

LINCOLN LORE

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THE BRADY LINCOLNS

The publication of "Mr. Lincoln's Camera Man" has contributed much to a renewed interest in original photographs of Abraham Lincoln and incidents which occurred during the different times he was being posed. The name of Matthew Brady has been more often associated with the President than that of any other photographer and although he was given several sittings by Mr. Lincoln, strange to say, but one view among them all has been designated throughout the years as the "Brady Lincoln." Reproductions of this print appear on the five dollar bank notes and for many years were featured on the three cent postage stamps. Robert Lincoln referred to the print as "the most satisfactory likeness" of his father.

This new book by Roy Meredith has again brought to the front several debatable questions about the identification of certain portraits credited to Brady. It has also contributed such information as will make possible the discovery of other prints not as yet enumerated. The purpose of this bulletin is to mention some of the evidences establishing the authenticity of a few original portraits and suggest what we may anticipate in bringing the Brady series to completion.

The Cooper Institute Lincoln

When a celebrity arrives in a city now, the photographers hurry to the station or air field to meet him, but in Lincoln's day, the visitor was rushed to the photographer's gallery and this seems to be what happened on Lincoln's visit to New York in February 1860, when engaged to speak at Cooper Union. Brady's new gallery on the west corner of Broadway and Tenth Street had been opened just a month when it received the distinguished visitor from Illinois.

Usually Brady is credited with having made three portraits of Lincoln at this time and now Mr. Meredith adds another sitting. After having carefully studied these four pictures the editor of Lincoln Lore is of the opinion that we cannot positively identify prints from more than one negative made at that time. The three-quarter length portrait known as Meserve 20 is unmistakably an original but Meserve 19 seems to be nothing more than a bust length enlargement. Meserve 18 and also Mr. Meredith's new selection, Meserve 111, both appear to have been made in Springfield, Illinois, at a later date. The wearing apparel in 18 has been retouched to such an extent as to almost conceal its association with the Hesler series taken at Springfield on June 3, 1860. The rather recently discovered full length photograph credited by Mr. Meredith to Brady was probably taken by a Springfield photographer during the week of May 20th at the request of Leonard Volk. For this sitting Lincoln was wearing a suit of clothes different from the one in which he appears in the Meserve 20 sitting at New York.

The Cooper Union picture of Lincoln made by Brady shows the great skill of the artist in posing Lincoln to the very best advantage. The photographer observed that his visitor had a long neck and suggested rearranging the low collar and tie which caused Mr. Lincoln to remark, "Ah, I see you want to shorten my neck!" Even with the utmost precaution after the picture was made, considerable retouching had to be done to make the tie and collar presentable so even the genuine Brady Cooper Institute picture hardly can be called an unretouched photograph.

Lincoln of the First Inaugural

Brady's photograph interests in Washington were being looked after by Alexander Gardner until early in 1861 when the proprietor himself decided to make the Washington studio his headquarters. He had been there but a short time when the President-elect arrived in the city and the very day Lincoln reached the Capitol on February 23, 1861, he was again rushed to Brady's gallery much the same as he was in New York. After some comments on the picture taken at New York only a year before Lincoln is said to have exclaimed, "Brady and the Cooper Union Speech made me President."

The series of pictures taken at this time could be dismissed without controversy if it were not for the fact that Brady used a camera with a multiple lens. The Lincoln National Life Ins. Co. has a stereoscopic print in this series made indicating at least two lenses. Stefan Lorant found an original Brady camera with four lenses and Roy Meredith exhibits in his book a print made about the same time as the President-elect series which reveals that Brady was also using on occasions a camera with eight lenses. Just how many actual negatives were made by Brady on Feb. 23, is problematical and the same might be said with reference to two other Brady sittings where multi-lens cameras were used.

The Rice Copies

Information gathered by Meredith allows one to successfully refute the claim of a Washington photographer, R. C. Rice, that Lincoln and Grant came together to his studio for their pictures. The prints said to have resulted from these sittings were excellent but the Lincoln picture, Meserve 59, was made by Alexander Gardner on November 15, 1863, and Brady himself has given us a dramatic story of the Grant sitting on March 9, 1864. There is no continuity whatever in the taking of the much publicized portraits of Lincoln and of Grant copyrighted by Rice.

Pictures at Antietam

Possibly the most human interest pictures of Lincoln were taken at Antietam. Meredith gives us a detailed account of Brady's presence there but also admits that the photographer, Alexander Gardner, was also present with his equipment at the time the famous negatives were made. Apparently the pictures were taken in three different locations but all with tents as background scenery. Brady probably took the picture of Lincoln and McClellan in the latter's tent, Meserve 43, and the group in front of the tent, Meserve 41, but the supposed original of Lincoln and McClellan in front of the tent, Meserve 42, may be nothing more than a highly retouched enlargement of the two main figures in the group with an artist adding some details including a new right hand for McClellan and a face lifting for Lincoln. It is likely that Brady also took the two group pictures before the open tent consisting of Lincoln and Pinkerton in one instance, and Lincoln, Pinkerton and McClellan in the other view.

The best known and by far the finest photograph of the President, Meserve 44, was taken in front of another tent where McClellan and his staff of officers had been assembled. We are inclined to believe that this picture was made by Gardner instead of Brady as the Lincoln National Life Foundation has a print of this group on one of the original Gardner studio cards and copyrighted by Gardner. Possibly Brady and Gardner should divide photographic honors at Gettysburg.