James and Rowan Herndon arrived in the spring of 1831 built a store and opened it that fall. In the summer of 1832, James sold his interest in the store to William Berry. Berry was a local minister’s son and a corporal in Lincoln’s Black Hawk War. When Lincoln returned from the Black Hawk War and ran for the state legislature, he was defeated. He found himself without money and a means of business. Rowan Herndon did not like the partnership with William Berry, so Herndon sold his interest to Lincoln on a promissory note.

Berry and Lincoln later took over a stock of goods from Henry Sinco and James Rutledge, and in January 1833 they bought Rubin Radford’s stock. Lincoln recalls that he and Berry were both poor and took over the stock on credit, with no exchange of money. The two men kept store in the “First Berry-Lincoln Store” until they bought Rubin Radford’s stock of goods in January 1833, then moving across Main Street into the “Second Berry-Lincoln Store.” They got deeper and deeper into debt. According to records, Lincoln sold his share to Berry in April 1833, and Berry sold out to the Trent Brothers.

There were four stores in New Salem at this time. The Berry-Lincoln store was mainly a grocery store. Two other stores owned by Rubin Radford and James Rutledge were grocery stores. The fourth store, owned by Hill and McNeill (Note: whose real name was McNamar), carried a line of dry goods as well as groceries.

The Berry-Lincoln store was no more successful than any other store that began without having funds available. They didn’t have any money to improve their store, buy new stock or to tide them over until they began making a profit. According to New Salem tradition, Mr. Lincoln was more interested in reading and talking politics while Mr. Berry was interested in drinking the liquor.

The 2nd Berry Lincoln store is north on Main Street and was a one-story frame building consisting of two rooms. One was a large room in front with a smaller room adjoining on the north. The smaller room had a fireplace. Mr. Lincoln stayed there. When it was slow, as it often was, Mr. Lincoln would get lost in the pages of a book.
Mr. Lincoln was also postmaster while he kept the store. Lincoln became New Salem’s third postmaster on May 7th, 1833. It was his first federal job. Lincoln became postmaster under President Andrew Jackson. Federal law required that every postmaster keep an office. There is evidence that Lincoln kept the post office in the Second Berry-Lincoln Store. Harvey Ross, who carried the mail, recalled that Berry and Lincoln kept store in the same building as the post office.

Later, Lincoln moved the post office to Hill’s store where he clerked for a short time. There is no evidence that the post office was ever in the First Berry-Lincoln Store.

Mr. Rutledge, nephew of James Rutledge, said that the store was a frame building. It was one of the few frame buildings in New Salem. There were two rooms and in the small back room they kept their whiskey. They had pretty much everything. There was sugar, coffee, some crockery, a few pairs of shoes (not many), and some farming implements.

The main building of the 2nd Berry Lincoln store was twenty feet square on the outside. There was only one door for safety reasons. There was a basement measuring twenty feet square, but no door to the basement. Goods must have been stored in the basement and brought up through an inside trap door. The Berry Lincoln store did not have a porch but a generous oak tree that spread its limbs to provide shade for rest and relaxation on a hot day. A store front was a gathering place where the residents swapped stories and shared news.

McNamar is said to be the store’s last owner. In 1837 McNamar bought a lot in Petersburg and moved there. This means that maybe the store was empty. Mr. Warburton, a wealthy man originally built this store in a credible manner. He made the fireplace out of stone. There were two windows on the east wall and one window on the south wall east of the door. Since this building was built after the mill was erected, it is likely that the floors, siding and doors were built of sawn planks. It is known that the building was built of hewn studs and siding. The inside was probably sheathed, as well as the outside to provide protection in the winter season. Probably a hitching rail existed to the west of this building, for a map drawn by Mrs. Sam Hill
shows the Springfield road just west of the Rutledge Tavern continuing to the north past Main Street for a short distance. Perhaps the road continued because the hitching rail was used often.