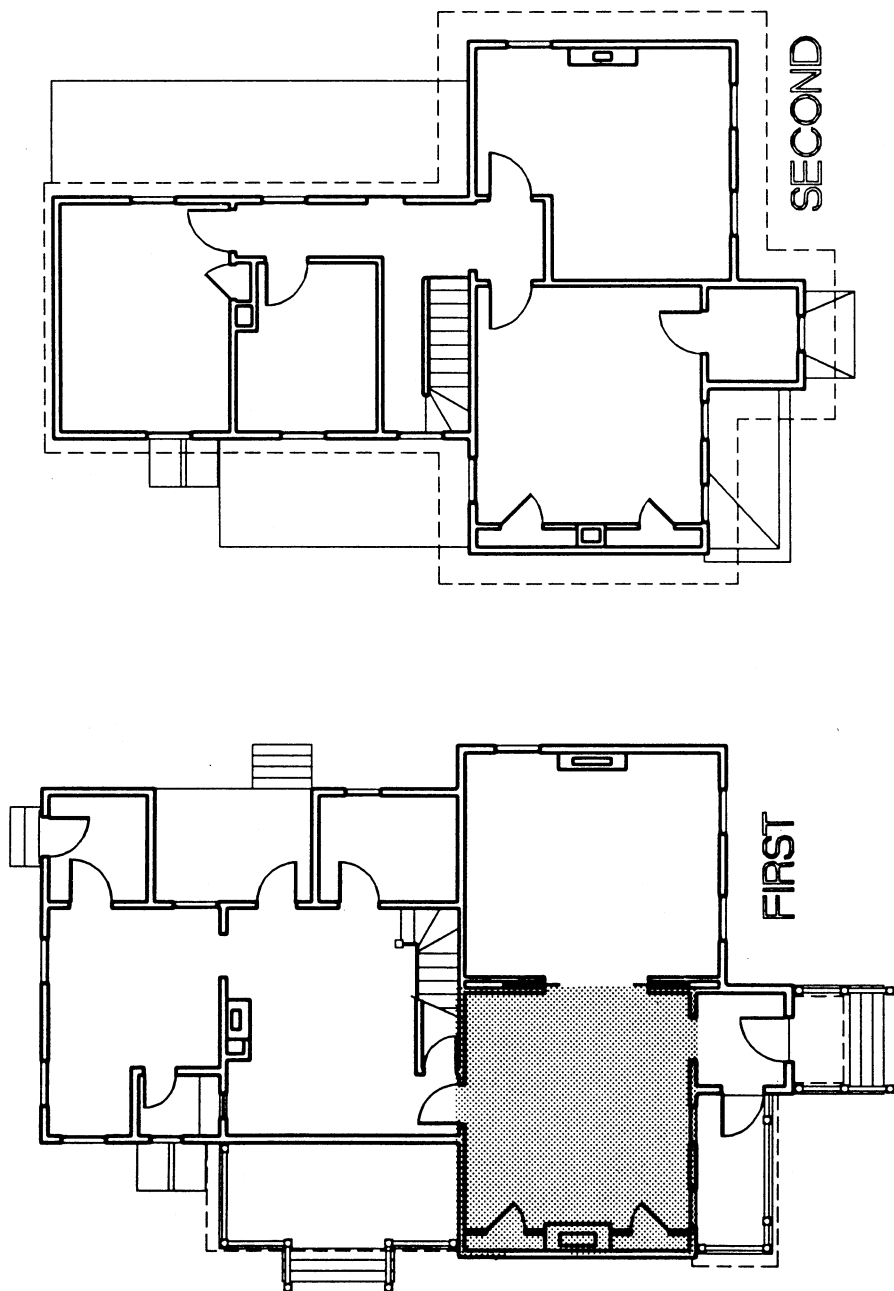


Figure 1. Dean House, 1867. The first- and second-story plans. The shaded area marks the limits of the original 1849 one-room cottage. (Fischer-Wisnosky Architects, Inc., *Historic Structure Report—Dean House*.)

