



Lincoln Lore

September, 1980

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.
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Number 1711

BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865 The Sentimental Counterattack

Politics provided subject matter for the satirical artists of Lincoln's day, but satire was never the dominant motif in popular prints. Sentimentalism dominated American taste—even highbrow taste. Pro-Lincoln cartoons and simple portraits to be hung on parlor walls answered the satirists while Lincoln was President. After he was assassinated, there was no need to answer the critics. They were completely silenced, and an enormous sentimental counterattack swept them from the field—virtually forever.

The last issue of *Lincoln Lore* focused mostly on the satirical vein in graphic art in Lincoln's day. This issue dwells on the sentimental strain which prevailed in popular depictions of Lincoln after April 15, 1865. The prints shown are all part of an exhibit entitled, "BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865." It will be on view in the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., through March, 1981.

The only really respectable art, popular or otherwise, in the Victorian era was sentimental in content. Satire had at best a marginal respectability. Even humorists as great as Mark Twain ran afoul of the genteel tradition as late as the end of the nineteenth century. In Lincoln's day joke books were sold more at train stations than by respectable booksellers. As the previous issue of *Lincoln Lore* showed, Lincoln's own reputation for wit was something of a liability.

The graphic arts do not lend themselves to subtle interpretations of events. Subtlety is the realm of the word. In the pictorial and popular view of things, John Wilkes Booth was the tool of the devil, and angels carried Lincoln to heaven. There he was greeted by George Washington. When printmakers needed non-controversial images, they could always turn to religion and to the Father of His Country. The immediate association of Lincoln with Washington was remarkable.

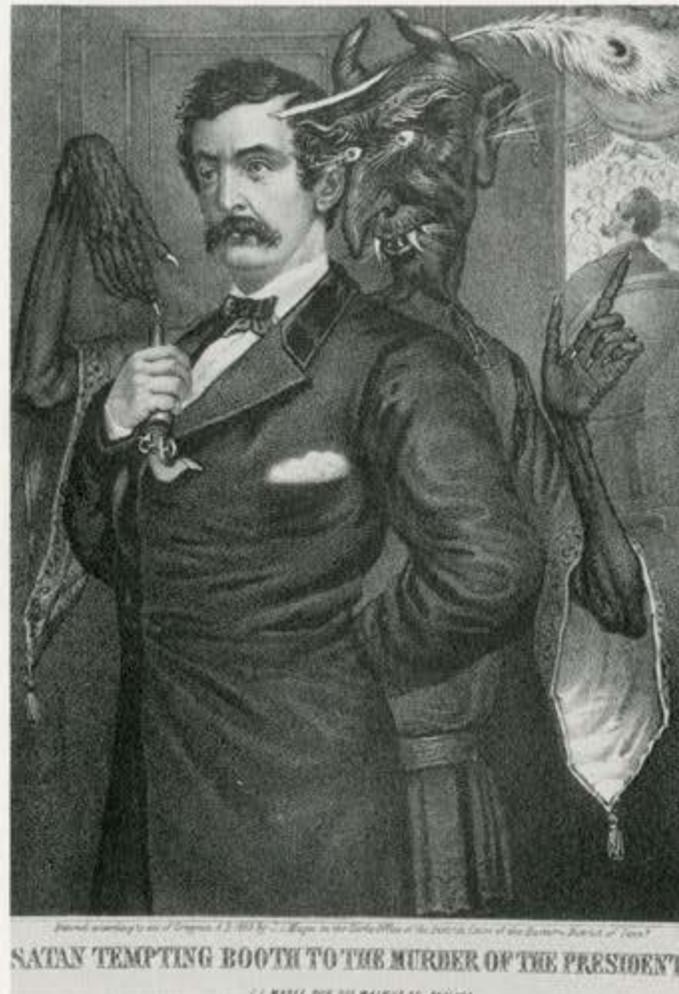
Lincoln's association with him was possible because the Civil War had saved the Union Washington had founded. It was the sort of association that a printmaker wanted to make only when it was a safe bet. Although there are many prints of Washington and Lincoln together, none bears a date before 1865. Statesmanship on a par with George Washington's was truly within the ability only of dead politicians.

Another part of the sentimental counterattack which had lasting effects was the development of what might be called the "Cult of the First Family." Lincoln never realized the power of this, and the printmakers were surprisingly slow to do so. When they caught on, however, they launched a phenomenon now visible at every

newsstand and grocery store check-out counter in America, as glossy magazines vie with each other to blazon forth color pictures and pulp stories about the President's wife, children, brothers, sisters, mother, and father.

