

# LINCOLN LORE

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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

### LINCOLN'S EARLIEST PHOTOGRAPH

On the third day of August, 1905, the eldest and only surviving son of Abraham Lincoln presented a photograph of his father to the president of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company to be used as the insignia of the company.



THE CONGRESSIONAL LINCOLN  
From a daguerreotype by N. H. Shephard, Taken at Springfield, Ill., in 1846. Meserve, No. 1.

Every Lincoln portrait since that day has been of more or less interest to the company, and the studies of Lincoln photographs which begin with this issue find a very congenial local atmosphere.

The outstanding work done by Frederick H. Meserve of New York in his compilation of 108 Lincoln prints must serve as the basis of all systematized studies in this field. While his system of numbering is retained, an added feature of identification is introduced by naming the photographs.

The earliest known photograph might be called the Congressional Lincoln. It is the only available likeness of him during his term in Congress.

The genuineness of this daguerreotype has been challenged and many Lincoln students including the late Senator Beveridge have agreed with Mr. William Patterson, miniature painter, that "seemingly it is the picture of some other man."

The following excerpt from a letter in possession of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, written by Robert Lincoln to Judge Daniel Fish on Oct. 15, 1919, should remove any question of doubt as to the authenticity of the portrait:

"There was in his (father's) house up to the time of his going to Washington as president, a daguerreotype of himself and one of my mother, being those that I have mentioned. They came into my possession upon my mother's death."

Gibson W. Harris, who prepared for the November, 1903 issue of the *Woman's Home Companion* some of his recollections of Abraham Lincoln, says he moved to Springfield in September, 1845, and became acquainted with Lincoln by doing some work in his office. Shortly after his arrival in Springfield, Harris says:

"I made the acquaintance of a young man from Syracuse, New York, named N. H. Shephard, a daguerreotypist who was about opening a gallery in Springfield. Photographs were as yet unknown, and daguerreotyping was considered, as it actually was, a marvellous advance in the art of portraiture.

"Together we two, Shephard and I, looked up a boarding-house where we became room-mates, remaining such throughout my stay in Springfield. He was among the very first in his line to come as far west as Illinois, and we were warm friends to the end. In the latter part of 1848 he wrote me (at Albion) that he was about to start for California.

"In one of Miss Tarbell's Lincoln articles, published a few years ago in a current magazine, I noticed a portrait of Lincoln with the statement annexed that it was from a daguerreotype, but giving the reader to understand that it could not be ascertained when and by whom the likeness was taken. Later, the same portrait appeared in the *Century Magazine*, but still unidentified. I feel confident I am not mistaken in recognizing the portrait as the work of my friend Shephard, before whose camera I know Mr. Lincoln sat once or oftener. The claim repeatedly made for it of being the earliest portrait of Abraham Lincoln remains, as far as I know, an undisputed fact."

Further notes by Mr. Harris allege the photograph was taken in 1846 when Lincoln was thirty-seven years of age.

When the photograph was published for the first time in McClure's magazine for November, 1895, it aroused much comment.

Dr. John W. Powell, noted geologist and author, wrote the following letter to the editor of McClure's.

Washington, October 24, 1895.

"I am delighted with the proof of the portrait of Lincoln from a daguerreotype. His pictures have never quite pleased me, and I now know why. I remember Lincoln as I saw

him when I was a boy; after he became a public man I saw him but few times. This portrait is Lincoln as I knew him best; his sad, dreamy eyes, his pensive smile, his sad and delicate face, his pyramidal shoulders, are the characteristics which I best remember; and I can never think of him as wrinkled with care, so plainly shown in his later portraits. This is the Lincoln of Springfield, Decatur, Jacksonville, and Bloomington."

J. W. Powell.

An excerpt from the letter of Murat Halstead, famous journalist, gives an unusual pen picture of Lincoln, the Congressman.

Brooklyn Standard-Union,

October 23, 1895.

"The old daguerreotype was, after all, the best likeness, in the right light, ever made. This is incredibly fine. It shows Lincoln to have been in his youth very handsome, and the stamp of a manhood of noble promise is in this. There is manifest, too, intellectuality. The head is grand, the mouth tender, the expression composed and pathetic. One sees the possibility of poetry and romance in it. The dress is not careless, but neat and elegant. The elaborate tie of the cravat is most becoming. The chin is magnificent. The length of neck is shaded away by the collars and voluminous necktie. This young man might do anything important. I cannot understand how this wonderful picture should have been private property so long..."

Murat Halstead.

A fitting climax to the study of the Congressional Lincoln is found in the letter in which the writer years after was able to appreciate fully the "later sadness" of the martyred president.

Princeton, New Jersey,

October 23, 1895.

Dr. S. S. McClure:

My Dear Mr. McClure: I thank you very much for the portrait of Lincoln you were kind enough to send me, reproduced from an early daguerreotype. It seems to me both striking and singular. The fine brows and forehead, the pensive sweetness of the clear eyes, give to the noble face a peculiar charm. There is in the expression the dreaminess of the familiar face without its later sadness. I shall treasure it as a notable picture.

Very sincerely yours,

Woodrow Wilson.