

# Lincoln Love

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## THE LINCOLN FAMILY ALBUM

By Mark E. Neely, Jr. & Harold Holzer

New York: Doubleday, [1990]

Quarto, cloth binding, xiv, 172, [3] pages. \$35.00

A Review by Ralph Geoffrey Newman

Writing to Harvey G. Eastman, a Poughkeepsie, New York abolitionist, who had requested a photograph of the Illinois lawyer-politician, Abraham Lincoln replied "I have not a single one now at my control; but I think you can easily get one at New-York. While I was there I was taken to one of the places where they get up such things, and I suppose they got my shadow, and can multiply copies indefinitely."

Abraham Lincoln was probably the most photographed person of his era. Many books have been published containing the more than one hundred photographic likenesses of him. But what of his family and friends? The same few likenesses have been reproduced many times, but no photographic historian has even hinted that perhaps the Lincolns collected specimens of the relatively new art form. The revelation that there were albums and many photographs collected and kept for posterity by Abraham and Mary Lincoln and their descendants is a major discovery in the much-mined store of Lincoln lore.

The discovery of these photographs is mainly due to the indefatigable energy and curiosity of James T. Hickey, a self-taught Lincoln scholar and one of the most persistent hunters for treasures relating to the life and times of our Six-

teenth President. In 1965 he was introduced to Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith (1904-1985), the great-grandson of President Lincoln. This meeting resulted in the eventual discovery of many hitherto unknown Lincoln treasures, not the least of which are the collection of albums and photographs preserved for posterity by four generations of the Lincolns.

We are all indebted to the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company for its devotion to American history, particularly the Abraham Lincoln story, and for acquiring this superb collection and placing it in The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana where it will be available for this and future generations. In the many years since its founding, Lincoln Life has given more than mere "lip service" to its use of the Lincoln name.

The two authors of this volume are much-respected students of the Lincoln period. Dr. Mark E. Neely, Jr. is the Director of The Lincoln Museum. He has written several highly-praised works relating to the Civil War President and his times, including *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* and *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties*. Harold Holzer, of New York City, is an authority on American historical prints and photographs. With Governor Mario Cuomo he edited *Lincoln on Democracy*, a superb collection of papers which has also been published in the Polish language. Jointly, Neely and Holzer have been co-editors (with Gabor S. Boritt), of *The Lincoln Image* and *The Confederate Image*.

This is no mere presentation of photographic images accompanied by meager text.



Abraham Lincoln II ("Jack") on his deathbed in Europe. This is the earliest form of snapshot photograph with characteristic bullseye format.

In fact, the superb text of the two authors gives life to the frozen likenesses which would not otherwise be apparent, making the viewer aware of the significance of the individual portrayed and his or her role in the dramatic story of the life and the family of Abraham Lincoln. Here we have both the Lincoln family album and a fascinating history of the Lincoln family. When Neely and Holzer discuss Robert Todd Lincoln they point out that perhaps the accusation made by some that Lincoln's only surviving son was probably a bit of a snob, has some validity to it. "This Harvard man wanted to put his father's frontier past behind him." When Robert's only son, Abraham Lincoln II ("Jack") is mentioned, his death, in 1890, while his father was the U.S. minister to Great Britain, is called to the reader's attention. He died, "apparently from blood poisoning contracted from surgery to remove a carbuncle. He was only sixteen years old." And then we are informed, "In the wake of Jack Lincoln's death, the Lincoln family's strange pattern was repeated, allowing grief for lost children to be compensated for by an almost suffocating affection for those that remained."

The Lincolns, accompanied by a host of relatives and friends, arrived in the national capital, in February 1861, for the Sixteenth President's inauguration on the following March 4. Photographers were quick to make carte-de-viste (visiting card-size) photographs of Lincoln and his family. But it was not until 1985 when the last of the direct line of



*Ambrotype of Robert Todd Lincoln — as he looked when his father was engaged in his famous debates with Stephen A. Douglas.*

