



# Lincoln Lore

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## Robert Lincoln's Favorite Photograph of His Father

The Lincoln National Life Foundation has acquired over a period of years some fifty-five letters of Robert Todd Lincoln. The most highly prized of all is the one dated August 3, 1905, addressed to Arthur F. Hall, Secretary, The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The letter follows:

"Replying to your note of July 28th, I find no objection whatever to the use of a portrait of my father upon the letterhead of such a life insurance company named after him as you describe; and I take pleasure in enclosing you, for that purpose, what I regard as a very good photograph of him."

Accompanying the letter was Robert Lincoln's favorite photograph (Meserve No. 85) of his father. Today both the letter and the photograph are on display in the library-museum of the insurance company's home office building, indicating that our institution is probably the only firm in the country using the portrait of Lincoln with the Lincoln family's permission.

Apparently, Robert became quite an authority on Lincoln photographs, and about eight of the fifty-five letters in the Foundation collection are related to that subject. One of the most interesting letters of this group is dated at Chicago, Illinois, October 15, 1919 and is addressed to the Hon. Daniel Fish, District Court, Minneapolis, Minnesota:

"I duly received your letter of the 4th inst., but have been delayed in arranging to reply to it until now. Some photographs I had taken were only delivered to me as I was leaving Manchester, Vt. on my trip here. I brought them with me so that I need delay no

1. Robert undoubtedly had in mind (Meserve No. 1) the daguerreotype of his father that is believed to have been made by N. H. Shepherd in Springfield, Illinois in 1846.
2. The photograph which Robert sent to Judge Daniel Fish was a reversed copy (mole on the left side of Lincoln's face) of the photograph made by Alexander Hesler in Chicago, Illinois in February, 1857 (Meserve No. 6).

longer replying to you. I am returning to Manchester within a day or two.

"I am old enough to have what I think is a correct memory of the mechanical likeness business further back than 1855. The process of the daguerreotype was, I think, the only one known in 1847-1849 when my

father was in Congress, and I have no doubt it was there that he had the portrait made, copies of which have been variously published.' There was in his house up to the time of his going to Washington as president, a daguerreotype of himself and one of my mother, being those that I have mentioned. They came into my possession upon my mother's death.

"While I was a boy at Springfield, and certainly as early as 1858, a new process came in, called the ambrotype, but I recall that people commonly called any such picture a daguerreotype, and continued to do so after the present photograph method came in. At about the same time that the ambrotype process came in, there was another cheaper style of likeness, called the ferrotype, or in common language, tintype, because it was made upon a thin sheet of metal such as is used for coating to make tinfoil. I have an ambrotype of myself made in 1858. It is made on glass, having a backing of wax of some sort. One operation produced only one portrait, which was also true of the daguerreotype, and I think must be true of tintypes. Photographs, however, are unlimited in number, because the negative is used merely in the

process of subsequent printing on paper.

"I found in my files a letter dated Princeton, Illinois, July 29, 1885, from Mrs. A. H. Paddock, with which she kindly sent me a tintype of my father taken on July 4th 1856 at Princeton, when my father was a guest at their house at a celebration of that day. She says that her husband prevailed upon my father to sit for this picture for her husband, and that she has preserved it ever since; that the day was exceedingly hot, but with wilted linen and hair wet with perspiration, which he combed with his fingers, Mr. Lincoln good-naturedly consented to sit.<sup>2</sup> I enclose with this several photo-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This photograph (Meserve No. 85) of Abraham Lincoln was made in the Mathew B. Brady Washington, D. C. studio on February 9, 1864. Robert Todd Lincoln stated to the late Frederick H. Meserve that he considered this to be the best photograph of his father.





