

# LINCOLN LORE

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

Number 624

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 24, 1941

## A SPURIOUS LINCOLN PORTRAIT

There appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* for February 15, 1941, an alleged ambrotype of Abraham Lincoln showing him lying in what is reputed to be a casket. The caption over the discussion about the picture was put in the form of a question, "Is this Lincoln?" Any student of the martyrd President who has observed closely his personal appearance would answer this question immediately with an emphatic "No!" The *Post* contributor, however, concludes that the picture is genuine.

Several statements in the introductory paragraphs of the article referring to photographs made of the martyrd President in New York by Gurney and Son are well authenticated, and Lincoln students have been acquainted with these facts. When the author of the discussion attempts to identify a certain ambrotype as "one of the two pictures of Lincoln's body made that day by Gurney," he is making an assumption which cannot be sustained.

As a means of identifying this spurious Lincoln, we will call it the Nelson Lincoln because the portrait was brought to light by Mrs. Elizabeth Nelson of Newark, New Jersey. Possibly the most convincing method of refuting the claim of authenticity for the Nelson Lincoln is to make several observations, any one of which would seem to be sufficient to prove it is not a genuine portrait of the President. The *Post's* feature story would hardly be worth attention if it had not received such wide circulation.

### Observations

1. **Photographic Process**—The writer of the article must have been woefully ignorant of photographic processes to conclude that a photographic plate from which positives are made and an ambrotype are identical. The conclusion that the Nelson Lincoln is "one of the two pictures of Lincoln's body made that day by Gurney" is ridiculous. No photographer would have made an ambrotype of the President from which no original prints could be made, but he most certainly would have made a plate or negative from which he could take as many prints as he desired. Yet the author apparently sees no difference between a photographic negative and an ambrotype and concludes that they are identical. An ambrotype could have been made of a print which was produced from a negative.

2. **The Casket**—The Gurney picture was most positively taken of Lincoln while he was lying in a casket. This Nelson Lincoln is a picture of some man lying in a bed. There is no evidence of any casket anywhere about, although nearly one half the length of the man's body is included in the picture. The position of the pillow under his head, and the comforter thrown over him leaves no doubt as to the identity of the object on which he is reclining.

3. **The Wearing Apparel**—We have positive evidence that Lincoln was dressed in a conventional black suit when the body was prepared for the casket. Probably the last man to look upon the features of the deceased Lincoln was Charles L. Wiley, a tinsmith who sealed the zinc covering for the casket when the body was viewed on September 26, 1901, by the committee of identification after the attempt was made to steal the

body. In describing the body Mr. Wiley said, "He was dressed in a black suit, white shirt with collar attached, and black tie." All descriptions of Lincoln as he appeared in the casket are in agreement with this statement. What the Nelson Lincoln is wearing is problematical, but it looks more like a white gown or shirt than a coat.

4. **Neckwear**—The most outstanding inconsistency when one compares the Nelson Lincoln with actual portraits taken of the President in 1865 is the peculiar white stock and white tie which adorns the corpse. One would immediately conclude that no one would have placed on the martyrd President neckwear the like of which he had not worn for nearly twenty years. As far as we know, in the days when Lincoln did wear a stock he wore a black tie with it.

5. **Facial Characteristics**—Abraham Lincoln's most distinguishing facial blemish was a very prominent mole which appeared just above the corner of his mouth on the right side of his face. Surely death would not erase this, yet the Nelson Lincoln has no mole. There is no similarity whatever between Lincoln's overhanging underlip and the rather stiff underlip of the spurious Lincoln. Lincoln's large ears were always very conspicuous in every picture he had taken and were altogether unlike the ears shown in the picture under criticism.

6. **Hair**—Pictures taken of Abraham Lincoln just before his assassination show him wearing the lightest growth of beard of any other of his Presidential portraits. There is no similarity whatever between the beards of the real Lincoln and the Nelson Lincoln. Even the eyebrows of Lincoln would alone be sufficient to prove the Nelson Lincoln an imposter to say nothing of the absence of the well known deep-set eyes of the martyr.

7. **Chronology**—The story of the origin of the Nelson Lincoln is based entirely on hearsay evidence. The recipient, Mrs. Nelson, was but a babe in arms when the picture became her property, so she could have had no first hand evidence about it. The lady who made the presentation of the portrait to the baby, a Miss Fries, was but seven years of age at the time Lincoln was assassinated, so she was also largely dependent on some one else for the story about the origin of the picture which she may have been told was Abraham Lincoln in a casket.

### A New Lincoln Myth

The primary object in bringing evidence against the authenticity of this spurious Lincoln has been to show the utter unreliability of the story of another picture which is said to have been associated with the Nelson Lincoln. This picture of an unknown young lady is bound to create a new Lincoln myth. Never before has any one ever implied that there was a picture of a woman, not his wife, "so precious to Lincoln that he carried it on his person at all times."

There is no attempt to identify this picture, although Mrs. Nelson claims that it came to her along with the other, and so the chronology of it may be said to have been identical with the alleged picture of Lincoln. From now on it is apparent that Ann Rutledge will have a rival in the Lincoln field of fiction. Historians, however, are confident that Mary Todd ruled supreme in the heart of Abraham Lincoln.