

# LINCOLN LORE

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## PROFESSIONAL IMPERSONATORS OF LINCOLN

When D. W. Griffith was searching for a character to play the Lincoln role of his motion picture "Abraham Lincoln," he had applications from no less than forty-five men and two women who thought they were qualified to take this role. There are a great many people living today who look like Lincoln and who are available for impersonations and interpretations.

It will be necessary for this bulletin to confine itself to those who have become known as professional impersonators and who have been used widely in roles where Abraham Lincoln appeared in the cast.

### *Ralph W. Ince*

In 1895 Ralph W. Ince then director of the Vitagraph Company appeared as Abraham Lincoln in a one-act play entitled "The Seventh Son."

### *Benjamin Chapin*

Chapin like Lincoln was born of poor parents and had little formal education. At the age of nine he was reciting Lincoln's speeches. His studies of Lincoln made a place for him on Lyceum platforms.

Chapin's first success resulted from his presenting some Lincoln monologues made up of scenes from Lincoln dramas he was then writing. In the Spring of 1906 a Lincoln drama he had produced was staged in New York. The following year he produced two or three one-act Lincoln plays, and in 1909 he reproduced his four-act play, revised under the title "Lincoln at the White House."

This was followed by "The Son of Democracy," a picture in the Paramount Series. The climax of his efforts was "The Benjamin Chapin Cycle of Lincoln Photo-plays," and it was shortly after the completion of this series that he passed away in a sanitarium at Liberty, New York.

### *Dennis Connel*

Connel was associated with the Art Club Players of Washington and in 1921 interpreted "The Spirit of Lincoln."

### *Frank McGlynn*

John Drinkwater's play "Abraham Lincoln" introduced a new and popular impersonator of Abraham Lincoln in Frank McGlynn. McGlynn was born in San Francisco October 26, 1866. He attended Hastings Law School and for seven years was in the law office of Matthew S. Sullivan. He was admitted to the bar in 1894, but two years later began his stage career in New York City.

For many years he appeared in stock companies and in motion pictures. It cannot be said that he resembled Lincoln in any way without make-up, but his interpretation of the character on the stage has received high praise. His fame was won in this role in the Drinkwater play 1919-1923 and again in a revival of the production in 1929-1930.

### *Joel Day*

Back in 1922 Universal produced a serial entitled "In the Days of Buffalo Bill" in which Joel Day took the part of Abraham Lincoln.

### *George A. Billings*

One of the outstanding Lincoln impersonators is George A. Billings. He was born in Preston, Minnesota. His father, a Shakespearian reader, was a native of New York and his mother came from Ohio. Billings engaged in about as many occupations as Lincoln followed during his early life. He was a cow puncher, miner, carpenter,

farmer, salesman, building-loan expert and engineer, and a soldier in the Spanish American War.

"Mr. Billings is the same height as Lincoln, has the same gait, mannerisms, voice, temperament, and physiognomy." He is best known on the stage as the impersonator of Abraham Lincoln in the play "The Dramatic Life of Abraham Lincoln" produced by the Rockett Brothers in 1924.

### *Lawrence Coughlan*

Appearing in an atmosphere prologue to "The Iron Horse" Lawrence Coughlan impersonated Abraham Lincoln on an extensive circuit in 1926.

### *Charles E. Bull*

Charles E. Bull was born in a log cabin on Belle Creek, Mills County, Texas, on February 26, 1881. His early frontier life closely paralleled the early days of Lincoln. His family, however, were southern sympathizers in the Civil War and two uncles fought in the Confederate army.

In 1925 he wrote, "I am the exact stature of Lincoln, which means not only height and weight but all the dips, spurs, and angles."

Judge Bull first appeared professionally in "The Iron Horse" which was produced by the Fox studios in 1924. He was then a Justice of the Peace at Reno, Nevada. Later on he appeared in a Warner Bros. production "The Heart of Maryland."

In company with N. Louise Dorgan, who played the part of Mary Todd, he toured the country presenting a play he had written called "The Heart of Lincoln." More recently he has appeared as host at the Rutledge Tavern in the Lincoln group at the Century of Progress Exposition.

### *Walter Huston*

D. W. Griffith's "Abraham Lincoln," which has had such wide distribution through the movies since 1930, features Walter Huston as its leading character. There was much competition among those seeking the place of Lincoln in the play and the fact that Walter Huston was selected would indicate his superior ability to play this role.

It is said Huston devoted a whole year preparing himself to properly impersonate Lincoln; and, while it must be conceded that off the stage he has little in his personal appearance to suggest Lincoln, his acting, in some measure at least, allows one to pass over some of the characteristics in which he least resembles the President.

### *Daniel Poole*

In the dramatization of "If Booth Had Missed," Daniel Poole took the part of Lincoln in several presentations in 1932.

### *Lincoln Caswell*

One of the best-known Lincoln impersonators, Lincoln Caswell, was born in Upper New York State and had an uncle who wanted to name him Horace Greely. Caswell's father, a clergyman, suggested that they would give the new son a name far greater than Greeley's and called him Lincoln Caswell. An old picture of Lincoln in the home where he grew up at Plymouth, New York, was the first picture which the boy remembered.

Caswell was engaged to do some work for educational pictures and the promoters observed how closely he resembled Lincoln. He was made up to characterize the President, and from that time on continued to give impersonations of Lincoln.

He prepared a three-act presentation which he called "Abraham Lincoln, an Interpretation" which he gave throughout the country for many years.