

## **Abraham Lincoln**

*Essay prepared by IHS staff*

A native of Kentucky and a resident of Illinois for most of his adult years, Abraham Lincoln spent one quarter of his life in Indiana. His parents, Thomas and Nancy (Hanks) Lincoln, moved to the Hoosier state in the year of statehood, 1816, and the family lived in what is now Spencer County until 1830.

Lincoln is widely recognized as America's greatest president, his achievements, given the supreme crisis of civil war that confronted the nation in 1861, surpassing even those of Washington. Lincoln is credited, subject to some qualifications, both with preserving the Union and freeing the slaves, and he is also admired for his extraordinary command of the English language.

Lincoln's Indiana years were difficult, marked with personal tragedies (including the death of his mother in 1818), and--in his own words--could be summed up as the "short and simple annals of the poor." But he overcame the economic and educational disadvantages he endured in pioneer Indiana and became a prosperous attorney and politician in Illinois. Originally a Whig, he served in the Illinois legislature and enjoyed a single term in the United States House of Representatives (1847-49) before reemerging in the 1850s as the leading Republican statesman in the West.

Defeated for the United States Senate in 1858 by Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln went on to electoral victories in 1860 and 1864 (carrying, if narrowly, both Indiana and Illinois but not Kentucky in these contests). His years in office as president are also the years of the American Civil War, a contest which, at long last, confirmed to the country a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." Lincoln died from an assassin's bullet on April 15, 1865, just six days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox.