

LINCOLN LORE

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THE DECATUR PHOTOGRAPH OF LINCOLN

The city of Decatur, Illinois, at last, seems to be receiving belated proper recognition for the very prominent part which it played in the biographical history of Abraham Lincoln. Even more important than the recent erection in that city of the heroic bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln is the discovery of an original photograph which at once takes its place among the more significant likenesses of the rail splitter.

The picture is an excellent one and by far the finest profile extant of Lincoln, facing to the right, giving a good view of the left side of his face. Most of the photographs of Lincoln show him looking to the left thereby emphasizing the mole or small wart on the right side. There is an alertness in the expression of Lincoln's face which is absent in many of the other early pictures and if it were not for the enormous bow tie which detracts somewhat from his general appearance, the photograph would vie with the Hesler portraits taken a month later.

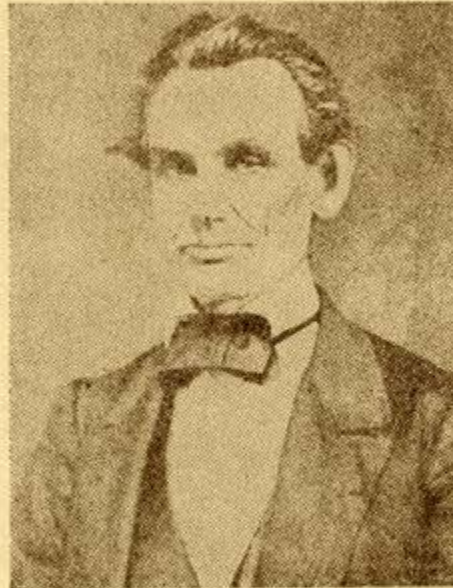
The picture comes to light almost as a Christmas gift to students of Abraham Lincoln after having been in obscurity for over eighty-seven years. It has not been lost or intentionally withheld from public view as the owner has through the years often displayed it, but until just recently no one has identified it as an unpublished photograph.

It is timely indeed that the photograph should be presented to the Decatur Public Library by Grace Barnwell, a daughter of the photographer who made the negative. It will become one of the most valuable treasures of the fine Lincoln room set apart as a sort of memorial to Lincoln. The *Illinois State Business Directory* for 1860 under the caption, "Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes, Photographs, etc." lists Edward A. Barnwell with a studio at Decatur. Barnwell's is one of the twelve names printed in capital letters among the 280 names in the complete list of photographers in Illinois at the time. This extra publicity investment for display type apparently sets him out among the more important photographers of the state. His name and business reference appears in the general index of the directory as follows: "Barnwell, Edward A., Ambrotype, Decatur, Macon County."

On March 14, 1830, Abraham Lincoln in company with his father and eleven other members of the Lincoln caravan family reached Decatur in their migration from Indiana and camped that night in the new settlement of some dozen cabins. The Lin-

colns located ten miles west of the town. Here with the help of John Hanks, a relative, they built a log cabin and fenced in ten acres of ground to establish the pioneer Lincoln home in Illinois.

It was in Decatur where Lincoln is said to have made his first political speech in Illinois. According to John Hanks there was a political rally held at Decatur some time after the arrival of the Lincolns and he attended the



Abraham Lincoln

At the time of the Decatur Convention rally in company with Abe. The meeting is said to have taken place in front of Rinshaw's store where W. L. D. Ewing and John D. Posey, candidates for the assembly of Illinois were the chief speakers. After they were through Lincoln made a creditable speech which was his introduction to Illinois politics and undoubtedly had much to do with Lincoln himself announcing as a candidate for the legislature two years later.

The earliest visit to Decatur of Abraham Lincoln as a lawyer, which can be documented, occurred on Monday, May 14, 1838, and he was there at least two days. From that time on he was probably in Decatur at about every session of the circuit court for the next twenty years or more. It was not his legal associations in Decatur however which contribute most to the significance of the town in Lincoln history. Two political gatherings which assembled there are of primary importance, and the date of one of them helps to fix the time the picture was taken.

The first political assembly of some importance held at Decatur and in which Abraham Lincoln participated was on Washington's Birthday, 1856. It was largely a meeting of Illinois newspaper editors headed by Paul Selby. Abraham Lincoln was invited to make the speech of the evening. If he would have consented to run he would have been nominated as a candidate for governor.

The most important political gathering ever held in Decatur assembled for the State Republican convention of 1860. Richard J. Oglesby, a local political leader and a great admirer of Lincoln was responsible for putting on a piece of pagentry with John Hanks and a few rails Lincoln is supposed to have made. The significance of this episode in the nomination of Lincoln at Decatur and later at Chicago cannot be exaggerated.

It is certain that the newly discovered picture of Lincoln was made by Photographer Barnwell during this Decatur visit. The exact day is not quite certain. Lincoln was in Decatur on Tuesday, May 8, preliminary to the regular session of the convention and remained until Thursday, May 10. The convention was called together on Wednesday the 9th, but did not instruct its delegates to vote for Lincoln until Thursday, May 10. Miss Barnwell believes the picture was made the day before the convention which presumably would place the date as May 8, two days before his nomination.

Irrespective of the exact date on which the picture was made it will immediately take its place among the most important portraits of Abraham Lincoln. It should be included among the best half dozen pictures made of Lincoln before he started to grow a beard. The following six pictures arranged in chronological order seem to be of most historical interest. 1. Congressional by Shepherd at Springfield. 2. Debater by Hesler at Chicago. 3. Orator by Brady at New York. 4. Nominee by Barnwell at Decatur. 5. Candidate by Hesler at Springfield. 6. President Elect by German at Springfield.

It is regretted that some of the artists who rushed to Springfield a month after the Barnwell portrait was made did not have copies of this picture as a basis for their studies of the Republican nominee. The people would have had a much better idea of how Mr. Lincoln looked at that time.