

Lincoln Love

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Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him

At The Lincoln Museum
April 24-October 17, 1999

Original paintings, drawings, sculpture, and photographs from a variety of public and private collections, as well as works from the collection of The Lincoln Museum, make this the most comprehensive and dramatic exhibit of eye-witness images of Abraham Lincoln ever assembled.



Oil on canvas, late June 1860, Springfield, by Alban Jasper Conant (1821-1915) (Philipse Manor Hall, New York State Office of Parks)

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President Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, both oil on canvas, ca. 1864 by Francis B. Carpenter. (Courtesy of The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington)

(On the cover: detail from the last painting from life of Abraham Lincoln, by Matthew Henry Wilson (1814-1892), oil on board, February-April 1865. (The Lincoln Museum))

Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him

by Harold Holzer, Guest Curator
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In 1860, a political ally advised Abraham Lincoln: "I am coming to believe, that likenesses spread broad cast, are excellent means of electioneering." He was right: such "likenesses" proved an excellent means of not only of electing Lincoln but of immortalizing him as well. Lincoln posed often for painters and sculptors. Despite his modesty about his physical appearance, he recognized the potential of the fine arts to improve his public image. "Our worthy, noble, and heroic President has little of the grace of the Apollo," admitted one artist who painted him from life, but he radiated "intense feeling, great intellectual power, and the boldest decision of character... and all this a painter must get or he gets nothing of Mr. Lincoln."

The artists got *much* of Mr. Lincoln. In an age before television, newsreels, and newspaper photography, life portraits supplied America with a view of Lincoln as he evolved from a little-known partisan candidate for the presidency into a universally recognizable statesman. Lincoln and the American fine arts came of age together. The results became part of public memory.

A Sculptor Poses Lincoln First — And Often

Lincoln had never before sat for an artist or sculptor when thirty-two-year-old Leonard Wells Volk, a relative by marriage of his political arch-rival, Stephen A. Douglas, asked him to pose in the spring of 1860. Although he originally planned only to create a formal statue, Volk first had his early models and casts mass-produced in popular editions, in both plaster and bronze. They were sensationally popular and they made Volk



Bronze copy of the life mask made March 31, 1860, in Chicago, by Leonard Wells Volk (1828-1895). (The Lincoln Museum)

famous. They also inspired unauthorized copies. A furious Volk once burst into the shop of "itinerant Italian figure-venders"[sic] in Chicago, and destroyed their molds of his Lincoln works, earning arrest for trespass and riot. Volk also influenced serious artists: his life casts would be consulted and copied by all the sculptors who attempted to portray Lincoln in the 20th century. Whether or not he was wise to commercialize his work instead of devoting himself to the great public sculpture that some expected of him, Volk holds a place in the Lincoln story that no one can dispute: he was the first artist to convince Lincoln that he was a fit subject for the fine arts.

Born in Wellesville, New York, Volk was raised on a farm. He had his first training in St. Louis, and spent two years studying in Rome. A critic called him "an artist whose soul is deeply imbued with the grand principle of making mighty the genius of American art, untrammelled with the fossil-haunted ideas of an Old World."

He possessed, the admirer said, a "love of us of the West."

Volk first asked Abraham Lincoln to pose for him a few months before the 1860 Republican national convention. Lincoln was too busy for lengthy sittings, but consented to submit to what he remembered as an "anything but agreeable" life mask process. Volk lathered wet plaster over his subject's face, and let it set for an hour while Lincoln breathed through straws inserted into his nostrils. When Volk had trouble removing the hardened mask, Lincoln "bent his head low, and took hold of the mold and gradually worked it off without breaking or injury; it hurt a little...and made his eyes water." Volk used the result to make copy masks in plaster and bronze (above), one of which inspired the following verse from poet Richard Watson Gilder:

*This bronze doth keep the very
form and mold
Of our great martyr's face. Yes, this is he.*



Bronze copies from original casts made May 20, 1860, in Springfield, by Leonard Wells Volk. (The Lincoln Museum)



Newly made life mask notwithstanding, Volk asked Lincoln to pose for a bust in his studio. The sittings took several days. During one of them, Lincoln removed his coat, waistcoat, shirt, tie, and collar, then pulled down his undershirt, so Volk could, as he put it, accurately

"represent his breast and brawny shoulders as nature presented them." Lincoln left the studio in such a hurry that he dressed without properly re-adjusting his undershirt, and had to return to ask Volk's help because, he sheepishly admitted, "it wouldn't do to go through the streets this way." Lincoln was impressed with the sculptor's skill, marveling: "In two or three days after Mr. Volk commenced my bust, there was the animal himself!"

tunic for the draped bust sacrificed realism but it did not diminish its appeal. Half a century later, the bronze version was praised by another eminent Lincoln sculptor, George Gray Barnard, as "the best thing done in Lincoln's life time."