Based on all the physical evidence gathered during the historic structure report, the recommended treatment of the house was preservation/restoration to the 1867 appearance. Although it is not to the Site's target date, it is believed that any attempt to return the house to its 1860 appearance is not possible due to a lack of evidence and a loss of fabric. Despite the house's restoration to a time after the target date, the fabric which remains is largely being preserved rather than restored, and the resultant house is one which "fits" into the Site and provides the visitor with a feel for the neighborhood Lincoln knew 130 years ago.

The Charles Arnold House (HS-20) located directly across the street south of the Lincoln Home, began as a small two-room cottage with a sleeping loft above (Figure 2). An increase in the value of the lot suggests an initial construction date of 1840. The following year, a one-story addition was made to the back of this cottage, doubling the size of the first floor. There may also have been some site improvements at this time. Following this date, there is no indication of changes in the property value to suggest any significant work on the house. The 1854 and 1858 city maps indicate a long, narrow structure with a J-shaped plan located near the front of the lot directly on the long street-side property line. There is a small square outbuilding seen at the alley. Three panoramic views of the city consistently indicate a house

similar to that seen on these maps except that there is only a straight-line plan with no apparent J-shape. The house shown has a taller gable-roofed addition at the end. The only door indicated is on the long face of the taller portion of the house. There is a gable-roofed outbuilding shown at the alley.

The 1884 Sanborn map indicates a structure with a J-shaped plan; however, the shape is obscured by extensive infill construction which nearly doubled the size of the house. There is photographic evidence available for this house, all of it seen beyond in photos of the Lincoln Home. Photographic evidence of the outbuildings (likely a barn and privy) exist as early as 1860. Photographic evidence of the house itself is available only as early as 1885 (Figure 3). However, these photographs indicate only about two-thirds of one elevation of the house. This photograph confirms what has been seen in the cartographic and physical evidence. The Sanborn maps, archival evidence, and photographs indicate little apparent change until circa 1900, when portions of the house were demolished and the remaining structure was rotated 90 degrees and relocated to the rear of the site. By circa 1902, the owner built a much larger house at the front of the lot. Over the next 70 years, the Arnold House was added onto and renovated until all that remains of the original house today is the original one-room cottage with the sleeping loft. In 1978,

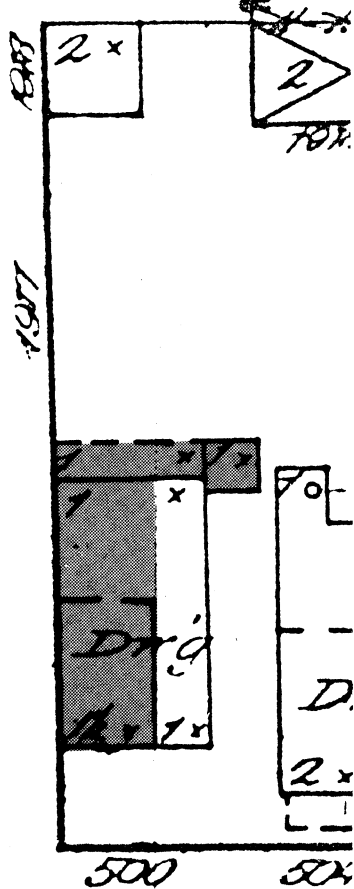
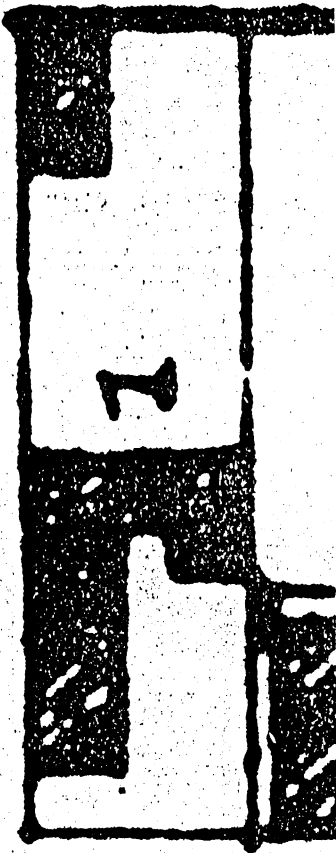


Figure 2. Arnold House, 1854 & 1884. On the left is a portion of an 1854 city map indicating a J-shaped plan. The drawing on the right is from the 1884 Sanborn map. The shaded area indicates the "J" shape still in evidence, although infilled with later construction. (Left drawing from *City of Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois*. Drawn by M. McManus. New York: Hart and Mopather, 1854. Courtesy of Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield. Right drawing from "Springfield, Illinois." New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., February 1884. Courtesy of Lincoln Library, Sangamon Valley Collection, Springfield.)

