



Lincoln Lore

January, 1984

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LINCOLN'S DEATHBED



View of the room in which President Lincoln died, Saturday morning, April 15, 1865 at the residence of Wm. Peirson, No. 135 10th Street, Wash- ington, D. C., opposite Ford's Theatre. The room was occupied by Wm. P. Clark of Mass.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Photograph by Julius Ulke. See story inside.

As the morning light crept into the disheveled room of William T. Clark on April 15, 1865, one of the upstairs boarders carried his camera into the room. Clark roomed in the house of William Petersen, and the President of the United States had just died on Clark's bed. The cameraman was Julius Ulke, who, with his brother Henry, had been up all night fetching water for the doctors.

Tired though they were, everyone sensed the historical importance of the events just witnessed in Clark's humble little room. Julius Ulke apparently sensed the commercial possibilities in the situation as well. He and his brother were artistic, but it was difficult to make a living as an artist in bustling, commerce-minded America. Julius photographed people in Washington, selling his little paper pictures mounted on stiff cards with his name printed on the back. Henry, after a stint as an illustrator in New York, made his living painting the portraits of Washington's bureaucrats and politicians.

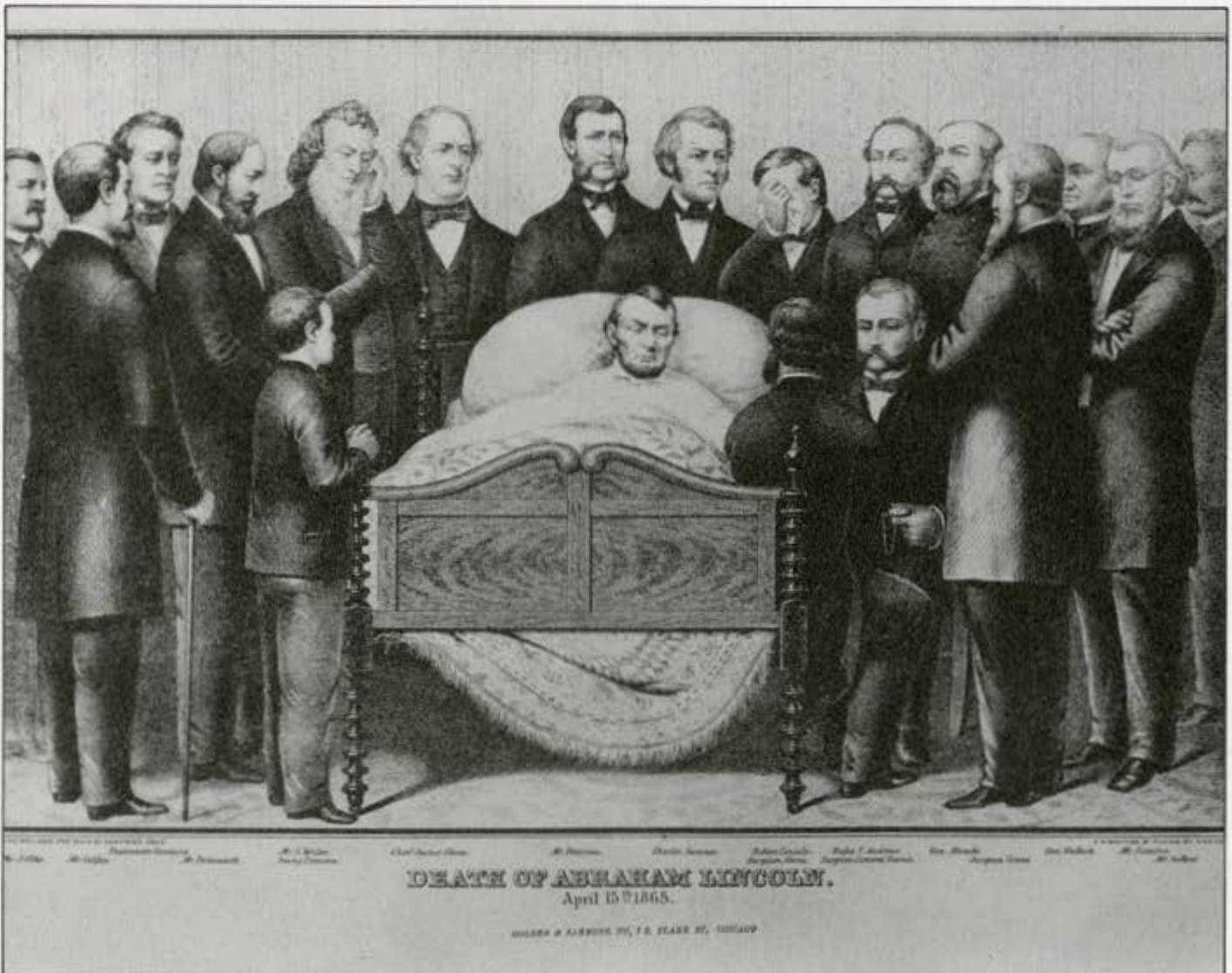
Julius Ulke knew that Americans would be curious to know what Lincoln's deathbed looked like, and he was just the man to show them. Fate seemed to have played into his hands, bringing the American historical event of the century almost to his very doorstep. He took at least two photographs of the scene before Clark cleaned up his room. Eventually, he mounted one of the pictures on a stiff card and had a caption carefully lettered on it: "View of the room in which President Lincoln died. . . ."

Others sniffed the scent of profit that hung about the little boarding house. Albert Berghaus, special artist for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, had followed President Lincoln

HENRY ULKE,
278 Pennsylvania Avenue,
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1865.

