



Lincoln Lore

February, 1983

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THE LINCOLN IMAGE: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE POPULAR PRINT

By Harold Holzer, Gabor S. Boritt, and Mark E. Neely, Jr.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984. xxii + 234 pp.
Illustrations, notes, and index. \$35.00

Reviewed by
Ron Tyler, Amon Carter Museum

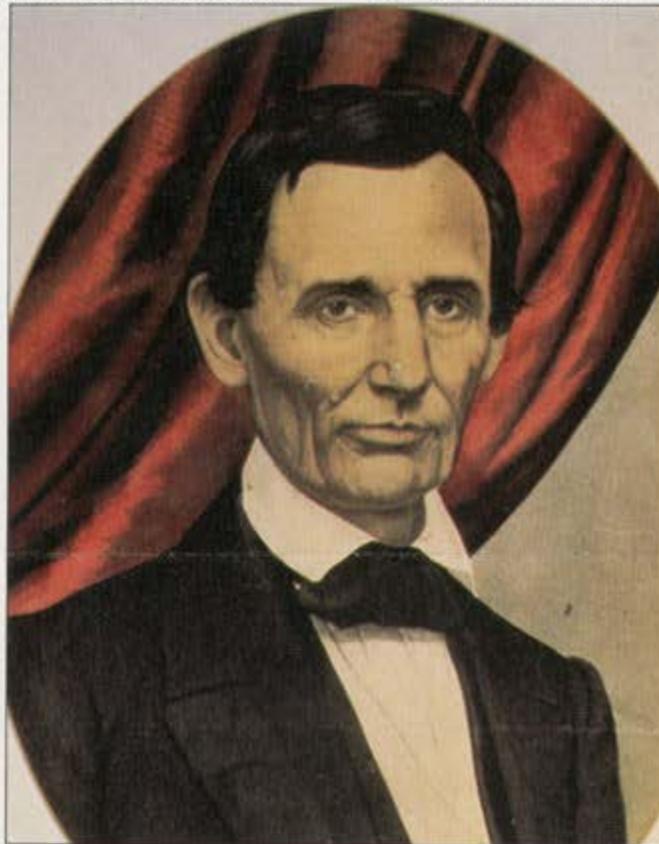
In this age of television, motion pictures, and color photographs in newspapers and magazines, it is difficult to imagine a society starved for pictures. Yet, that was the condition of nineteenth-century America, particularly before printers mechanically produced the "ubiquitous chromo" of Mark Twain's Gilded Age. Artists and printers, of course, had produced lithographs, etchings, and engravings, and lavishly illustrated books had been treasured for centuries, but the introduction of the *carte-de-visite*, card-sized photographs that could be mass-produced, made it possible to offer, for the first time, inexpensive, multiple photographic images. The printmakers' need to defend their decades-long hold on popular portraiture against the photographers' encroachments, plus the Republicans' need for their services, makes Lincoln an excellent case study for the impact of these popular images upon the people.

The first published image of Lincoln was rained down upon the Republican convention like confetti when his name was placed in nomination. It must have been something of a surprise, then, when his physical countenance became a campaign issue. He appeared "so homely; so mortally homely," that one print salesman had a hard time selling his stock. The editors of the Charleston *Mercury* declared Lincoln to be a "horrid looking wretch," and the postal workers in another Southern city refused to distribute the copies of *Harper's Weekly* with his portrait on the cover, although one suspects that motives other than revulsion at his physical appearance might have motivated them. It

was clearly to the Republicans' advantage to show that their candidate did not possess such awkward physical attributes, and the printmakers, who could minimize detractions while capitalizing on virtues, were prepared to serve.