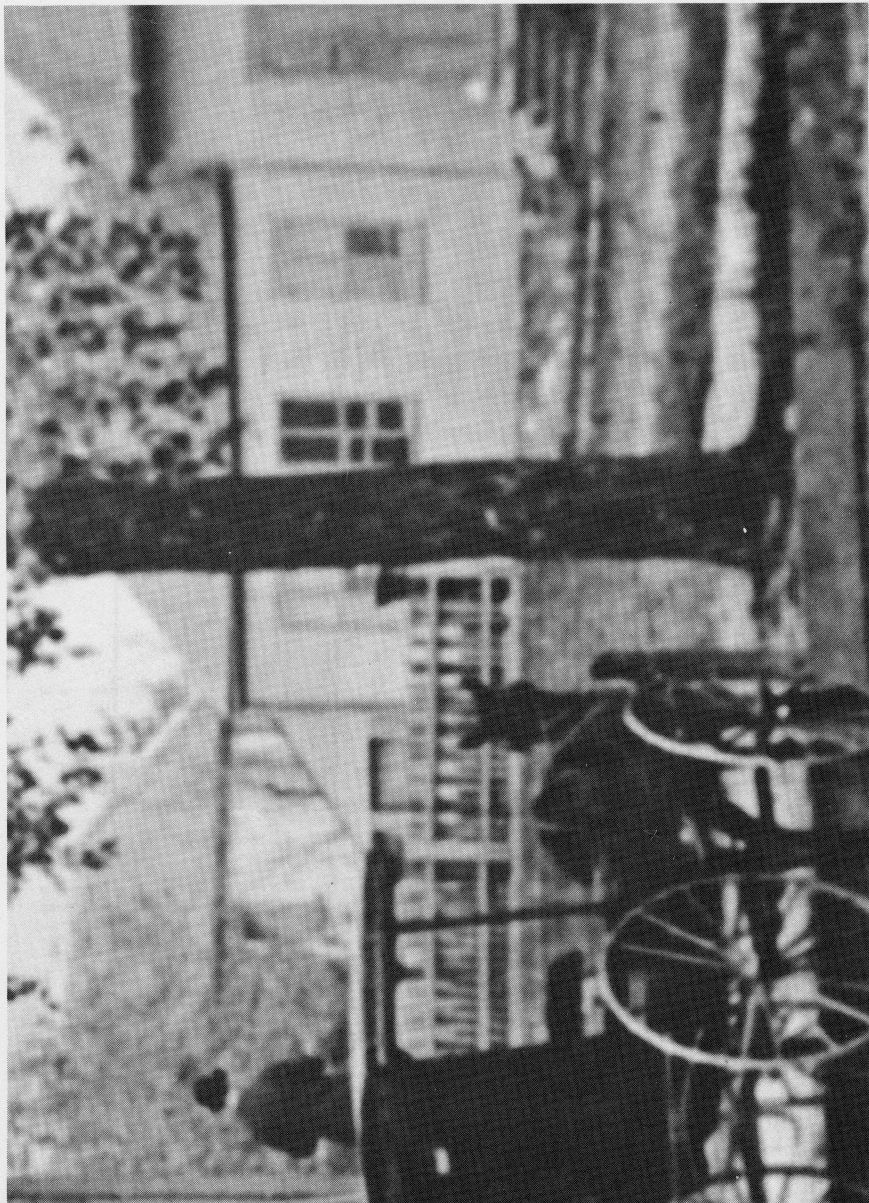


Figure 3. Arnold House, ca. 1885. This a view of the house seen in the lower right-hand corner of a photograph of the Lincoln Home. This photograph and others like it provide a view of the north façade of the house as it appeared in 1860. (Courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.)

the 1905 house at the front of the lot was demolished by a Site contractor. The demolition contract called for complete removal of all foundations. Archeological investigations on the lot have determined that it is unlikely that any original Arnold House foundation survived the demolition work of the larger house; however, some archeological evidence of the outbuilding at the alley and two privy locations have been unearthed.

