

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN LORE

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Dr. Louis A. Warren . . . . . Editor

### THE REPUBLICAN NOMINEE IN 1860

A correspondent of an eastern paper who visited Lincoln on June 15, 1861, said that on that date Lincoln was giving Hicks, the portrait painter of New York, a final sitting. The reporter also commented on the zeal of biographers, photographers, and artists, who were on the grounds seeking an audience with the presidential nominee.



THE CANDIDATE LINCOLN

From a photograph made by Alexander Hesler. Taken at Springfield, Illinois in June, 1861. Meserve, No. 26.

It is very likely that one of the photographers to whom the correspondent referred was Hesler of Chicago. While it has been accepted generally that the campaign portraits of Lincoln which Hesler made were done in June, this rather indirect reference might place the sitting during the week closing on June 16.

Hesler, four years previous to this engagement, had made a portrait of Lincoln in his Chicago gallery which has been designated in this series of studies, "The Awakened Lincoln."

The Springfield sitting by the same artist resulted in two excellent photographs, one of which is herewith presented. This one is without doubt the most popular portrait of Lincoln as the Republican nominee for the presidency and became known as "The Candidate Lincoln."

We have the testimony of Mr. Hesler, the photographer, that Lincoln said, after seeing the picture, "Well, that looks better, and expresses me better than any I have ever seen; if it pleases the people I am satisfied."

Evidently it did please the people as it appears to have had a wider circu-

lation than any of the other pictures that Lincoln had taken before he started to grow a beard.

The story of the preservation of the two Springfield negatives made by Hesler is interesting in itself.

In 1865 Hesler disposed of his Chicago gallery, located at 113 Lake Street between Clark and Dearborn Streets, to George B. Ayres.

The process by which negatives were made at that time was known as the "Wet Plate" method. The glass plates which were coated with a collodion film were used over and over again by removing the film, and applying another solution of collodion to sensitize the plate.

On one occasion Mr. Ayres was going through the stock of old negatives for the purpose of culling out obsolete negatives when he came upon the two Springfield negatives of Abraham Lincoln.

The popular Lincoln portraits at that time showed Lincoln with a beard, and Mr. Ayres attached no great attention to the old negatives but laid them aside. The assassination of the president, shortly afterward, however, induced the photographer to wrap them up and place them with his own personal belongings.

Two years later Mr. Ayres sold the gallery and moved to Buffalo and later on to Philadelphia.

It has been the opinion of most Lincoln students that the earlier Hesler negatives of Lincoln were destroyed in the great Chicago fire, but this seems not to be the case as Mr. Ayres claims that the old Hesler gallery which he sold in 1867 "burnt out within a year." The great Chicago fire did not occur until 1871.

It is very fortunate that the two negatives of Lincoln, discovered by Mr. Ayres, were moved with his personal belongings or he would not have been able to bring them from hiding at the time Nicolay and Hay were about to cause a revival of Lincolniana by publishing their work in the Century magazine in 1886.

The interest which the reprinting of this photograph aroused, encouraged Mr. Ayres to arrange for its general distribution and it, with the companion portrait, have been known as the Ayres' prints.

Mr. Ayres gathered a great many testimonials from men who had personally known Lincoln, who gave their reactions to this portrait. Excerpts from some of these testimonials follow:

William Herndon, as reported by Jesse Weik. "There is the peculiar

curve of the lower lip, the lone mole on the right cheek, and a pose of the head so essentially Lincolnian; no other artist has ever caught it."

Henry C. Whitney. "The negative gives by far the most graphic, striking, and accurate picture of him now extant. It shows him exactly as he was when he was nominated for President."

Emily Todd Helm. "It is the truest I have ever had and is as perfect as it could be—as I remember him in 1860."

John M. Palmer. "I know of no better ante-presidential picture of Abraham Lincoln than this—and indeed there is none better."

Lyman Trumble. "The photograph of Abraham Lincoln, taken before he became President, brings vividly before me his face and features as I knew him."

S. M. Cullom. "I regard it as the very best picture extant of Mr. Lincoln as he was before he was elected President of the United States."

Noah Brooks. "It appears to me as the only life-like picture of 'Lincoln before the War' that I have ever seen."

Truman H. Bartlett. "To me it is the most human and approachable one I know of . . . It is indeed a beautiful and truthful representation of the man—before Lincoln wore a beard."

James W. Somers. "It shows him in his best mood, with a gentle smile lighting up his noble sympathetic face; delineating every feature, every line of his countenance, as we were wont to see it in the early days of 1850-1860."

D. W. Voorhees: "Your picture of him is the very best ever made, and in my opinion it would be impossible to improve upon it. Mr. Lincoln wore no beard until after his election to the Presidency, and I always thought it detracted from the greatness of his wonderful face."

While Lincoln may have been best known to the East by means of the portrait taken in New York at the time of the Cooper Institute portrait, the Hesler negative which we have chosen to call "The Candidate Lincoln" is the one which was more widely circulated in the west.

Note: The first installment of six portraits, depicting the "beardless" Lincoln is concluded with this presentation. It will be followed by six "bearded" Lincolns, bringing the series "A Dozen Lincoln Photographs" to a close.