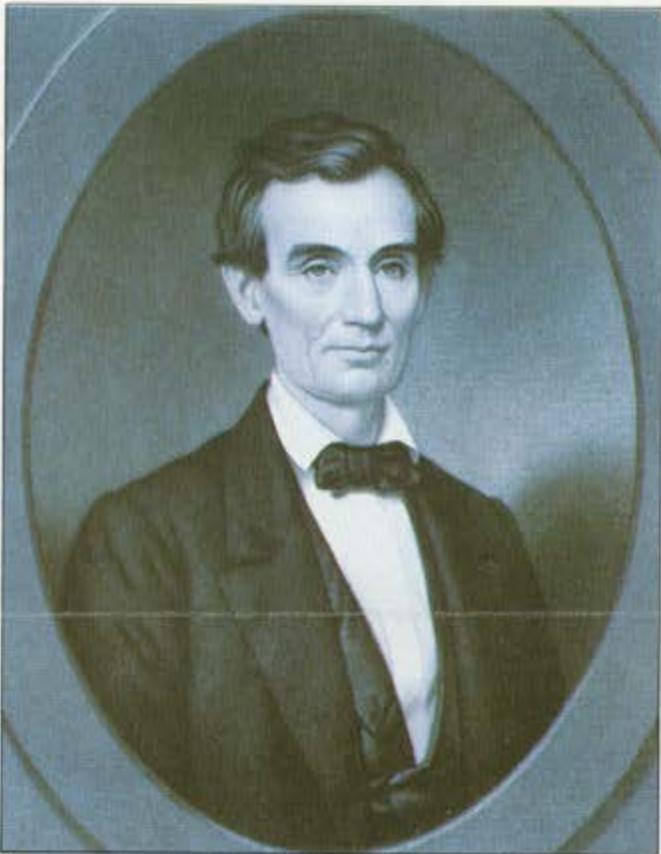
As the campaign got underway, the prints poured from the presses, some made after the few photographs that had been taken of Lincoln up to that date, others from life sketches and paintings made by the several artists who visited Springfield to capture Lincoln's likeness. The firm of Currier & Ives, the most prolific of American printmakers, made seven. Some showed him as "Honest Old Abe," suggesting that his physical plainness was simply the manifestation of his humble but desirable virtues. One recalled the regal stature of Andrew Jackson: "His head was Jacksonian in shape, and the angle of the jaw all that nature intended that it should be as a sign of power and determination," wrote the artist Charles A. Barry.

The printmakers usually ceased their production after the election, no doubt because of their inventory and a sated public with the new president's image firmly in mind. In Lincoln's case, however, the output did not stop, because he began growing a beard, and the printmakers were called upon, without a photograph or life-sketch to work from, to imagine how the change affected his looks. They reworked old plates to show the president-elect with side-whiskers and even a bushy beard. The Emancipation Proclamation inspired the next spate of prints, from Peter S. Duval's calligraphic portrait of Lincoln made up of the words



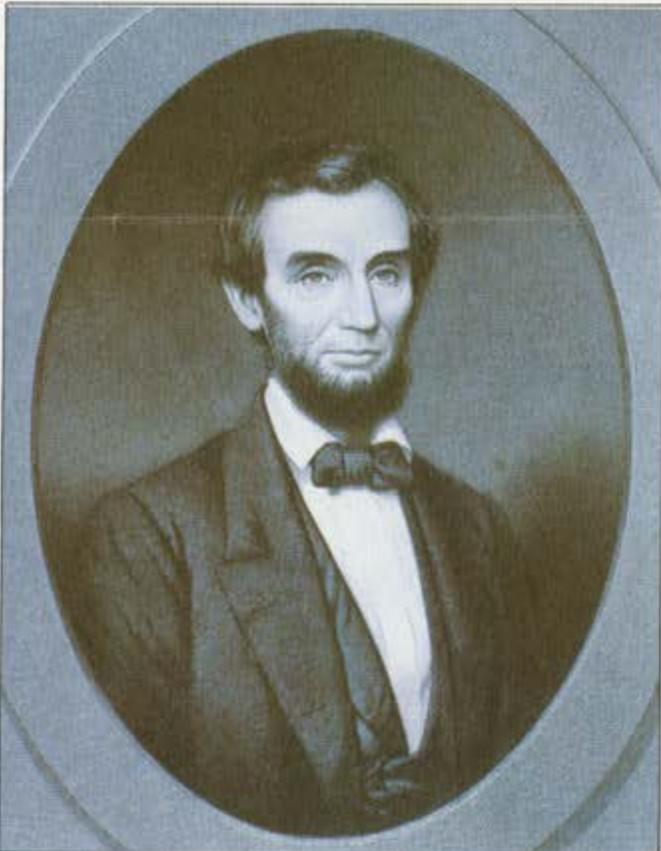
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FIGURE 1. Currier & Ives, *Hon. Abraham Lincoln Republican Candidate for Sixteenth President of the United States*. New York, 1860. Hand-colored lithograph. This, one of the most prized of all Lincoln prints, was based on Mathew Brady's photograph taken on February 27, 1860, a pose frequently adapted by Eastern print publishers. The lithographs sold for 20¢ apiece or 6 for a dollar during the campaign. Some four score years later, a jury of experts voted it 34th among the "best 50" small folio Currier & Ives prints. (Note: all prints appear in black and white in the book.)



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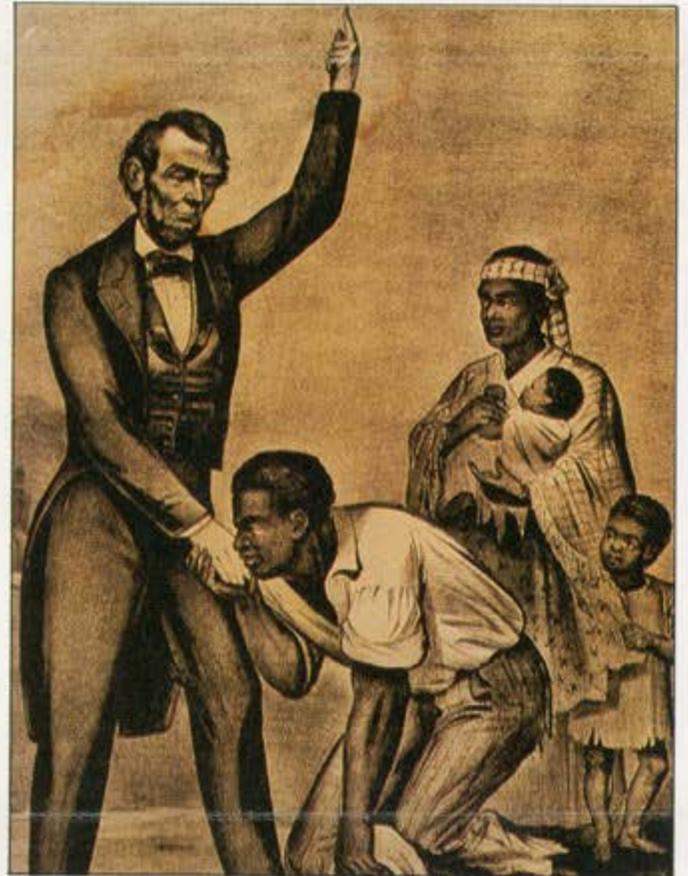
FIGURES 2, 3. Samuel Sartain, after a life portrait by John Henry Brown, A. *Lincoln*. Published by James Irwin, Philadelphia [1860]. Mezzotint engraving. Brown's patron wanted him to make the portrait "good looking, whether the original would justify it or not." The print appeared only in October, too late to have much impact on the election. When Lincoln grew a beard after the election, Sartain slapped a beard (below) on his earlier print.



of the proclamation itself and the stately portraits of Edward Marchant and Francis Carpenter to the poison pen of Adalbert Volck, picturing Lincoln as devilishly inspired as he wrote the document.

The presence of these many images surely explained why so few new prints were issued for the 1864 election, but Lincoln's assassination called forth more pictures. First, the President was shown as John Wilkes Booth shot him, then on his deathbed. The Lincoln family, rarely together during the war years, was now shown gathered around a table as the President read to them, or to his son, Thomas. Lincoln was pictured with George Washington in prints styled the "father" and "savior" of our country, and, finally, he was depicted as a martyr in careful portraits by Henry Gugler and William Marshall.

But what of the impact of these images? Little is usually known of how many copies printmakers made of various images or how many they sold. The documentation around Lincoln is so abundant, however, or has been so carefully mined, that perhaps there are more answers here than in other cases. While some of the prints were produced in relatively few copies, it seems evident that others were printed by the thou-



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FIGURE 4. Currier & Ives, *Freedom to the Slaves*. . . . New York [ca. 1865]. Lithograph. This sentimental print depicted Lincoln as no camera could. A Biblical quotation in the caption, taken from God's instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, reinforced the depiction of Lincoln as a modern Moses destined to "return every man united to his family." White printmakers were willing to portray the new freedmen but often in subservient positions.

sands and widely distributed. They likely had a role in the changing public perception of Lincoln from homely to honest and strong, and the reaction to them was, no doubt, a factor in Lincoln's decision to grow his famous beard. Prints also show Lincoln with blacks or writing the Emancipation Proclamation, and the moderate words of the document were not calculated to inspire, artists were not so reticent and produced contemporary and sometimes inflammatory images associating Lincoln with blacks and writing the act that added to the Civil War struggle for unity the cause of liberty.

