

LINCOLN LORE

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LITTLEFIELD'S ENGRAVING OF LINCOLN

The Littlefield painting of Abraham Lincoln, engraved by Henry Gugler, has always been a close rival of the Marshall portrait for first place among fine engravings of the President. Properly it should be called the Gugler engraving, but it has become known as the Littlefield engraving which is really a misnomer. While it is generally conceded that from the artistic viewpoint the Marshall study is superior to the Littlefield work, sentiment almost makes one choose the latter because of the close association of the painter with Mr. Lincoln over a period of many years. Possibly there are not many people who associate John H. Littlefield, the artist, with the young man who studied law in Lincoln's office in Springfield, Illinois.

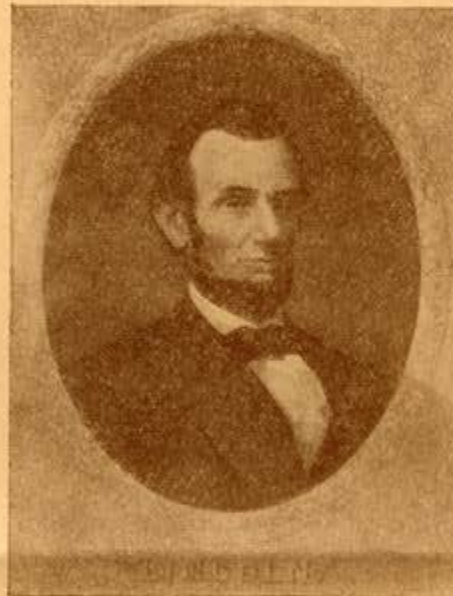
Littlefield was born in Cicero, a small New York town, on March 20, 1835. His father, a native of Vermont, was a carriage-maker, and he taught John what he knew about the trade. His earliest task, when he was about ten years of age, called for painting certain parts of the vehicles. During this period he showed some ability to draw and his artistic temperament soon was recognized by his promotion to design painting.

After John moved with the family to Grand Rapids, Michigan, he began to study law. A brother met Lincoln at Ottawa in 1858 and spoke to him about John's entering the Lincoln and Herndon office to read law. Lincoln said, "All right, send him down, and we will take a look at him." Littlefield has left us the following reminiscence about this early contact:

"The morning I entered the office Mr. Lincoln and his partner, Mr. Herndon, were both present. Mr. Lincoln addressed his partner thus: 'Billy, this is the young man of whom I spoke to you. Whatever arrangement you make with him will be satisfactory to me.' Then, turning to me, he said, 'I hope you will not become so en-

thusiastic in your studies of Blackstone and Kent as did two young men whom we had here. Do you see that spot over there?' pointing to a large ink stain on the wall. 'Well, one of these young men got so enthusiastic in his pursuit of legal lore that he fired an inkstand at the other one's head, and that is the mark he made.'"

Littlefield, so far as we can learn, did not make any ink stains or blots anywhere, but he did learn to use a



LITTLEFIELD'S LINCOLN

brush and palette. What little he learned about law in Lincoln's office was discarded for what proved to be the more important contribution of helping people throughout all time to visualize the living Lincoln.

Littlefield remained in the law office until Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency, and then he began to stump the state of Illinois on behalf of the senior partner of the firm. He is said to have made sixty speeches in the campaign. In 1862 he went to Washington and through Mr. Lincoln's influence was given a place in the Treasury Department.

After the death of Mr. Lincoln he conceived the idea of painting a death-bed scene. This was completed in a creditable manner and still remains one of the best studies of the final hour of Lincoln. The painting was copyrighted by Littlefield in 1865, photographed by John Golden, and the photographic mount printed by William Terry. There were over twenty characters worked into the painting, with a key printed on the mat to identify the individuals.

Just when he decided to do the portrait of Lincoln we do not know, but a paper published in September 1868 states, "Mr. Littlefield has also painted a portrait of President Lincoln, which is now being engraved in pure line, the size of life . . . Those who have seen the portrait pronounced it a superb work of art."

For twenty years after the death of the President, Mr. Littlefield lectured on Abraham Lincoln, part of the time under the auspices of the Star Lyceum Bureau.

Henry Gugler, the engraver of the Littlefield picture, was also a business associate of Mr. Lincoln, but in a different capacity than that of the Springfield understudy. Gugler, previous to his making the famous engraving in 1866, had been working in the printing and engraving department at Washington making plates for federal currency.

For two years Mr. Gugler is said to have worked on Littlefield's famous Lincoln engraving, until it was estimated that the finished plate was worth \$10,000. It is claimed that his Lincoln was the first life-size steel engraving ever attempted. The head alone is 7½" wide and 10" long, the entire engraving being 23" x 30". Mr. Gugler later became associated with the Gugler Lithographic Company in Milwaukee of which his brother was for many years the directing manager.