

LINCOLN LORE

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INFORMAL PAINTINGS OF LINCOLN

At least one hundred and fifteen original photographs of Abraham Lincoln are known to be in existence and possibly many others will come to light as time goes on. These portraits have been the sources for hundreds of reproductions of various kinds which have made the profile of Lincoln known throughout the world.

Photography was confined almost wholly in Lincoln's day to the taking of picture gallery portraits and motionless objects. One had no worry of being snapped by a staff photographer while making a speech or greeting friends. All the original pictures of Lincoln are therefore very formal and reveal little of the spirit of the man.

Upon Lincoln's nomination to the presidency a swarm of portrait artists swooped down on Springfield, Illinois, for the purpose of putting Lincoln's likeness on canvas. Even then most of them had photographs of the nominee made to assist them in their work. After Lincoln's election a still larger group clamored for sittings but few dared to portray him in other than conventional pose. The result is that we have an exceptionally large number of paintings said to have been made of Abraham Lincoln from life.

During the political campaign, however, the cartoonists and caricaturists who worked with pen, pencil, charcoal, etc., were very active in reproducing Lincoln, due to the fact that they had a character who was an excellent specimen for their art.

With Lincoln's growing popularity throughout the years there has been scarcely an artist of note who has not used the method of reproduction in which he excelled to create a Lincoln. The engraver and lithographer has utilized these studies until a catalogue of different Lincoln prints most certainly would reach over 5,000.

There is one field, rich in possibilities, which has been sadly neglected, especially by the portrait painter. It will be impossible to visualize Lincoln in his many occupations and experiences until the canvas brings him back to life in episodes which reveal his outstanding human characteristics.

There is scarcely a painting available today, which might be called an informal presentation of Lincoln, which stands among the great works of American art, if Carpenter's "Lincoln and His Cabinet" be excepted. One will search a long while before he finds a single study in

oil which is not based on one of the better known photographs of the President.

The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company has in years past found a need for various informal studies of Lincoln for cover designs, outdoor advertising, etc., but in every instance has relied upon drawings to serve its purpose. The artists engaged have used the Lincoln National Life Foundation Library for source material and have also had the cooperation of its office staff in making these studies historically correct.

It is now the thought of the Company to have the researches made for some of the future studies put on canvas by recognized portrait painters. This issue of Lincoln Lore gives the reader some idea of the initial effort to present a purely interpretative picture. "Abraham Lincoln—The Honest Clerk" has just been completed by Frederick Mizen of Chicago. It is the first attempt to visualize on canvas the most striking characteristic of the martyred Lincoln.

Lincoln is represented as a clerk in a grocery store at New Salem, Illinois, in the act of weighing some produce for a customer.

The scene is based on the earliest known incident which gave rise to the nickname "Honest Abe." The story goes, that Lincoln had waited on a customer late in the evening and upon opening the store the next morning noticed that he had placed the wrong weight on the balance scale in weighing the purchase of the day before. He is said to have shut up shop immediately and proceeded to deliver a few ounces of goods due the purchaser.

The short weight incident was closely followed by the short change experience which contributed still further to Lincoln's reputation for honest dealings. Clarissa Hornbuckle is said to have purchased from Abraham Lincoln a bill of goods in October, 1831, for which she paid cash. Before closing the store that evening he discovered that he had made a mistake of 6¼ cents in figuring her bill, and immediately set out for the Hornbuckle cabin three miles away and returned to his customer the amount he had overcharged her.

Lincoln's reputation for honesty followed him through both his legal and political careers; and, when he became a presidential nominee in 1860, it was the slogan "Honest Abe" which did much to win the election for him.