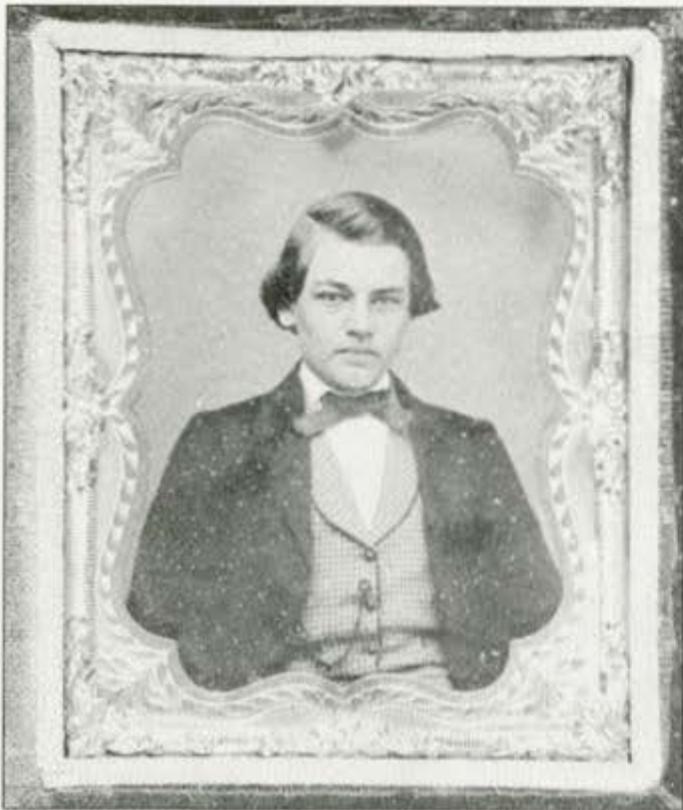
the family, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, the Civil War President's great-grandson, was dying did we learn of the "family album." The family collection consisted of about four hundred pictures which Messrs. Neely and Holzer call "The Lincoln Family Album." Abraham and Mary Lincoln's album was just a part of the larger collection.

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln were married in Springfield, Illinois on November 2, 1842. Four sons were born to this union. Robert Todd Lincoln, Edward Baker Lincoln, William Wallace Lincoln, and Thomas "Tad" Lincoln. Edward died in Springfield in 1850 when he was only four years old. William "Willie" died in the White House in 1862. Thomas "Tad" Lincoln died in Chicago a few months before the great fire of 1871. Robert Todd Lincoln, the only son to survive to maturity, was married in 1868, to Mary Harlan, the daughter of Senator James Harlan of Iowa. Robert and Mary Lincoln had three children, Mary "Mamie" Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln II "Jack," and Jessie Harlan Lincoln.

Mary Lincoln married Charles Isham in 1891 and they had one son, Lincoln Isham, who died in 1971. Abraham Lincoln II died in England when he was sixteen years old. Jessie Harlan Lincoln married Warren Beckwith in 1897 and the marriage resulted in two children, Mary Lincoln Beckwith, who died in 1975, and Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, the last of the direct line, who died in Virginia in 1985.



*Thomas "Tad" Lincoln, ambrotype photograph, probably from the late 1850s.*



*Ambrotype of Robert Lincoln as a student in prep school.*

Here, in this handsome book, are photographs of all the Lincolns with the exception of Edward who died in Springfield at age four. Not all of the photographs in the collection are reproduced, but every significant and revealing image is here. The authors have wisely supplemented the "family album" photographs with early ambrotypes from the Springfield years and with photographs of Robert Lincoln and his family, most of which have not been previously reproduced. This is, as the book and its writers reveal, "the first time the sad story of the descendants shaped by their tragic family history has been told."

Here, too, are seldom or never-seen photographs of important Lincoln contemporaries — other family members, associates, secretaries, friends, as well as places and events. The Lincoln family does not appear on an empty stage — the entire cast is here. The Lincoln drama is presented in a most exciting manner.

The question has been asked many times since the late James G. Randall posed it more than fifty years ago, "Has the Lincoln theme been exhausted?" Here literarily, pictorially, and excitingly is vivid proof to the contrary. For the first time the Lincoln family down to the last generation is captured between the covers of a handsome book. It is a volume to be admired, to be lovingly paged through, and to be used as a reference work. It is a major contribution to

Lincoln literature. It is difficult to conceive of any one interested in the Lincoln story not owning and savoring this work.

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Ralph Geoffrey Newman, who celebrated his 80th birthday November 3, 1991, is the founder of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop and currently heads Ralph Geoffrey Newman, Inc., offering rare books, manuscripts and expert appraisals. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of numerous works, including *The American Iliad* (1947); *Lincoln for the Ages* (1960); *Abraham Lincoln: An Autobiographical Narrative* (1970); *Abraham Lincoln: His Story in His Own Words* (1975); and *Preserving Lincoln for the Ages: Collectors, Collections and Our Sixteenth President*, which was the 1983 R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture.

