

LINCOLN LORE

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MARSHALL'S ENGRAVING OF LINCOLN

The Marshall portrait of Abraham Lincoln has become known as the finest line-engraving of the President which has thus far been created. There is but one other such engraving which approaches it in artistic workmanship and that is the one known as the Littlefield Lincoln.

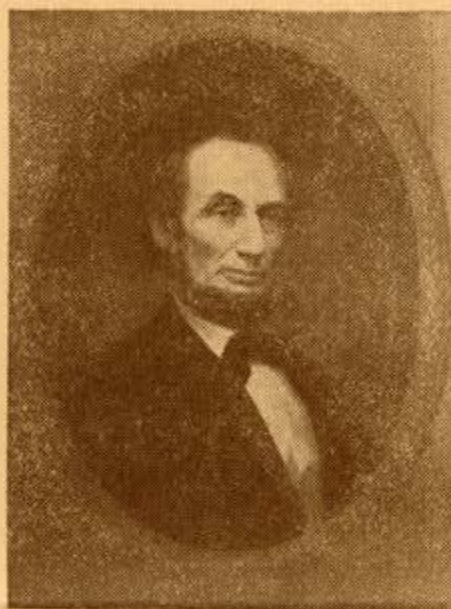
William Edgar Marshall was born in New York City on June 3, 1837. He started his career as a bank-note engraver, but later established a studio in Boston where he painted portraits of many famous people, among them Washington and James Fenimore Cooper. Along with his recognition for his painting he soon gained a reputation for his excellent line-engravings, and possibly he stood at the head of his profession in this field when he went to Europe in 1864. Here he located in Paris and turned his attention to painting again, exhibiting his portraits in the salons of 1865 and 1866. He was in France when Lincoln was assassinated and, returning the following year, he immediately started work on a painting of Lincoln. As a work of art it received many commendations from famous artists. Couture stated, "It is superb, striking, and fine, admirable in color."

In November 1866 Ticknor and Fields of Boston announced that they had arranged with Marshall to publish his line-engraving of the martyred President. They stated that the engraving would be sold only by subscription at these prices: Artist's proof (limited to 300 copies) to sell for \$20.00, India proof for \$10.00, a plain proof for \$5.00. The plate was 16" x 21" and the full size mat 24" x 30". The Lincoln National Life Foundation is in possession of one of the artist's proofs. This signed copy is also done in colors, and we have reason to believe it is the work of the artist himself.

In the art section of the *Atlantic Monthly* for November 1866 a brief statement about the Marshall engraving reveals how one critic reacted

upon first viewing the engraving. He said:

"Were all the biographies and estimates of the President's character to be lost, it would seem as if, from this picture alone, the distinguishing qualities of his head and heart might be saved to the knowledge of the future; for a rarer exhibition seems impossible of the power of imparting inner spiritual states to outward physical expression.



MARSHALL'S LINCOLN

"As a work of art, we repeat, this is beyond question the finest instance of line-engraving yet executed on this continent."

Gustave Dore, thinking of the excellency of the workmanship, stated that it was "the best engraving ever made by any artist living or dead." It was left for a member of Lincoln's family and some of Lincoln's close friends to pass final judgment on the work as a sympathetic study of the President, and a few excerpts from their testimonies follow:

The President's son, Robert, wrote: "I have seen a copy of your engraving

of my father's portrait, published by Ticknor & Fields, and I take pleasure in testifying to its excellence as a likeness. I cannot suggest any improvement."

Charles Sumner advised Mr. Marshall: "I congratulate you upon your success in the engraved portrait of President Lincoln. As a work of art, it will take its place among those rare productions not to be forgotten. As a portrait, it will always be valued as presenting the original in his most interesting expression, where gentleness and sympathy unite with strength."

Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War, commented: "Your engraved portrait of the late President, Abraham Lincoln, has been carefully examined, and is regarded by me as a beautiful likeness of that great and good man. In many respects it represents his living expression with more accuracy than any other that has come under my observation.

"As one who knew and loved him, I rejoice that you have so well succeeded in your effort, by a work of art, in preserving the memory of his countenance, and enabling the world to know what manner of man he was."

This comment came from Schuyler Colfax: "The picture reminds me of him, as he looked the evening before the Inauguration Ball of 1865, when the Rebel armies were still in the field, and he spoke so sadly of the long years and bloody sacrifices of the war, and yet so hopefully of the success he was certain Providence had in store for us. You can imagine, therefore, how highly I appreciate and value it."

Marshall made more than one painting of Lincoln. Yale University is in possession of one and the New York Historical Society has two of his works. One of these paintings, showing Lincoln with a flowing bow-tie, served as the source from which the famous Marshall engraving of Abraham Lincoln was created.