Based on the available evidence, and the credibility of that evidence, the recommended treatment for the Arnold House is to preserve, restore, and reconstruct the house to its 1860 appearance, relocated to its original siting on the lot. The barn and the privy will also be reconstructed. The interior will be adapted for use as a display space, interpreting preservation/restoration activities at the Site—a very compatible use since, with the exception of the Lincoln Home, this is the most completely period-documented structure at the Site (Figure 4).

The Julia Sprigg House (HS-11) was originally built in 1851 as a small rectangular gable-roofed cottage (Figure 5). The 1854 and 1858 city maps indicate a rectangular structure with a porch in one of the rear corners. The house is seen situated toward the middle of the lot. The three panoramic views of the city consistently indicate a structure of similar size; however, these views are not always clear or consistent with the location of the structure on the

lot. The house remained virtually unchanged until circa 1873, when the owner (no longer Julia Sprigg) built a two-story balloon-framed addition with a porch at the front of the house. This plan configuration is indicated on the 1884 Sanborn map. This map further indicates some non-extant outbuildings, one at the alley and one near the immediate rear of the house. This basic configuration remains unchanged until approximately 1922 when a new owner undertook substantial renovations to change the house into a “stacked” duplex. This owner, and another who followed a year later, added a second floor to the rear (or original) portion of the house, lowered by 24 inches the height of the existing second floor, installed all-new Craftsman-style windows and doors, demolished the fireplace, re-sided the original one-story cottage portion of the house (to match the new second floor), and rebuilt the front porch into a two-story brick-columned porch. Some twenty years later, the house was again renovated into apartments and remained that way until the mid-1970s.

The treatment of the Sprigg House has indeed presented a preservation/restoration dilemma. Although the mass and form of the building throughout its history is basically understood, evidence of the character of the original windows and doors, the circa-1873 front porch, and the chimney profile is not available. Three different treatment alternatives have been considered.