From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

In his letter to the Hon. J. M. Edmonds (11/17/1868) Robert Lincoln stated that "The engraving which pleases me most is one by A. B. Hall, published by John B. Bachelder of N. Y. . . ." This H. B. Hall engraving (from a photo by Brady & Co.) appeared as a frontispiece in the prospectus of Isaac N. Arnold's "Sketch of The Life of Abraham Lincoln" (M. 912) published by John B. Bachelder of New York, 1869.

graph copies I have just had made of this tintype belonging to me, which are made as nearly exact as possible of the size of the tintype. For the sake of comparison with the photograph you sent me, I had the photographer also take an enlarged photograph of my tintype. You will observe that the brass frame, as photographed for me, differs from the brass frame as photographed for you, and here arise two questions: First, is your photograph an enlargement of the tintype you have: Next, as there seems no possible doubt that they represent each the same single picture of my father, and as I believe to be true, one tintype portrait must inevitably differ in some small degree from another, I shall be puzzled if you can point out any difference whatever in these two photographs. My photographer examined them carefully and could see none."

Fifteen days later (October 30, 1919) at Hildene, Manchester, Vermont, Robert wrote Judge Fish a second letter on the subject of Lincoln photographs:

"I have read your letter of the 27th with great interest. I cannot now comment on your additional news as to the portrait, as I am nearly swamped in getting ready to go to Washington for the winter — I will later write you from there — That address is 3014 N Street N.W.

"One or two things I will speak of at once. You say that your friend's original is an 'ambrotype' — Does it show the right or left side of my father's face? That question will not do. Is it like (drawing a) this or (drawing b) this? My tintype is as (a).

"Neither my wife nor I have any recollection of Mrs. Rice or Miss Fischer, but that fact implies nothing

whatever. After my father's death my mother had many people about her whom we never saw or heard of.

"The size of your photograph may be greater or less than the object it represents. That I sent you was as exactly the size of my tintype as the photographer could make it — Then as I recall he tried to make one off the tintype, the same size as your photograph.

"My wife has just now shown me a *Daguerreotype* of her mother taken before she was married — that is before 1846. Also an ambrotype of her father taken we suppose not far from 1854. The difference of process is manifest."

All of the Robert Lincoln correspondence in the Foundation's collection reveals that he was consistent in his belief that the photograph made in Mathew B. Brady's Washington, D. C. studio (Meserve No. 85) on February 9, 1864 was his father's best likeness. At the same time the President's son did not hesitate to criticize portraits of his father which he felt were inaccurate in their portrayal of the Sixteenth President. Such a criticism is found in Robert Lincoln's letter to S. Townsend of Plainfield, New Jersey, dated April 8, 1918:

"I return to you the photograph which seems to be based on some attempted likeness of President Lincoln. If taken as it seems to have been, from a death mask, it has all the disagreeable qualities of such a work, and I can only say it is the worst thing of the sort I have ever seen in the way of a likeness."

Many times Robert Lincoln was helpful in identifying obscure photographs which were thought to contain the likeness of his father. On October 3, 1900 Robert wrote Dewitt Miller of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from Chicago, Illinois regarding a photograph of his father's house. The son wrote:

"I do not remember such a picture, but if you will cause it to be shown to me in the way you suggest, or in any other convenient way, I will take pleasure in giving you my opinion as to whether any of the figures represents my father."

On October 18, 1900, Robert made the following comments in a letter to Dewitt Miller concerning the photograph of his father's house which was shown to him by Messrs. O'Brien & Son:

"It is a good picture of the house, but I cannot recognize either of the figures shown in the photograph, but it is certain that neither of them is any member of my family. They seem to be two young men who were probably passers by at the time the picture was taken."

As Robert grew older he found fault with many of his father's photographs, and on April 30, 1903 in reply to W. W. Reed of Buffalo, New York, Robert wrote:

"Your letter of the 14th instant was duly received, and also the copy of the portrait of my father, as to which you ask me to say whether I honestly consider it a good life-like likeness; adding that Mr. Hay and Mr. Watterson have commended it. I also received this morning your telegram on the same subject.

"I have delayed replying to you, because I disliked very much to give an unfavorable expression if I could avoid it. I have studied the picture carefully, and am sorry to tell you that I do not like it. It is probably taken from some photograph which I do not remember, but if it is a good reproduction of that photograph, the latter was, as frequently happens, not a fortunate one to say the least.