The Lincoln Image, further, is a case study in history applied



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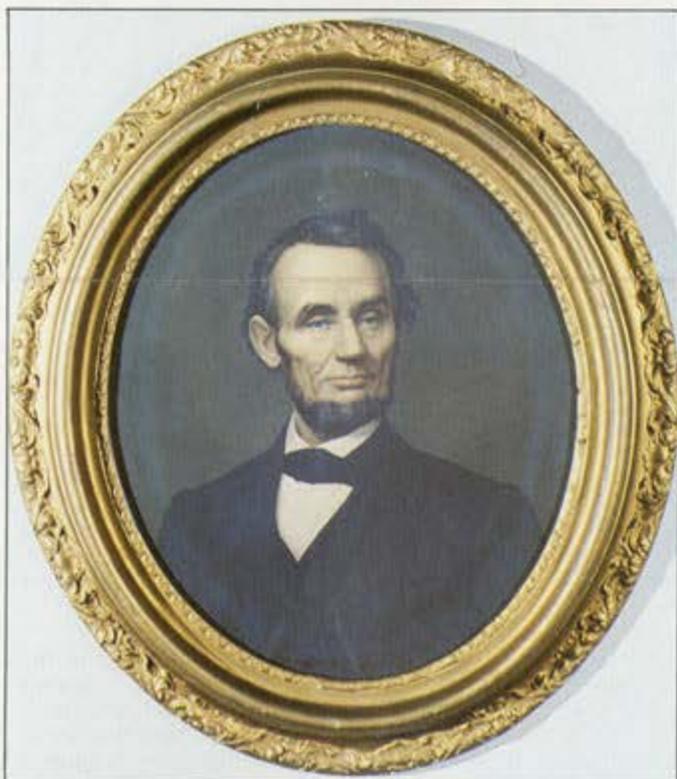
FIGURE 5. Ferdinand Delannoy, *Lincoln Recevant Les Indiens Comanches*. Published by C. Chardon aine, Paris [ca. 1863].

to the pictorial image, for the authors know their subject well and bring significant detail to bear on the prints. Lengthy captions give the background on each image and sometimes correct misinformation, as in the case of a print purporting to show Lincoln returning from a campaign encounter with Douglas: because Lincoln never left Springfield for the campaign, he could not have returned. They also present enough information about the tricks of printmaking to put the careful historian on guard. In at least two instances portraits of other

people, one of John C. Calhoun and one of Preston Blair, Jr., are redone into portraits of Lincoln by changing only the head; the surrounding features remain identical.

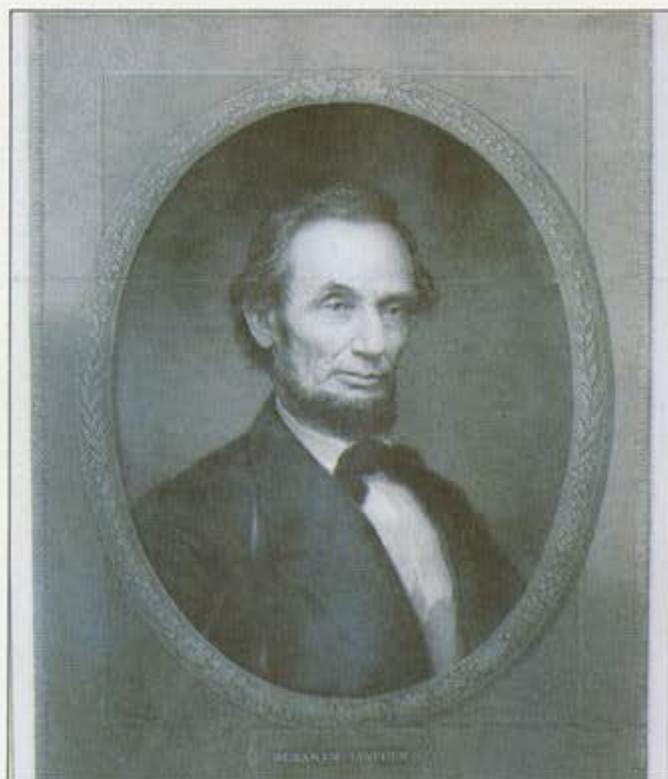
While dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of historical prints remain an enigma, those of Lincoln are now a more useable part of our graphic heritage.

