

LINCOLN LORE

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PICKETT'S PROFILE OF LINCOLN

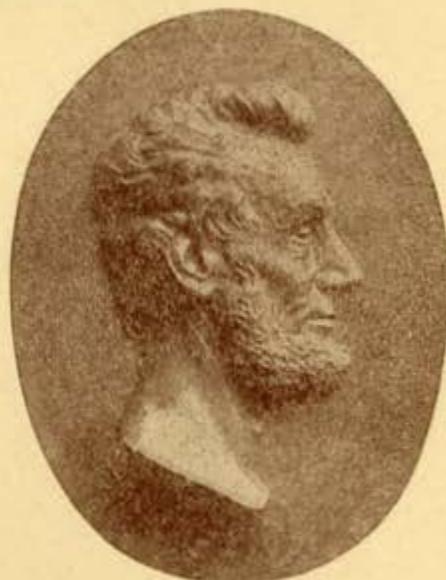
Images cast in bronze are possibly the most enduring memorials which man can visualize as far as the ravages of time are considered. The approach of Memorial Day invites our attention to a little known work of art which has often been called the finest profile in metal of Abraham Lincoln. The fact that the State of Illinois has recently used in silhouette what appears to be a copy of this portrait suggests some statements about its origin and history.

The original study is an elliptical shaped piece of bronze 24 x 19 inches and one quarter inch thick, the head of Lincoln in bas-relief measuring 18 x 12 inches. Inscribed in the lower area of the plaque is the name "Pickett" with the date "1873." Much effort has been put forth through the years to learn some biographical facts about the sculptor but to no avail. The initial "C" appears before his family name but the date of his birth and death as well as the place where he resided is not available. He is said to have been of French descent and was associated with the sculptor Leonard Volk either in America or France. Volk was in Europe about the time the profile was created. No other work by Pickett has come to our attention.

Without doubt Pickett had before him at the time he was working on the masterpiece a photograph made by C. S. German in Springfield just before the President elect started for the inauguration at Washington. It is a little known portrait in profile which shows Lincoln with untrimmed hair and a very full beard and Pickett did not overlook these features. The original print is without question one of the most, if not the most artistic photograph in profile of Lincoln ever made. Leonard Volk greatly admired it and it is not strange that he would make it available to Pickett as the most acceptable side view of Lincoln. The hair arrangement Pickett used however, seems to have been borrowed from Volk's head of Lincoln.

Not only did the government issue a commemorative two cent stamp revealing the likeness of Lincoln and also coin a one cent piece bearing his portrait during the centennial year of his birth, but plans were also made

for the issuing of a new one cent postal card 3 x 5 inches to bear a likeness of the Emancipator. It was the preparation for this postal and design that brought the Pickett study into prominence.



As early as 1893 Mr. L. G. Muller came in possession of the Pickett bronze profile. It was not until fifteen years later, however, that he secured a copyright on the plaque and had a metal plate welded onto the reverse side of the bronze bearing this inscription: "Copyrighted L. G. Muller, 1908." At the time Muller secured his copyright he not only had replicas of the plaque made in metal but he also widely distributed lithograph reproductions of the head.

Mr. Muller living in Chicago in 1909 submitted a picture of the plaque along with twenty other contestants as a suitable design to be used on the new postal card then contemplated. He received from A. M. Travis, third assistant postmaster, a letter dated Dec. 11, 1909 informing him that his portrait of the plaque would probably be used on the new postal issue. The acceptance of the Pickett head appears in the report of the Post Office Department for 1909, and again in 1910. The design for the postal having been completed it is described as "a profile head of Abraham Lincoln looking to the left after a portrait by L. G. Muller." It was not until 1911 however, that the Lincoln postal card

was finally released. This profile by Pickett was pronounced by E. Roberts, Director of the United States Mint as "the finest likeness of Lincoln that has yet appeared." By 1917 the plates used for printing the postals were badly worn and it was discovered that better printing results could be obtained from a new design, so the Pickett Lincoln postal became obsolete.

In the month of November 1908 J. B. Oakleaf, one of the original "big five" collectors of Lincolniana, became greatly interested in reproductions of the Pickett head and attempted to interest another of the "big five", Daniel Fish, in a project to form a company with Mr. Muller as its director for the distribution of lithographs and replicas of the profile. What success or failure accompanied this effort we are unable to learn. Appearing on a folder we have this testimony in a letter from Mr. Oakleaf to Muller with reference to the work by Pickett: "I have never seen anything of Lincoln which pleased me so much as your production and you are entitled to the profound thanks and admiration of every lover of Lincoln."

Ten years later in August 1919 Mr. Muller was in Seattle, Washington and the plaque was exhibited at the Seattle Fine Arts Society rooms. On November 4, 1912 William M. R. French on behalf of the trustees of "The Art Institute of Chicago" thanked Mr. Muller for the loan of "the bronze bas-relief of Lincoln by Pickett." In a letter written by Mr. Muller in 1923 he states that the plaque had "hung in the Chicago Art Institute for four years."

On July 2, 1923 Dr. W. E. Barton stated in a letter to Mr. Muller, then living in Seattle, Washington: "I am indeed familiar with Pickett's Bas Relief of Lincoln. He will be a happy man who possesses it . . ." It was at this time that Mr. Arthur F. Hall, president of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company acquired the masterpiece and it is now the outstanding piece in the collection of 1200 Lincoln plaques, medallions, medals, tokens, etc. in the library and museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation.