

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 787

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

May 8, 1944

THE MOST VALUABLE AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOGRAPH OF LINCOLN



Meserve No. 42

"For Mrs. Lucy G. Speed from whose pious hand I accepted the present of an Oxford Bible twenty years ago.

"Washington, D. C., October 3, 1861
"A. Lincoln."

A son of Lucy G. Speed, named Joshua, was a roommate of Abraham Lincoln's in the early Springfield days, and Speed has been called Lincoln's most intimate friend. In the Fall of 1841 Lincoln paid an extended visit to Speed at his home in Louisville, and upon his departure was presented with an Oxford Bible by Speed's mother. When Speed visited Lincoln at the White House in the Fall of 1861, it is quite natural that they would talk about old times, and the visit of Lincoln to the home of Mrs. Lucy G. Speed would most certainly be called to mind by both of them.

While any specific incident which may have caused Lincoln to recall an episode which occurred twenty years before, may not be known for a certainty, it is possible to mention some factors which undoubtedly contributed to the presentation and also suggested the Bible reference in the writing.

The mention of the anniversary occasion, apparently is nothing more than a coincident, in that Joshua Speed happened to be visiting Washington just twenty years after Lincoln visited Louisville. There is a possibility that Mrs. Speed may have requested Joshua to ask the President for one of his photographs, and, if so, it would be very natural for Lincoln to recall the gift he had once received from her. On one visit Joshua Speed made to the White House he claimed he found Lincoln reading the Bible, and entered into conversation with the President about the value of the practice. It is not necessary in accounting for the mention of the Bible to find some current incident in the Civil War history of some religious or biblical significance.

Not only has the inscription called for more than usual attention to the picture, but the fact that the origin of the photograph has never been established has given the study a peculiar interest to all Lincoln students. While the time of presentation gives us the latest date on which it could have been taken, the earliest identical day when it may have been made is not so easily ascertained.

It is interesting to note that the photographer who took this valuable photograph of Lincoln has not been definitely identified, and what is known as Meserve photograph No. 42 has become one of the mystery portraits of the more

than one-hundred original prints. It seems to stand alone with no other companion sitting as yet associated with it. It could not have been made earlier than January 1861, as it shows Lincoln with a full beard, and it could not have been made later than the date of the inscription in October, 1861.

These dates, however, do not help very much in settling where it was taken, as Lincoln was not only in Springfield and Washington during this interval of nine months, but he was also in several different cities enroute from his Illinois home to the Nation's Capitol.

A few of the more important references to the origin of the photograph are found in the following tabulation arranged chronologically with respect to the time the certain print is said to have been made:

WAKEFIELD—A tintype is in possession of Milton L. Miller which he claims was "Presented by Lincoln to a member of the Wakefield family in Springfield, Illinois." This would imply the photograph was taken by a Springfield photographer, presumably sometime during the first ten days of February.

IVES—Dr. Maurice A. Bernstein has in his possession an original photograph of this study which he claims "Mrs. Ives in Springfield received at the hands of the Great Emancipator." This would place the taking of the picture sometime before February 11, the day Lincoln left for Washington.

FREDERICKS—The Lincoln National Life Foundation has a carte de visite portrait with the imprint of the photographer, C. D. Fredericks, New York, on the card. This photograph was presented to the Foundation by Mrs. Martha A. Anderson, now deceased. She claimed that she purchased the picture on February 11, 1861, from a vendor who was traveling on the train, conveying Lincoln from Lafayette, Indiana to Indianapolis, enroute to the inauguration. George E. Perine of New York made an engraving on which he noted: "Photograph by Fredericks."

APPLETON—An engraving made by W. G. Jaekman, expressly for Abbott's Civil War, bears the inscription, "Photograph by G. D. Appleton." Lincoln was in New York where the Appleton Gallery was located on February 19, 20 and 21, 1861.

MCCLEES—A photograph of the print in possession of Rev. Scott Bruner bears this imprint underneath the picture, "James E. McClees, 910 Chestnut St., Philadelphia." Lincoln was in Philadelphia on February 21st and 22nd, 1861.

BRADY—James B. Speed, of Louisville, a grandson of Lucy G. Speed, wrote to Herbert Wells Fay, on February 29th, 1896, that Lincoln had "a special sitting for this photograph you refer to, for Mrs. Lucy G. Speed, because he wanted to send her a picture taken for that purpose." If Mr. Speed were correctly informed, Brady was the most likely photographer to make a picture taken in October, 1861.

One can see how difficult it is to come to any satisfactory conclusion about when and where and by whom the photograph was made. If it were taken in Springfield and copied by a representative of a New York gallery, who sold copies enroute from Washington, the only story to be seriously contradicted, would be the testimony of the Speed family. Inasmuch as the Speed family is in possession of the original autographed picture, their version of its origin should bear more weight than any one of the other traditions.