

LINCOLN LORE

No. 98

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

February 23, 1931

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

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Editor

LINCOLN'S BEARD

In the pioneer day the course of least resistance encouraged most of the men on the frontier to allow their beards to grow. It may be said to the credit of Thomas Lincoln that he was always clean shaven. In this respect, as in many others, Abraham Lincoln followed in the footsteps of his father.

Lincoln's personal appearance was greatly changed by the wearing of a beard. Up until the time of his election to the presidency he was a smooth-faced man.

Just when he first conceived the idea of allowing his whiskers to grow cannot be determined but it would be reasonable to expect that after his nomination for the presidency the continual appeals for his portrait induced him to give more attention to his personal appearance.

On December 27, 1860, the following item appeared in the Evansville Daily Journal:

"They say that Old Abe is raising a pair of whiskers. Some individual of the cockney persuasion remarked that he was 'a puttin' on (h) airs'."

As this story appears to be of current interest it is likely that it was not very long before this date that he made the decision which was to bring about such a change in his appearance.

The first portrait of Abraham Lincoln showing him with a beard is said to have been made in Springfield, Illinois, early in the month of January, 1861.

On January 26, 1861, a photograph of Lincoln was taken by C. S. Gernon, a Springfield photographer. This photograph shows a much heavier beard, and a later portrait by the same photographer indicates that by the time he left Springfield for Washington he had quite a full beard.

Just how much Lincoln's conclusion to grow a beard was due to his correspondence with an eleven-year-old girl, Grace Bedell, is not known, but the letter he received from her shortly before the election is very interesting and is here printed by permission of Mr. George A. Dondero, of Royal Oak, Michigan, who is now in possession of the original letter.

Westfield, Chatauqua Co., N. Y.
Oct. 15, 1860

Hon. A. B. Lincoln,
Dear Sir:

My father has just come from the fair and brought home your picture and Mr. Hamlin's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much so I hope you won't think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you any way and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you; you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is going to vote for you to and if I was a man I would vote for you to but I will try and get everyone to vote for you that I can I think that rail fence around your picture makes it look very pretty I have got a little baby sister she is nine weeks old and is just as cunning as can be. When you direct your letter direct it to Grace Bedell, Westfield Chatauqua County, New York. I must not write any more answer this letter right off. Good bye.

Grace Bedell.

We might expect Mr. Lincoln would reply to any letter which he received from a child, as he was especially interested in children. His letter to Grace Bedell follows:

Springfield, Illinois, October 19, 1860
Miss Grace Bedell:

My dear little Miss: Your very agreeable letter of the 15th is received. I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughter. I have three sons—one seventeen, one nine, and one seven years of age. They, with their mother, constitute my whole family. As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affectation if I were to begin it now!

Your very sincere well-wisher,
A. Lincoln.

Grace Bedell, now Mrs. George N. Billings, of Delphos, Kansas, is still living. She is eighty-two years of age, but remembers well her meeting with President Lincoln some weeks after receiving his letter, while on his way to Washington for the inauguration.

The following statement signed by Mrs. Bilings has been prepared especially for this number of Lincoln Lore:

REMINISCENCE OF MRS. GRACE BEDELL BILLINGS

Before President Lincoln's special train arrived at Westfield, N. Y., Mr. Lincoln is said to have asked Hon. Geo. W. Patterson whose home was in Westfield, if he knew a family there named Bedell. Mr. Patterson replied in the affirmative whereupon Mr. Lincoln told him that he had received a letter from a little girl named Grace Bedell in which she advised him to wear whiskers, thinking it would improve his looks. He said, "The character of the letter was unique, so different from the many self-seeking and threatening ones I was receiving every day that it came to me as a relief and a pleasure."

I was at the station with my two sisters and a Mr. McCormack who had escorted us there when the president's train arrived. In my hand was a bouquet of roses which a neighbor had furnished so that I might give them to the president. The crowd was so large and I was so little that I could not see the president as he stood on the rear platform of his train making his address. But at the end of a short speech he announced, "I have a little correspondent in this place, and if she is present will she please come forward?"

"Who is it?—What is her name?" shouted a chorus of voices from the crowd.

"Grace Bedell," answered Mr. Lincoln.

Taking my hand, the gentleman who had escorted us to the station made a lane through the crowd and led me to the low platform beside the train. The president stepped down from the car, shook my hand, and kissed me. "You see," he said, indicating his beard, "I let these whiskers grow for you, Grace."

The crowd cheered and the president reentered his car. I was so surprised and embarrassed by the president's unexpected conduct that I ran home as fast as I could, dodging in and out between horses and buggies and once crawling under a wagon. Such was my confusion that I completely forgot the bouquet of roses that I was going to give the great man to whom I had offered such rare advice, and when I arrived home I had the stems, all that remained of the bouquet, still tightly clutched in my hand.

It seemed to me as the president stooped to kiss me that he looked very kind, yes, and sad.

Grace Bedell Billings.

Note: This is the introductory article of a series of studies on Lincoln portraits which will appear from time to time during the next few months. Editor.