"It is, I regret to say, not a picture which I would care to have as a pleasing likeness of my father. I am very sorry that I am not able to speak in other terms of it."

One May 22, 1903 Robert wrote W. W. Reed a second letter on the subject of his father's photograph:

"Upon my return from a short absence, I find your letter of May thirteenth, in regard to my father's portrait.

"I notice the large number of commendations of the picture, and as to them, I can only say that such things are, of course, a matter of personal feeling upon which I cannot raise an argument.



"I take pleasure in enclosing to you a photograph (the negative of which was, unfortunately, cracked in the course of years) which I think is unequaled as a likeness and as a pleasing picture."

It is a matter of conjecture, but the photograph, the negative of which was cracked, may have been the Alexander Gardner photograph (Meserve No. 100) which was taken in Washington, D. C. on April 10, 1865. If Robert sent Reed the Gardner photograph it was likely because his supply of Brady photographs at that time was exhausted.

Within the last few days the Foundation has acquired a facsimile copy of a letter Robert Lincoln wrote to J. M. Edmonds of Washington, D. C. The letterhead is that of the "Law Office of Scammon & Lincoln, No. 1 Marine Bank Building, Chicago." The original letter dated November 17, 1868 was once the property of the late Frederick H. Meserve of New York City but now belongs to Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt of Morristown, New Jersey. Needless to state, it pertains to Lincoln photographs:

"Your letter of Nov. 11th was received yesterday. I do not recollect what pictures I have mentioned to Senator Harlan but of all the photographs of my father which I have seen I regard the one by Brady & Co. of Washington as the best. I am sorry that the only copy of it which I ordinarily keep with me is now in the possession of an artist and I cannot well reach it just now — There will be however no trouble in getting it at Brady's — It is what they call a 4/4 picture and may be recognized by the large watch chain and from the fact that Marshall seems to have copied his engraving from it.

"The engraving which pleases me most is one by A. B. Hall, published by John B. Bachelder of N. Y. and I think the one at the head of your letter is a woodcut facsimile of it.

"The large photograph you sent is entirely new to me and is not as good a likeness as you ought to have. The Brady picture is much better.

"If I can assist you any further in this matter I shall be happy to do so."

The above letter is of interest because it reveals that the twenty-five year old Robert in 1868 had a favorite photograph of his father. The steel engraving by A. B. Hall and published by John B. Bachelder of New York is used in connection with this article.