The printmakers' slowness to provide the sentimental public they served with a suitable portrait of the First Family (the term was not used in Lincoln's day) was in part due to the old problem of models to copy. President Lincoln never posed with his whole family for a photograph. His wife was rarely photographed and was never photographed with her husband. Only in February, 1864 did Lincoln and his son Thomas sit for a charming portrait which provided a model for numerous scenes of domestic bliss.

Lincoln's failure to provide good models to copy was only a part of the problem. The printmakers were apparently unaware of the potential market for family scenes. Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln raised Abraham from age nine to maturity and outlived her stepson, but it never occurred to anyone to go out to Coles County, Illinois, and photograph her until after her stepson was killed. Knowledge of Lincoln's family was hard to



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. The simple view of the assassination.



From the Louis A. Warren
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FIGURE 2. Lincoln was carried to heaven . . .

come by. Even when a printmaker copied the photograph of Lincoln and his son Thomas, the print was entitled, "Lincoln and His Son Thaddeus"! Tad was the boy's nickname, bestowed on him by his father, who thought he looked like a tadpole (with a large head and small body) when he was a baby.



From the Louis A. Warren
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FIGURE 3. . . . to meet George Washington.

After the assassination the printmakers caught on quickly. They invented the family portraits which Lincoln had never provided in life. Starting with the photograph of Lincoln and Tad, they added other family members from other individual portraits. When they did not know what a family member looked like, they sometimes turned his head away from the viewer and dressed him as a typical little boy from some English Victorian print.

The urge to have America's Presidents domesticated proved to be strong in Victorian America, and an abundance of family prints appeared just after Lincoln's death — many of them crude, some grotesque, and all the products of printmakers' imaginations. The popularity of these pictures could not be ignored — nor could their unstated political message: could this good family man in his Victorian parlor really be a threat to American liberties? President Ulysses S. Grant would calm any anxieties that he might prove to be a dangerous "man on horseback" by appearing in numerous family portraits.

The unskilled crudity of most of the family prints is as much a comment on the demand for domestic art as on the infant stage of America's graphic arts industry. These prints were long on love and short on technical skill, but they are eloquent



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FIGURE 4. Lincoln and "Thaddeus."

testimony to the reverence Americans held for Lincoln — eventually. They were also responsible for discovering a nearly unquenchable market for pictures of the President's family, a market that has not been saturated to this day.

The printmakers' association of Lincoln with George Washington was also prophetic. Before the twentieth century, educated opinion ranked Washington first and Lincoln second among American Presidents. Even John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary and biographer, typified this thinking in 1904, when he wrote, "If we accord the first rank to Washington as founder, so we must unhesitatingly give to Lincoln the second place as preserver and regenerator of American liberty." In polls of historians taken in 1948, 1962, and 1968, however, Lincoln ranked first and Washington second in all three.

Poll of 55 Experts by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., 1948

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. George Washington



*From the Louis A. Warren
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FIGURE 5. Sometimes Tad became Willie.

- 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
- 4. Woodrow Wilson
- 5. Thomas Jefferson
- 6. Andrew Jackson
- 7. Theodore Roosevelt
- 8. Grover Cleveland
- 9. John Adams
- 10. James K. Polk

Poll of 75 Experts by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., 1962.

- 1. Abraham Lincoln
- 2. George Washington
- 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
- 4. Woodrow Wilson
- 5. Thomas Jefferson



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 7. Mary's legs appear to be very short.

- 6. Andrew Jackson
- 7. Theodore Roosevelt
- 8. James K. Polk
- 9. Harry S. Truman
- 10. John Adams
- 11. Grover Cleveland

Poll of 571 Historians by Gary M. Maranell, 1968.

- 1. Abraham Lincoln
- 2. George Washington
- 3. Franklin D. Roosevelt
- 4. Thomas Jefferson
- 5. Theodore Roosevelt
- 6. Woodrow Wilson



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 6. Willie's portrait is on the wall.



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 8. Note portraits of George and Martha Washington.



