

# LINCOLN LORE

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## PORTRAITS OF CONGRESSMAN LINCOLN

One is deeply impressed by the marked contrast between the portraits of Abraham Lincoln as a nominee for the Presidency in 1860 and those taken just before his death in 1865. It appears as if twenty-five years had elapsed in the interval instead of five. Of course the growing of a beard contributed somewhat to this incredible change. However, a transformation almost as striking is revealed in the photograph made of Lincoln as a congressman elect in 1846 or 1847 and those taken ten years later. During that decade Lincoln's appearance changed so much that many prominent Lincoln students have denied that the earlier daguerreotype is authentic.

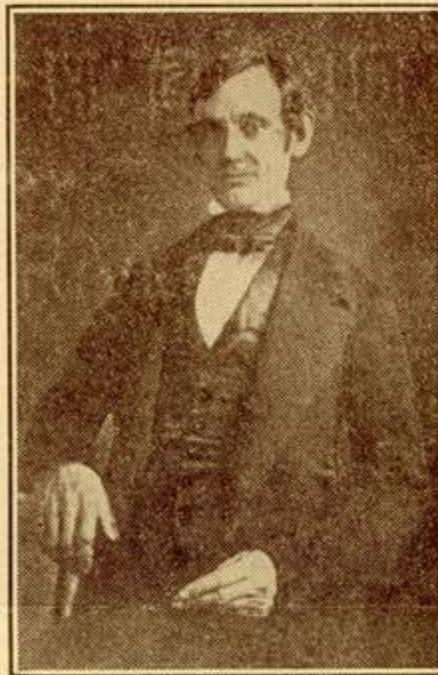
The controversy over the genuineness of the photograph did not arise until about 1925 and strange to say the earliest criticisms came out of Springfield, Illinois. Albert J. Beveridge was in the city in 1925 when a group of Lincoln students had come together at the Leland Hotel. According to one of the experts on Lincoln pictures, Beveridge "scoffed at the idea" that the portrait "was really a daguerreotype of Lincoln." He was supported in this contention by Jacob C. Thompson and other local Lincoln authorities. Apparently William Patterson, a miniature painter of Chicago who was then doing a series of studies of Lincoln on ivory, supported the Beveridge viewpoint and commented: "Seemingly it is the picture of some other man." The *Illinois State Journal* published a broadside setting forth these testimonials. The only one present to defend the genuineness of the photograph was Herbert Welles Fay. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* was also drawn into the controversy by correspondence and his comments supporting Mr. Fay's position were published in John E. Vaughn's column in the *State Journal*.

It is to be regretted that most of the reproductions of this first photograph of Lincoln are in reverse and show his hair parted on the wrong side of his head. Possibly this fact may have added to the confusion, although the vest buttoned on the wrong side should have made the mistake quite noticeable.

The photograph was first published by *McClure's Magazine* in November 1895 and more widely distributed when a woodcut made from it by T. Johnson was used as a frontispiece in the *Century Magazine* for 1897. The editors had been in touch with Robert Lincoln, son of the President, who had written with reference to the daguerreotype on November 21, 1896: "I remember it as being in my

father's house as far back as I can remember anything there. My own guess that it was made either in St. Louis or Washington City during my father's term in Congress."

At the time Frederick H. Meserve was compiling all the then known Lincoln photographs in 1910 he received a letter from Robert Lincoln about the photograph in question. He wrote: "Springfield in 1846 was simply a village and I do not believe it possible that anyone there possessed the facilities for using the then new



Congressman Lincoln  
From Daguerreotype by Shepherd

daguerreotype process. It seems to me incredible that it was not done in some more important place."

About ten years later Daniel Fish, Lincoln bibliographer, wrote to Robert about the same picture and his reply dated Chicago 15, 1919 is now before me. By this time Robert had concluded it was made in Washington and stated: "I have no doubt that it was there that he had the portrait made." He further mentioned that this daguerreotype and one of his mother were in their home at the time the family left for the White House.

Gibson W. Harris' *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* appeared in the *Woman's Home Companion* in four

issues concluding with February 1904. He states: "In September 1845 through the kindness of our then state senator, Mr. Charles Constable, it was arranged that I should enter the law office of Lincoln and Herndon . . . I made the acquaintance at the hotel of a young man from Syracuse, N. Y. named N. H. Shepherd, a daguerreotypist who was about opening a gallery in Springfield . . . Together we two, became room mates, remaining such throughout my stay in Springfield." Referring to the daguerreotype, one of the illustrations used with his memoirs, he wrote: "I feel confident that I am not mistaken in recognizing the portrait as the work of my friend Shepherd, before whose camera I know Mr. Lincoln sat once or oftener."

The summer edition of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* has contributed an extremely valuable word portrait of Abraham Lincoln preliminary to his congressional term. Harmon G. Reynolds edited *The Masonic Trowell* published at Springfield, Illinois and shortly after the assassination of the President prepared an editorial for the issue of May 15, 1865 which opened with the statement that he had known Lincoln "ever since 1840." The paragraph in which he described Lincoln in the early forties follows:

"The people are accustomed to look upon Mr. Lincoln as he appeared when elected President. The pictures and photographs that meet the eye everywhere, even when flattering him, by no means do justice to his appearance in early manhood. The first time we saw him to know him, he rose to address the House. His figure was tall, and his face was sufficiently full to relieve the prominences so noticeable in later life. Although dark, yet his face was fresh almost to floridness, his eye brilliant and speaking (sparkling); his hair was heavy and well-dressed, and greatly added to his appearance. No man in the House seemed to care so little for dress, and yet no one dressed in better taste. Humor, mercy, and talent were ineffaceably delineated upon his countenance."

Those who will read this description with a good reproduction of the Shepherd daguerreotype before him will be convinced of the striking resemblance of this word portrait and the photographic likeness. If there has been any doubt as to the identity of the daguerreotype known by Lincoln students as Meserve number one, it should be dispelled by Mr. Reynolds' description of Abraham Lincoln about the time he married Mary Todd.