## A New Heroic Bronze Statue

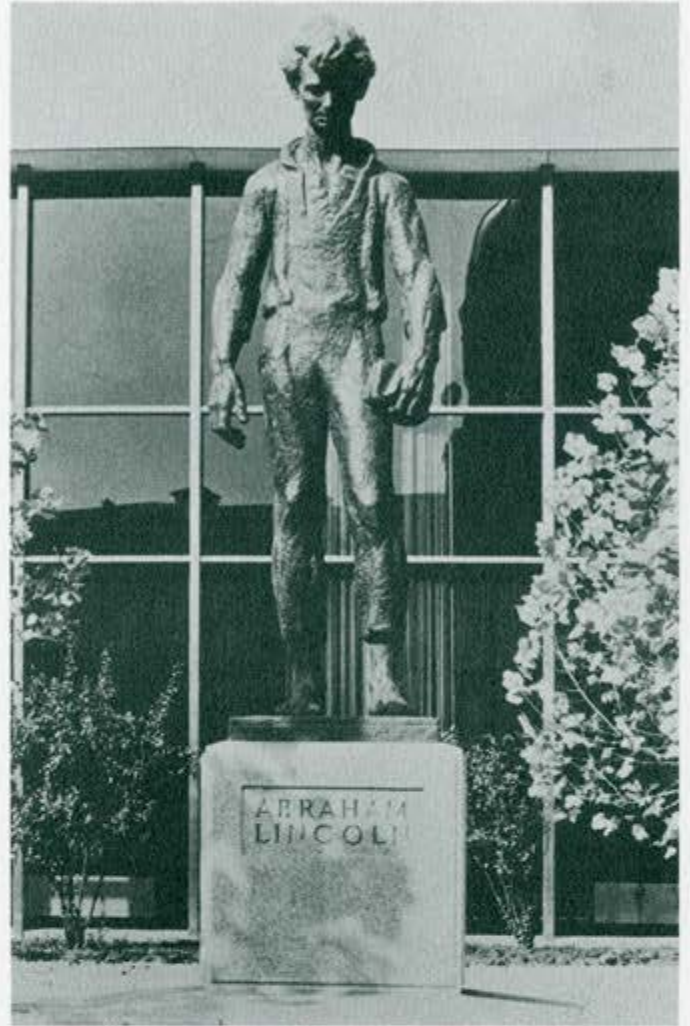
### Lincoln — The Boy

On Thursday morning, September 26, 1963 at ten o'clock, David K. Rubins' new heroic bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln was dedicated. The statue, which is located in the entrance plaza to the east of the Indiana State Office Building lobby, 100 North Senate Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana, is nine feet three inches in height and is placed on a pedestal of dark granite bearing the inscription "Abraham Lincoln."

In discussing the creation of this statue, Mr. Rubins stated: "The thoughts that concerned me most in making this statue were the necessities of representing a vital energy, lean physical strength, and a tree-like growth suggestive of the strong roots of character that were growing and manifest as early as his Indiana years. In the rather knotty and active forms of the body, I have tried to express that, as well as the rough warmth of his frontier humanity and the ungainliness of his boney frame.

"In the simple but rough-surfaced pedestal, and in the quiet, shadowed, thoughtful head, I wanted to suggest the very simple, classic character of his mind — as well as the loneliness and tragedy of his life.

"In the hair, I tried for boyishness and humor. I felt it unimportant to invent a purely imaginary portrait of how Lincoln might have looked at twenty-one years. Our knowledge of his appearance, on which the popular symbol of Lincoln is based, is from photographs taken after his fortieth year; my face therefore, is a compromise be-



Photograph Courtesy of David K. Rubins

The heroic bronze statue of "Abraham Lincoln" by David K. Rubins, dedicated at Indianapolis, Indiana, on September 26, 1963.

tween the unknown Indiana youth and the pre-presidential Illinois lawyer.

"The true look of Lincoln during his Indiana years is as unimportant as the historical accuracy of his clothing. In favor of representing his character and his contemporary significance to the best advantage, I have subordinated every literal element except the book. In the light of Lincoln's whole life, the axe is unimportant in comparison to the book.

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From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The New Indiana State Office Building at Indianapolis, Indiana, on which entrance plaza (statue not shown—see arrow for location) the David K. Rubins statue of Abraham Lincoln was erected.



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## A New Heroic Bronze Statue

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"The placement of the figure was chosen for two reasons: I felt that Lincoln should be placed back among the trees on the plaza, since the forest was his Indiana experience; and it would be difficult to compete in scale with the open plaza and building were the figure to be placed in the open. Too large a figure in sculpture produces an inhuman and unreal effect."

Indiana judges who served on the panel which selected the Rubins statue of Lincoln were as follows: Dr. Wilbur D. Peat, Director of John Herron Art Museum; Dr. Henry R. Hope, Chairman of the College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University; Dr. Marvin G. Probst, Architect Representative for the State Office Building; Mr. Ralph O. Yeager, Jr., Architect Representative for the Employment Security Building; Mr. Donald M. Mosiman, Deputy Attorney General, representative for the State Office Building Commission and former art student, and Dr. A. Reid Winsey, Chairman of the Art Department of De-Pauw University. In addition to the above mentioned judges, Dr. Louis A. Warren, former director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, and Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, were called to act as historical consultants.

The bronze figure, which was cast by the "lost-wax" method, weighs over 1500 pounds. The entire process required over five months to complete. David Rubins, creator of the statue, is a well-known sculptor and instructor at John Herron Art School.

Four heroic bronze Lincoln statues are now located in the State of Indiana; namely, Fort Wayne (Manship), Wabash (Keck), Indianapolis (Hering) and Indianapolis (Rubins).