## HIGH COMEDY AND MARFAN'S SYNDROME

*by Mark E. Neely, Jr.*

Marfan's Syndrome is no laughing matter, as a medical problem, but its appearance in historical discussions is moving rapidly from the realm of wrongheadedness to that of hilarity. Somehow, the grotesquely comic exhumation of Zachary Taylor's remains, for the sake of ascertaining whether he was poisoned by his Whig rival Henry Clay, brought home to legitimate historians, as never before, the lengths to which misguided headline-seekers, uninformed journalists, and medical adventurers will go.

At seeking headlines, the medical speculators have definitely struck gold. The spring 1991 issue of *Caduceus*, a museum journal for the health sciences published by the Pearson Museum at Southern Illinois University's School of Medicine, is devoted entirely to "Museums and the Human Remains Controversies." The syndicated newspaper medical question-and-answer man, Dr. Paul Donohue, published a letter about Marfan's and Lincoln in his column last summer. And even Europeans, who generally lack Americans' interest in Lincoln, have responded eagerly to the recent medical stories. In June *The Economist*, published in Great Britain, ridiculed the Lincoln field because of its concern with trivial questions and devoted two paragraphs to the DNA-testing-for-Marfan's controversy. Meanwhile, the distinguished Paris newspaper *Le Monde* has written about the subject at least twice. In a long article entitled "Diagnostic posthume pour Abraham Lincoln," Jean-Yves Nau outlined the Marfan's problem, and in a brief article published in



Lincoln's unusual height seemed comical in the nineteenth century. It now seems to suggest physical dysfunction.

August, *Le Monde* again referred to Lincoln in the course of discussing the genuinely useful medical research that has recently isolated the gene for Marfan's Syndrome.

At the end of the second article there appeared the European angle on the Marfan's speculation: "Several studies suggest that Abraham Lincoln, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, Nicole Paganini, Sergei Rachmaninov and Franz Liszt suffered from Marfan's Syndrome."

Without delving much into medical details, one can certainly say that the genetic disorder under discussion is rare and usually results in early death. That so many nineteenth-century musicians suffered from it might arouse suspicion, but what caught my attention was the mention of the French statesman Talleyrand. Around our household we consider "Talleyrand" a likely name for our next cat — because, like the animal, the Frenchman always landed on his feet. He lived in perilous times of rapid political change, with succeeding waves of revolution and reaction, but Talleyrand managed to serve governments of widely varying political philosophies.

In other words, what every schoolboy knows about Talleyrand is that he was a survivor — at least in a political sense. Was he also a survivor in the sense of physical longevity? And how about the musical greats listed there too?

A quick look in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* — surely something the journalists could have done, at least in its French equivalent — proved most revealing. The violin virtuoso Paganini died when he was 58. The Russian composer Rachmaninov died in 1943 (well past the date when the disease was identified by medical research); he

was 70 years old. Franz Liszt was 75 when he died. And Talleyrand lived from 1754-1838, 84 years!

The only one of these men, besides Lincoln, to die at a relatively early age was Paganini. And as is the case with Lincoln, little doubt about the cause of death lingers in the historical record. Paganini did not stop a bullet, but he did die of tuberculosis, not heart failure caused by Marfan's Syndrome.

Given all the interesting issues in Lincoln's life that are difficult to resolve, it seems a waste to work up exotic explanations for what needs no explaining: Abraham Lincoln, a man blessed with a robust physical constitution, died of a gunshot wound when he was only 56.

Still, anyone who studies Lincoln should, if he or she is to do so in a spirit congenial to the subject, retain a sense of humor. And the Marfan's speculation does provide a few laughs.

### SOME IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

With this issue of *Lincoln Lore* its masthead and format change. Our bulletin now embraces the Lincoln Museum's new logo and offers larger more readable text for the many subscribers who, in answering our reader survey this year, complained that the print was too small.

Beginning with the 1991 issues, *Lincoln Lore* will devote four pages a year to news from the Abraham Lincoln Association. Watch for the first such page in the March 1991 issue. We welcome members of the association to our readership.

Longtime readers of our monthly bulletin probably noticed that the December issue was not an index. The reader survey convinced us that *Lincoln Lore* is over-indexed, and we will cease devoting one issue a year to it. Instead, we will arrange to have an index published at greater intervals.



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