Ron Tyler
Amon Carter Museum



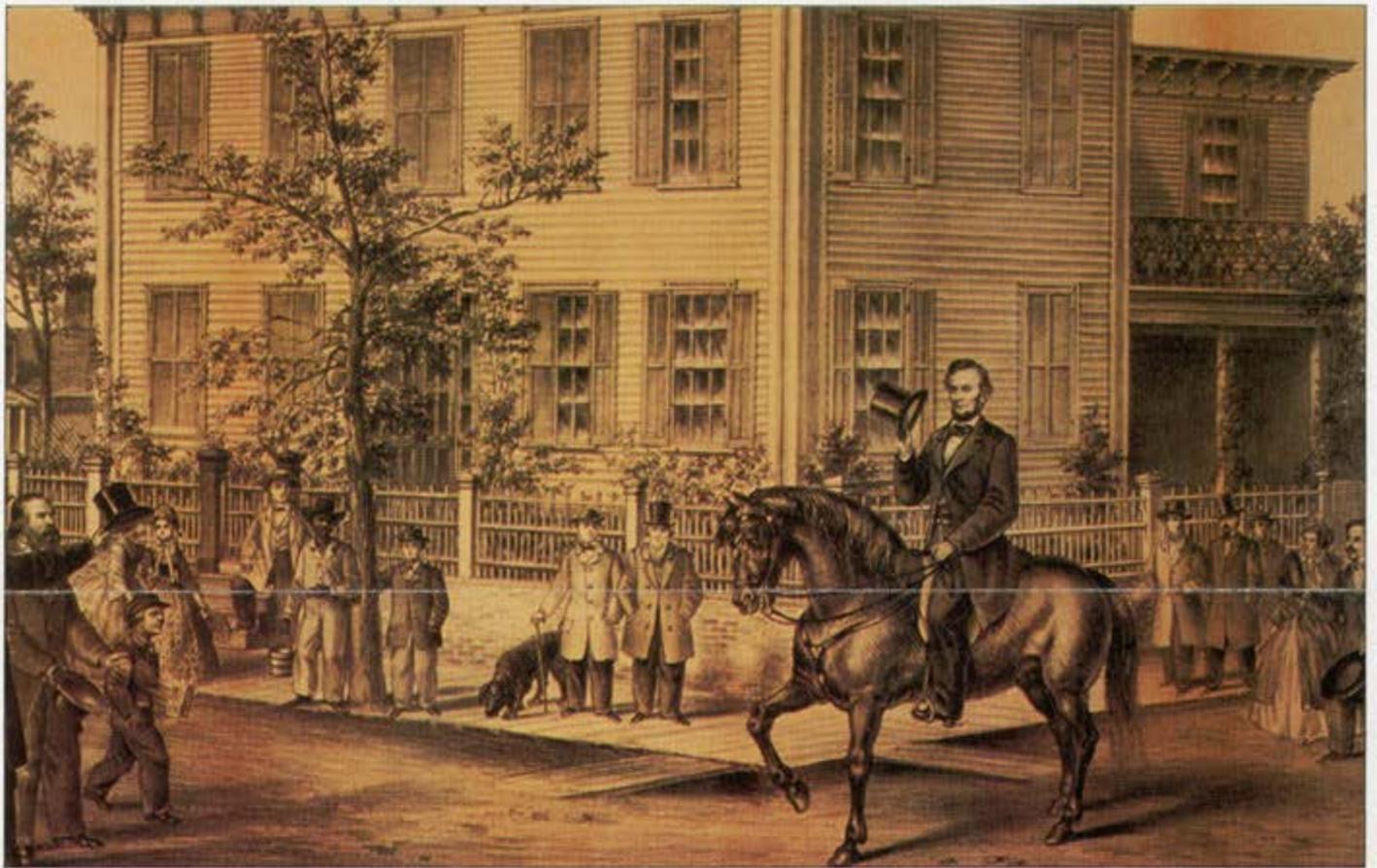
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FIGURE 6. E[lijah]. C[hapman]. Middleton, [Abraham Lincoln]. Cincinnati, Ohio, 1864. Chromolithograph.