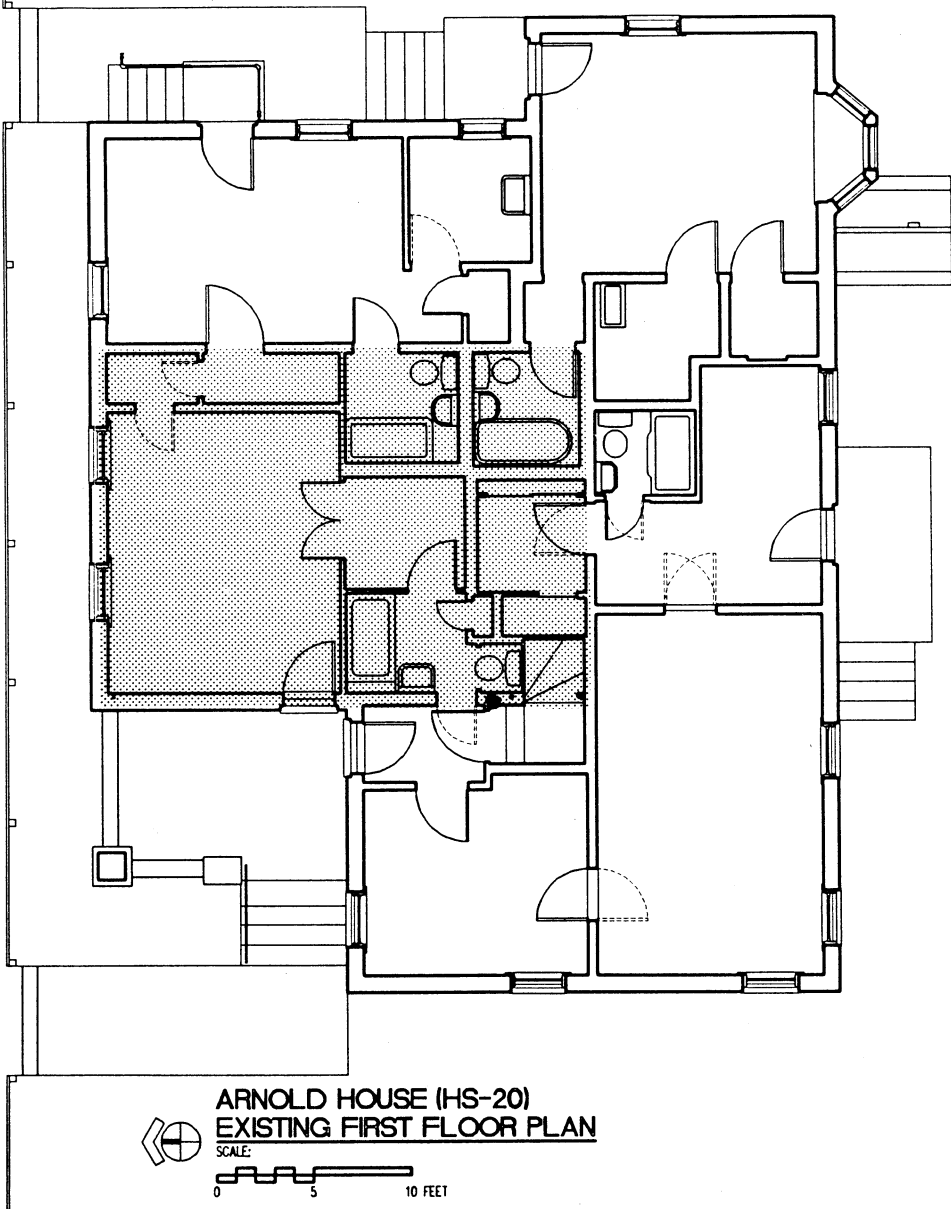


Figure 4. Arnold House, 1994. The current first-floor plan. The shaded area shows the limits of the original 1840 cottage which was relocated to the rear of the property at the turn of the century. (From Fischer-Wisnosky Architects, Inc., *Historic Structure Report—Charles E. Arnold House.*)

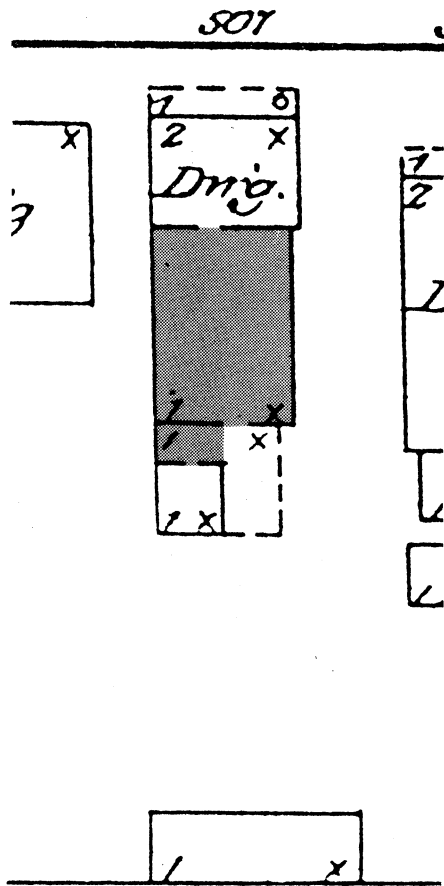
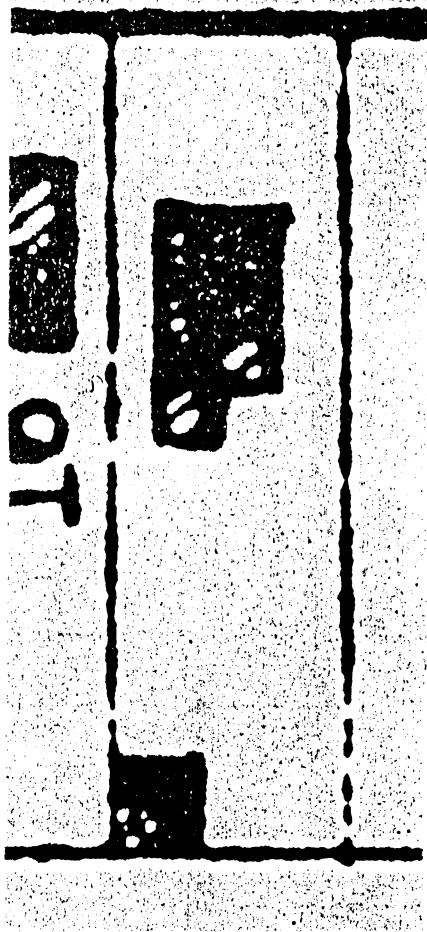


