

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 375

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 15, 1936

THE HICKS PORTRAIT OF LINCOLN

Portraits of Abraham Lincoln made from life are prize possessions. The earliest painting for which Lincoln posed was done by Thomas Hicks at Springfield, Illinois, after Lincoln had been nominated as the Republican candidate for the presidency.

Springfield, Illinois
June 13, 1860

I have carefully examined the portrait of Hon. A. Lincoln, painted by Thomas Hicks, Esq., and do not hesitate to pronounce it a great success.

I have known Mr. Lincoln intimately for many years, and was present and in conversation with him much of the time whilst it was being painted, and cannot adequately express my admiration of the fidelity of the picture, and the perfect and satisfactory idea which it gives of the original, and his physical, mental, and moral characteristics.

I doubt whether art is capable of transferring to canvass a more exact, and life like representation of the "human face divine."

O. H. Browning.

A revival of interest in this painting, possibly due to 1936 being a presidential year, has prompted this brief discussion of the picture. On February 9, the rotogravure section of a New York paper reproduced a Hicks painting which bore the inscription "Painted from life by Thomas Hicks. Springfield, Illinois, June 14, 1860." The announcement stated the picture would be shown publicly for the first time at an exhibition of Lincoln items in the Abraham Lincoln Hotel. Mrs. Herbert Shipman of New York was named owner of the portrait. A reproduction of the same picture, however, appeared in the rotogravure section of a Washington, D. C., paper on February 12, 1922. It was then in the Edson Bradley Collection and is said to have been presented by Mr. Lincoln to Edson Bradley's father.

Two other press notices in February, 1936, announcing the discovery of Hicks' miniatures, appeared in Philadelphia and Providence papers. Colonel John Gribbell, President of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, recently acquired in England a miniature of Lincoln by Hicks; and Brown University announced that a Hicks' miniature of Lincoln "discovered in an ob-

scure antique shop in London by Mrs. Steward Campbell," would be displayed.

Whether or not Hicks made copies of his original work on canvass is problematical, but he must have made several miniatures of the presidential nominee. The reproductions of the Hicks' portrait lithographed by Grozier and published by W. Schaus have become very desirable Lincoln items, and the Lincoln National Life Foundation was fortunate in securing one formerly in possession of Henry Watter-son which he presented to a friend.

When the news of Lincoln's nomination reached New York, Hicks was engaged to go to Springfield as soon as possible to paint a portrait which was to be used for lithographing. Before leaving he had an interview with Horace Greeley, who, upon presenting a wood cut of Lincoln, remarked, "There, I say, that is a good head to go before the people."

Hicks was supplied by Charles Dana with a letter of introduction to William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner. In due time he was introduced to Mr. Lincoln and said, "When I stood in the presence of a tall, gaunt man with a pleasant expression on his well marked features, and had received a genial, hearty handshake from his long, swinging arms I saw there was plenty of character with which to make a desirable likeness."

After Lincoln had learned Hicks' mission he consented to sit for his portrait. The details for the work were quickly arranged, and within an hour Hicks was at work.

The Lincoln National Life Foundation has come into possession of two valuable original manuscripts referring to this painting, one written by Orville H. Browning and another by Robert T. Lincoln.

The testimonial by Browning is in his own hand and was written for Hicks at the time he completed the work on June 13, 1860. Browning first observed Hicks at work on June 12, when he made the following memorandum in his diary:

"After breakfast called to see Hon. Abm. Lincoln, at his room in the State House. He was very glad to see me, and received me with great cordiality. I found Mr. Hicks, an artist from New York, painting a portrait to be lithographed in Boston, and at the request of himself and Mr. Lincoln, I remained and talked to Lincoln whilst Mr. Hicks worked upon the picture. In the after-

noon I called and did the same thing, and promised to call again tomorrow, as Mr. Hicks says he greatly prefers to have some friend present whilst he is at work. The picture promises to be a very fine one."

The following day Browning visited Lincoln again and later made this note in his diary:

"Spent a portion of the day with Lincoln talking to him whilst Mr. Hicks worked upon his portrait. He completed it this P. M. In my judgment it is an exact, life like likeness, and a beautiful work of art. It is deeply imbued with the intellectual and spiritual, and I doubt whether any one ever succeeds in getting a better picture of the man."

The document written by Browning which appears in full in this bulletin was sent to Robert Lincoln for comment, and Robert Lincoln's reply also is to be found in full on this page.

1775 N Street
Washington, D. C.

April 8, 1918.

Dear Mr. Foster:

It is only in a vague way that I know of the picture of my father by Thomas Hicks. The letter of Mr. Browning which you quote is certainly a most interesting document, and if it accompanied the picture, it would add greatly to the importance of the painting. Mr. Browning was one of the most distinguished men in Illinois, and all he says about his intimacy of acquaintance with my father is well known to me to be correct. He was a man of high education and culture and better able than most men to give a valuable judgment of the work. As I have already indicated to you, I have not the slightest notion of the whereabouts of the Hicks' portrait.

Very truly yours,

Robert T. Lincoln

Mr. Eugene G. Foster.

The artist gives Mr. Lincoln's own reaction to the painting as follows: "It will give the people of the East a correct idea how I look at home, and, in fact, how I look in my office. I think the picture has a somewhat pleasanter expression than I usually have, but that, perhaps, is not an objection."