

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN LORE

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THE BEST KNOWN LINCOLN PHOTOGRAPH

Although Abraham Lincoln was photographed more than a hundred times, one picture of him seems to have supplanted all others in popularity. From investigations which have been made, and information now available, about the use of this photograph, it is safe to say that it has been reproduced in greater numbers than all other likenesses of the president put together.



THE UNIVERSAL LINCOLN
From a photograph made by
Matthew Brady. Taken at Wash-
ington in 1864. Meserve No. 85.

This is the Lincoln we observe on the five dollar federal reserve notes and the three cent postage stamps. It would be difficult to estimate the number of different engravings which have been produced from this picture.

One Washington photographer, Matthew Brady, had the honor of taking one-third of all the original pictures of the much photographed Lincoln. At least thirty-five times he made and preserved a negative showing a likeness of Abraham Lincoln, yet the picture featured in this issue of Lincoln Lore is known everywhere as "The Brady Lincoln," completely overshadowing the other thirty-four prints.

There has been much speculation as to when this picture was made, the notation on one print states: "It was taken in 1862," while another bears this endorsement: "From photograph by Brady, Washington, 1865." One publisher who had prepared to distribute some sepia reproductions of this print, exhibited a copy of a letter from Robert Lincoln in which the son of the president says: "The accompanying photograph of my father was, I believe, the last photograph of my father ever taken."

It is not the wish of the editor of Lincoln Lore to add further confusion to the uncertainty about the

time the photograph was taken, but he cannot harmonize the many traditions and theories about this picture. A comparative study of the picture of Lincoln looking at the album, with Tad by his side, will show a striking similarity between it and the one under consideration. A full size print of the portrait exhibited in this bulletin shows the album clearly visible on the table at his elbow as if he had just laid it there before posing for his own portrait. This sitting, following the one taken with his son, the writer believes to be the famous Brady photograph exhibited on this folio.

This version would be in harmony with the story told by Robert Lincoln about the taking of the Lincoln and Tad photograph: "Upon the occasion of a sitting before Mr. Brady, historical photographer of Washington, the president was accompanied by his favorite son. While waiting in the studio Mr. Lincoln picked up an album of Brady's celebrated pictures and was showing them to 'Tad.' So impressed was Brady by the pose that he induced them to remain as they were while he took their picture." This picture is said to have been taken by Brady in 1861 which cannot be correct if associated with the famous likeness of the president taken three years later.

The evidence about the famous Brady picture which seems to have been accepted by most Lincoln students, was submitted by F. B. Carpenter, who went to Washington on February 4, 1864 for the purpose of painting "The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation." He is said to have been present when the Brady portrait in question was taken. A paragraph from the book presenting his reminiscences while in the White House mentions the occasion:

"At three o'clock (February 9, 1864) the President was to accompany me, by appointment, to Brady's photographic galleries on Pennsylvania Avenue. The carriage had been ordered and Mrs. Lincoln, who was to accompany us, had come down at the appointed hour dressed for the ride when one of those vexations, incident to all households occurred. Neither carriage nor coachman appeared. Well we will not wait any longer for the carriage. It won't hurt you and me to walk down."

Carpenter had already sketched for Lincoln the positions he intended to have the cabinet members occupy in the painting he anticipated and remarked that he wanted Mr. Lincoln in a certain position at the end of a table. One would infer that Mr. Carpenter had arranged this sitting at Brady's for the purpose of securing a likeness of Lincoln such as he could use in the painting. He did use a sitting taken on this occasion but it is not the famous likeness of Lincoln reproduced on this page. Neither could the two pictures known as

Meserve 86 and 87 have been taken at the same time, unless Lincoln had brought along two neckties and changed one for the other between sittings.

An inscription on one of the Lincoln and Tad portraits states that it was taken with "Lincoln in his characteristic attitude at home, with his eleven-year-old son by his side. His son, William Wallace, had died in the White House two years before." This would place the taking of this picture in 1864 and would allow the famous Brady picture to be taken at the same time. The artist Carpenter after finishing the Emancipation Proclamation study made a painting of the Lincoln family with the Lincoln and Tad photograph as a basis for the work. This fact has undoubtedly caused the confusion in the identity of the two Lincolns he used but it leaves us without any definite date for the taking of the most famous of all the Lincoln pictures.

One phase of Lincoln's personal appearance, which definitely establishes the approximate time the photograph was taken, is the peculiar manner in which he parted his hair in the year 1864. Up until this year every portrait of him shows his hair parted on the left side, but for some reason he decides to comb it from the right side. About a dozen photographs are taken of him with this arrangement and then about the first of the year 1865 he again parts it on the left side. This fact allows us to move the Lincoln and Tad picture up to the year 1864 where it may be associated with our famous Brady portrait as already suggested.

When Frederick H. Meserve published his famous collection of one hundred Lincoln photographs he used this picture by Brady for a frontispiece, supplementing it with a photographic copy of a letter he had received from Robert Lincoln, son of the president, which reads as follows:

Chicago, March 30, 1895.
60 Lake Shore Drive.

Dear Mr. Meserve:

I have always thought the Brady photograph of my father, of which I attach a copy, to be the most satisfactory likeness of him.

Very sincerely yours,
ROBERT LINCOLN.

This same sentiment was expressed by Robert Lincoln in a letter to Mr. Arthur F. Hall, president of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, who twenty-five years ago received one of the famous Brady photographs from the son of Abraham Lincoln who authorized him to use it as the insignia of the company. Of course, with such a historic picture as this in its possession, the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation has taken considerable interest in searching for all the information available about this greatest of the Lincoln portraits.