

LINCOLN LORE

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PAINTINGS OF STEPHEN ARNOLD DOUGLAS VOLK

Stephen Arnold Douglas Volk, better known as Douglas Volk, was the son of Leonard Volk, the sculptor who made the famous life mask of Abraham Lincoln. The mother of Douglas Volk was a cousin of Stephen Arnold Douglas, and her son was named for this famous statesman. Douglas Volk was born February 23, 1856, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, two years before the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates and he was four years old when his father made the life mask of Mr. Lincoln.

At the age of fifteen he began his studies in art abroad under the tutelage of Jean L. Gerome in Paris and exhibited his work at the Paris Salon as early as 1875. He also had a painting at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. In 1880 he was elected a member of the Society of American Artists and subsequently became a member of the New York League, National Society of Portrait Painters, Society of Mural Painters, and other kindred organizations.

Volk received a great many honors for his artistic work and was recognized at the Boston Exposition in 1899, Pan American at Buffalo in 1901, St. Louis Exposition in 1905, and Pan American at San Francisco in 1915. He received the cross of the order of Leopold II in 1921 for his portrait of King Albert.

Outstanding among his more recent works are his official portraits of the allied leaders in the first World War, including Lloyd George, King Albert, and General Pershing. His works are to be seen in twenty museums including the Metropolitan, Brooklyn, and Long Island Museums.

Douglas Volk claimed that Abraham Lincoln had held him on his knee at the time his father was making his plastic studies of the Illinois railsplitter. The painter Volk must have envied the opportunity of his father, and he said on one occasion: "How I longed, as every artist who has attempted the task must have done, to have the man appear in life, if only for a moment, that one might visualize the splendid countenance which suggested so much insight, patience, and sorrow, and above all, that winning human character that made Lincoln the idol of all divergent types of men." Yet Volk was fifty-two years old before he finished his first portrait of Lincoln.

There seem to be nine paintings of Lincoln which can be traced to the artist and there may be others. Although it would appear as if one or two of these passed through different stages, no attempt is made to date the time of retouching. The painting is named in the following list after the individual or institution with which it is most likely to be associated.

1. 1908—Clarke—Bust facing to right. 20" x 24".

This profile of Lincoln was copyrighted by "Douglas Volk and the Detroit Publishing Co." in 1908, when lithograph copies of it were distributed. It was used as a frontispiece in the booklet *Our Leader* published in 1909 by Charles Henry Butler.

When the original work passed into the possession of Thomas Benedict Clarke, art dealer of New York City, some slight changes were made, especially noticeable in the shape of the collar. After Mr. Clarke's death in 1931, the portrait was acquired by another New York dealer.

2. 1922—Albright—Bust facing to right. 30" x 40".

This is probably the most striking and the most familiar of the Lincoln paintings by Volk. It was copyrighted in October 1922 and lithographed reproductions have been widely circulated. The lithograph can be

identified by the drawing of the Lincoln mask and casts of hands in the lower border with the autograph of Douglas Volk inscribed.

A reproduction of the lithograph appeared in the *New York Tribune* for February 11, 1923, and a likeness also was printed in the *Boston Globe* for February 12, 1934. This is the same head which was used by the sculptor, who made the medallions distributed for so many years by the Illinois Watch Company to winners of Lincoln essay contests.

The story of the acquisition of the original painting by the Albright gallery, Buffalo, New York, is to be found in *The American Magazine of Art* for January 1923.

3. 1922—Sweat—Seated, facing to the right. 32" by 40".

This is a seated Lincoln with the right hand resting on the right arm of the chair and the left hand gripping the right wrist. The study is called "With malice toward none." It also appears in two different stages, the first reproduction showing a stray lock of hair over Mr. Lincoln's forehead and the final study having the unruly lock painted out. This painting was purchased by Cyrus H. K. Curtis and presented to the Sweat Memorial Museum of Art at Portland, Maine.

4. 1922—Post—Seated, facing to the right.

On February 11, 1922, the *New York Evening Post* displayed in its rotogravure section a picture which it called "The latest portrait of Abraham Lincoln by Douglas Volk." This portrait Volk called "The Man of Vision", and the position of the head and the facial expression are very much like the Albright painting. Lincoln holds in the right hand a scroll and his left hand rests upon the left arm of the chair. We have no information as to the whereabouts of this picture.

5. 1929—Barton—Bust front view. 16" x 20".

A book by Dr. W. E. Barton, *The Lincoln Lineage*, uses as a frontispiece a Volk reproduction called "Lincoln the Beneficent." It was copyrighted by the artist in 1929 and may have been the Lincoln in possession of Vivian Akers in 1932.

6. 1930—Norfolk, full length. 40" x 50".

This full length study represents Lincoln as described by Mr. Volk's father "as Lincoln took his speeches in a carpetbag and struck out afoot across the prairie to keep an appointment for a political speech." This painting was commissioned by the city of Norfolk, Virginia.

7. 1931—Whitehead—Bust facing to the left. 20" x 24".

This painting, completed in October 1931, was acquired by Benjamin Whitehead of Newark and now hangs on the east wall in the lobby of the Newark Athletic Club building at Newark, New Jersey. The portrait has been called "Lincoln the Ever Sympathetic." A reproduction appeared in the *Newark Athletic Club News* for November 1932 and another was later used on the club's birthday greeting card in 1935. Large copies have also been made for private distribution.

8. 1932—Seitz—Full bust facing to the right. 40" x 50".

A reproduction of a Douglas Volk painting is used as a frontispiece in Don Seitz' book, *Lincoln the Politician*. The note under the frontispiece states that the reproduction is from a portrait made by Vivian Akers.

9.—Bust facing to the right. 29" x 34".

This painting, privately owned, seems to be almost identical with the one listed just above, with the exception of the size of the canvas which makes the length of the figure much shorter.