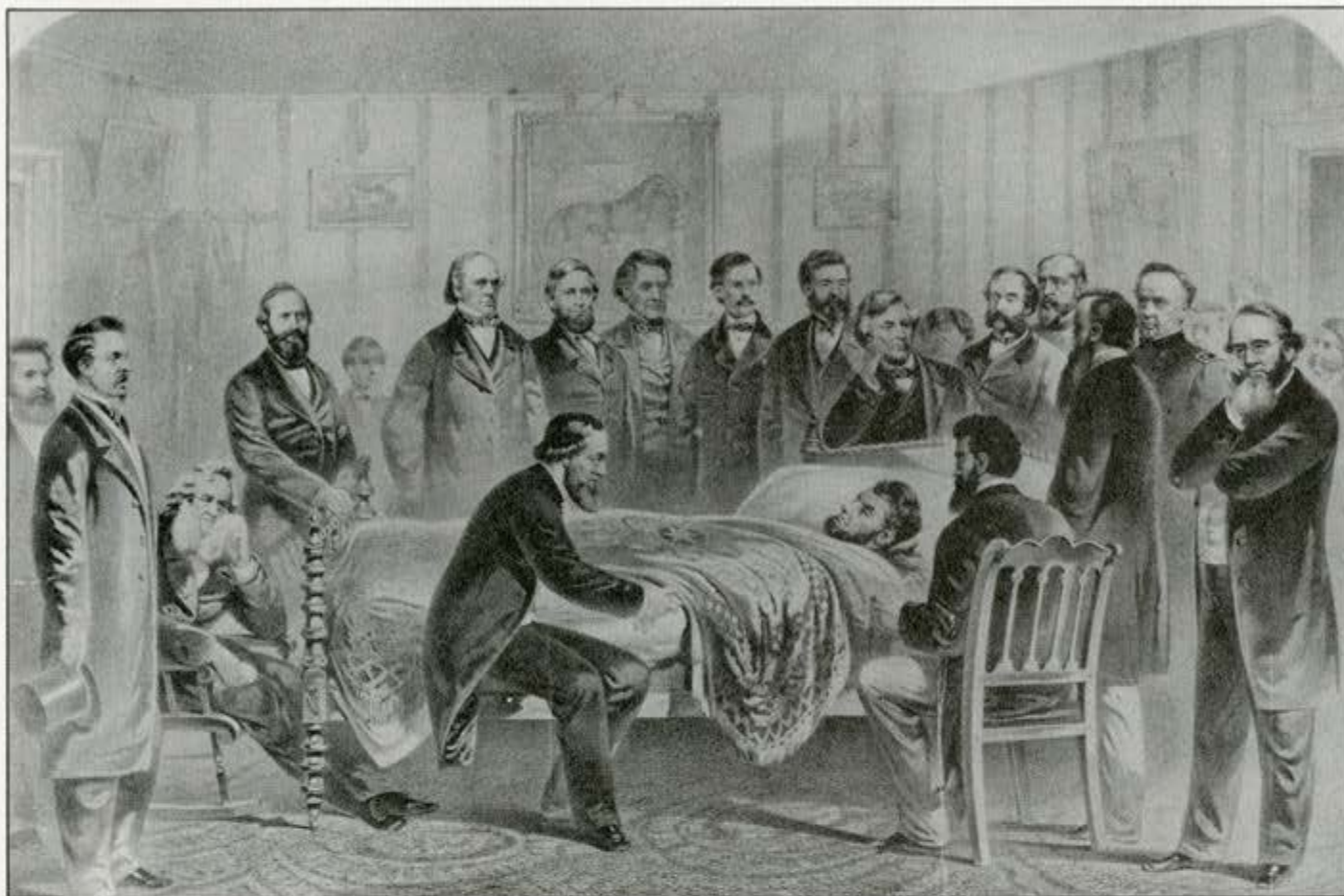
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FIGURE 3. Credit on the back of a Ulke photograph.



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FIGURE 2. A Kellogg lithograph shows Julius Ulke at far left.



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FIGURE 4. Henry Ulke appears with a top hat at left in Edward Mendel's lithograph, based on Berghaus's illustration.

to Richmond less than two weeks earlier, to capture the scene of what proved to be his last triumph. On Easter Sunday, April 16, Berghaus was at the Petersen house sketching the scene and asking the boarders who was present when Lincoln died. Most of the boarders saw to it that they were immortalized in Berghaus's sketch, for they placed Salmon P. Chase at the scene and he was not there in fact. Both the Ulkes appeared in the picture. *Leslie's* devoted a double issue to Lincoln's assassination and depended heavily on Berghaus's work as the centerpiece of their sensational appeal.

Julius Ulke, however, was destined not to realize anything from his photographs. The president's widow had forbidden photographs of her slain husband, and the War Department saw to the destruction of some photographs of Lincoln's body lying in state. The enterprising photographer probably read about this in the newspapers and decided not to try to sell his photographs.

They remained in the family for years and became wrinkled and torn, but from all evidence no copies were made. One of Ulke's photographs is well known from publication in *Life* magazine in 1961 and in Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr.'s *Twenty Days* in 1965. The other photograph was recently acquired by the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum and is reproduced on the cover of this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

What became of Julius Ulke after 1865 is not known, but his brother Henry attained considerable prominence as a painter of the prominent personalities in Washington. One of these was Edwin M. Stanton, who had been present at Lincoln's deathbed and whose destruction of coffin photographs of the martyred president had perhaps ruined Julius's hopes for commercial gain from his photographs. When Henry Ulke painted Stanton, he chose a pose highly reminiscent of the pose Albert Berghaus had used in his influential illustration of the deathbed scene for *Leslie's*. The Stanton portrait suggests that Henry Ulke may have hoped to exploit the scene at the Petersen house as well.



National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.

FIGURE 5. Henry Ulke's portrait of Edwin M. Stanton.

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

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