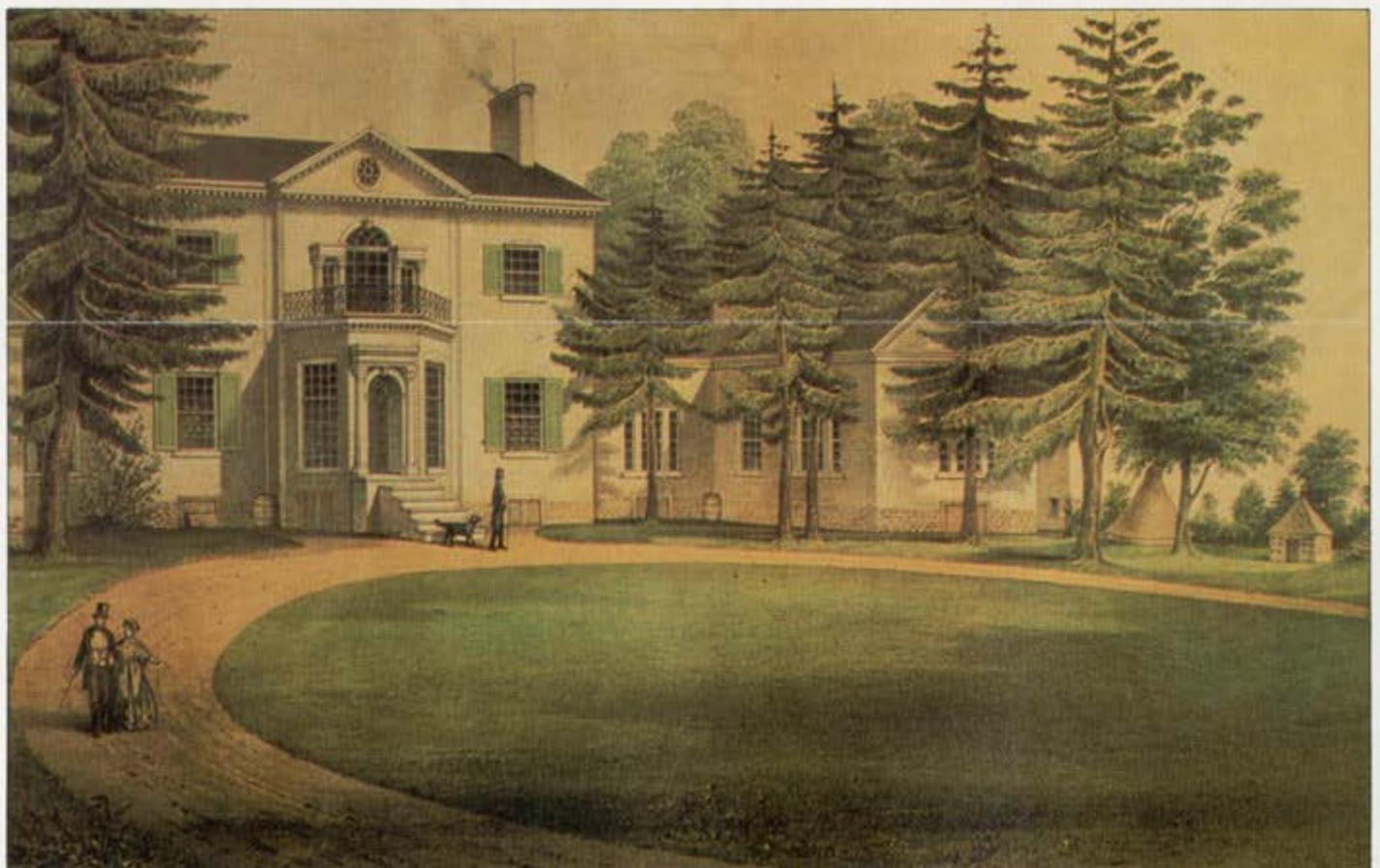
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FIGURE 7. William Edgar Marshall, after his own painting, *Abraham Lincoln*. Published by Ticknor & Fields, Boston, 1866.



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FIGURE 8. [Louis]. Kurz, *Mr. Lincoln, Residence and Horse...* Published by Alfred Storey & Co., Chicago, 1865. Lithograph.



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FIGURE 9. [Printmaker unknown], *The Home of Our Martyred President*. [ca. 1865]. Hand-colored lithograph.