Figure 5. Sprigg House, 1854 & 1884. On the left is a portion of an 1854 city map indicating the simple rectangular plan of the original cottage. The drawing on the right is from the 1884 Sanborn map. The shaded area shows the limits of the original cottage. (Left drawing from *City of Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois*. Drawn by M. McManus. New York: Hart and Mopather, 1854. Courtesy of Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield. Right drawing from "Springfield, Illinois." New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., February 1884. Courtesy of Lincoln Library, Sangamon Valley Collection, Springfield.)

The first alternative is to preserve and interpret the house in its 1922 form, basically as it now stands, with only minimal restoration work. This alternative is logical since it does provide for the accurate restoration of one point in time of the house's history. However, this alternative fails to restore or preserve the house to anything vaguely resembling the house as Lincoln knew it in his day. Thus, it falls short of the Site's stated restoration goal.

The second alternative is to restore the house to its circa-1873 appearance. This option would require some speculation concerning the front-porch configuration, the lite patterns of the windows, the appearance of the doors, and the profile of the chimneys. The original locations and rough opening sizes of the windows at the second floor of the circa-1873 portion of the house were documented during the physical investigations. The original first-floor windows at the front portion of the house are assumed to have aligned with those at the second floor; however, this has not been confirmed due to the present first-floor occupancy of the house. Only some window locations for the 1851 cottage have been discovered, since much of the evidence was apparently destroyed during later renovations. It has been suggested that the character of the missing elements could be patterned after period examples elsewhere in the park or other similar neighborhoods. This alternative is logical insofar as it

does provide for the restoration of the structure to a period soon after Lincoln's departure from the neighborhood. Further, this alternative restores the house as close to the historic period as is possible while remaining grounded in evidence of some of the character-giving elements of the house. It is likely that further removal of non-original finishes would uncover additional physical evidence; however, this alternative still requires speculation on numerous key features while failing to restore the house to meet the Site's stated goals.

The third option is to restore the house to its 1851 appearance, which is most likely one and the same as the 1860 appearance. This option would require speculation to restore the location of the chimney; the location, size, and character of most of the windows; the location and size of the front door; and the appearance of the street façade of the house. This alternative is logical since it returns the house to its appearance in 1860; however, it is a flawed solution due to its dependence upon speculation that cannot be based on solid evidence.

As can be seen from the examples of these three very different projects, completely accurate preservation/restoration of structures at the Site to the target date is often a difficult, if not impossible, task. It requires careful consideration of several factors to achieve acceptable solutions. The acceptable solution does not, and cannot, always return the historic

structure to its 1860 appearance. As has been noted, the primary factor hampering preservation/restoration to the Site's target date of 1860 is a lack of documentary evidence of the four-block neighborhood during the Lincoln era. Each structure, and the associated available evidence, should be considered on a case-by-case basis for each building. Not only must the target date be considered, but also the closest restoration date which is realistically possible to achieve based on what is known about the property. In other words, the parts are as important as the whole.

This undocumented period, coupled with the loss of some of the character-giving fabric at several of the houses, will continue to make difficult the accurate rest-

oration to the mandated target date. Nonetheless, through extensive physical research, careful consideration of available documentary evidence, and a continuous exchange of ideas between the parties involved in the work, acceptable solutions can and will be developed that will bridge the gap between the Site's target date and the available evidence for individual structures.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Since this essay was written, the first floor of the Julia Sprigg House (previously occupied) has been vacated, allowing for further physical investigation to discover additional evidence of the features of the 1851 cottage. This investigative work will begin sometime in the spring of 1994.