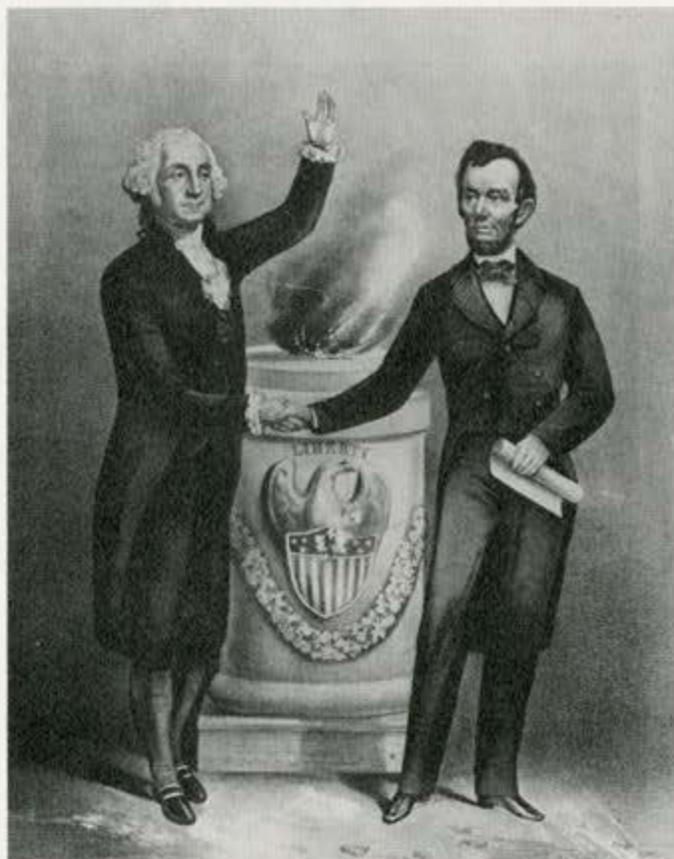
From the Louis A. Warren
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FIGURE 9. A grotesque Lincoln family.

7. Harry S. Truman
8. Andrew Jackson
9. John Kennedy
10. John Adams

From "The Evaluation of Presidents: An Extension of the Schlesinger Polls," *Journal of American History*, LVII (June, 1970), 104-113.

There were no public opinion polls in Lincoln's day, but the popular prints provide a sort of barometer of public opinion. Their direct legacy to us, Lincoln's incomparably high reputation and the Cult of the First Family, even anticipated public opinion. Their indirect legacy is a rich and vivid documentation of the social and political currents of Abraham Lincoln's era.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 10. Lincoln was taller than Washington.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Illinois State Historical Society is seeking proposals for papers, or sessions, to be delivered at the Second Annual Symposium on Illinois History, December 4-5, 1981. Papers, or sessions, will be considered on any aspect of the history, literature, art and culture, politics, geography, archeology, anthropology, and related fields of Illinois and/or the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. The Symposium will be held in Springfield.

Individuals who wish to submit proposals should send a three hundred to six hundred word summary, along with resumes of intended participants, to:

Roger D. Bridges, Director of Research
Illinois State Historical Library
Old State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Proposals must be received by April 15, 1981. Individuals will be notified of the Committee's decision by June 1, 1981.

Members of the Symposium Committee are Robert M. McColley, University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign, Chairman; G. Cullom Davis, Sangamon State University; Raymond E. Hauser, Waubensee Community College; Victor Hicken, Western Illinois University; Wilma J. Lund, Illinois State Board of Education; and Robert E. Sterling, Joliet Junior College.

CALL FOR LINCOLN PAPERS

The Abraham Lincoln Association is seeking papers for its Ninth Annual Abraham Lincoln Symposium, which will be held on February 12, 1982. Proposals for papers dealing with Abraham Lincoln should be submitted no later than June 1, 1981, to Roger D. Bridges, Chairman of the Symposium Committee, Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

Springfield's annual symposium on Abraham Lincoln is the premier Lincoln event in the country. Each year the leading scholars in the Lincoln field gather in Lincoln's home town to deliver or to listen to the latest findings in scholarship. The symposium is free of charge, and all interested Lincoln students should make an effort to attend. The papers are always worthwhile, and the opportunity to mingle with other like-minded people is not to be missed.

The symposium is followed in the evening by the annual dinner of the Abraham Lincoln Association. This is always a gala event and makes a fine conclusion to the day. To be sure of receiving the announcement of the symposium and the dinner, join the Abraham Lincoln Association. Individual memberships are available for fifteen dollars. Membership includes a subscription to the *Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, a handsome journal published annually. Requests for membership or for additional information should be directed to Mr. William K. Alderfer, Secretary, Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

A Correction

While dispensing advice to collectors in *Lincoln Lore* Number 1709 (July, 1980), I neglected to mention that they should study the dates and signatures carefully — something I did not do myself in the case of the letter shown on page 3. As James R. H. Spears of Indianapolis quickly pointed out, the letter could not have been written by Lew Wallace. The handwriting is not his, and he died four years before the letter was written.

The letter came in a lot of genuine materials, and I carelessly accepted the owner's identification of the author. I spent all my effort trying to figure out who the recipient of the letter was and what book it referred to. Mr. Spears closed his letter by saying, "I wonder who Charlie and Lew really were?" Do any of *Lincoln Lore's* other knowledgeable readers know?

M.E.N., Jr.