Abraham Lincoln, May 1860. Some experts believe that this photograph was made for the sculptor Henry Kirke Browne, but its resemblance to Volk's *The Emancipator* suggests that it was Volk who commissioned it. (TLM #O-31)

Volk's next project was a full-size Lincoln. "I want to make a statue of you, and shall do my best to do you justice," Volk told Lincoln when he arrived in Springfield two days after Lincoln had won the Republican nomination for the presidency. Since the new candidate had little time to pose, Volk made an appointment to have made "a full-length photograph to serve me for the proposed statue" (left). Volk also proposed making casts of Lincoln's hands, but he found his subject's right hand puffy from greeting well-wishers. He suggested that Lincoln grasp something to disguise the swelling, so Lincoln sawed off a piece of broom handle and began whittling it with his pocket knife. When Volk remarked that such perfection was unnecessary, Lincoln shrugged: "Oh, well, I thought I would like to have it nice." The resulting casts were used seven decades later as models for the hands on the Lincoln Memorial (above).

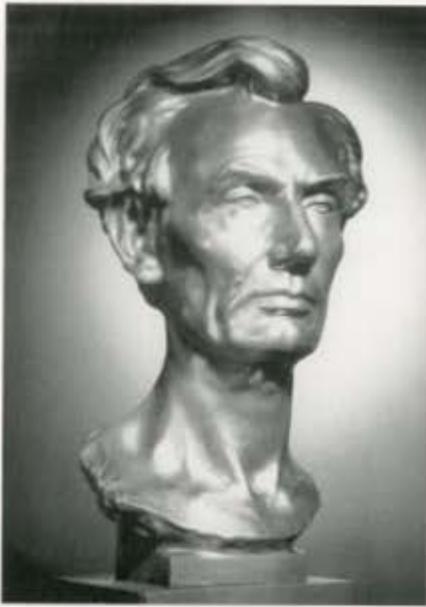
Volk's long-awaited, life-sized public sculpture of Lincoln, titled "The Emancipator," was unveiled in the rotunda of the State Capitol Building in Springfield in 1876. In 1879 Volk produced a popular 33-inch-high version in both painted and plain-plaster copies (opposite right). His son Douglas (whose painted portrait of Lincoln today hangs in the White House)



Volk at work, ca. 1860. In the background is a bust of Stephen A. Douglas; on the floor a cast of Lincoln's hand. (Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society. #CHI-22107)

Although Volk was not able to complete his full-size Lincoln statue for many years, he recognized the huge potential audience for his other Lincoln works. He posed for publicity pictures in an artist's smock and Bohemian-looking tam, and had copies of his Lincoln bust mass-produced in various sizes, styles, and media (opposite top). These included the nude, or so-called "Hermes" bust in plaster, as well as a more expensive draped version, which was treated with a high-gloss finish to simulate marble. Dressing Lincoln in a neo-classical

testified that his father created this statuette using "studies and notes" made from life in Springfield in 1860. Volk also issued plaster copies of his model for a second, full-length statue, unveiled atop the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Rochester in 1892, three years before the artist's death.



Two plaster copies of Volk's bust from life, June 1860. (TLM #1550 and #1024)

In all, Volk worked on Lincoln sculptures for more than thirty years.

Was Graphic Art Powerless?

When Lincoln won his unexpected nomination to the presidency in May 1860, many voters had no idea what he looked like. Worse, many had read reports that he was hideously ugly, and some of Lincoln's backers worried that such rumors would damage his candidacy. Several ambitious print publishers hired artists to travel west to Lincoln's hometown to make life portraits that could be brought back east and adapted into reassuring engravings and lithographs. Most of the artists were young and inexperienced, since established painters were unlikely to undertake such a long journey for small commissions (one of the better-known painters got just \$175 for his efforts).

Those young artists from New York, Boston, and Philadelphia worked under difficult conditions. The busy nominee seldom sat still, agreeing only to pose while he worked. Lincoln's newly appointed private secretary, John G. Nicolay, watched as painter after painter arrived in Springfield to capture the candidate's likeness, but insisted: "Lincoln's features were the despair of every artist who undertook his portrait." As he put it thirty years later: "Even before these paintings were finished it was plain to see that they were unsatisfactory to the artists

themselves, and much more so to the intimate friends of the man; this was not he who smiled, spoke, laughed, or charmed. The picture was to the man as the grain of sand to the mountain, as the dead to the living. Graphic art was powerless before a face that moved through a thousand delicate gradations of line and contour, light and shade, sparkle of the eye and curve of the lip, in the long gamut of expression from grave to gay."

But Nicolay was being too harsh. Artists who recalled Lincoln as a difficult subject did so to make their efforts seem more heroic, not less successful. No medium — not even the supposedly instantaneous one of photography, which in fact required long, frozen sittings — could with total accuracy record the mobility of Lincoln's countenance. When artists created refined images of Lincoln that soon became widely available as mass produced prints, they succeeded in turning the prairie politician into a new national celebrity. American audiences respected the fine arts, and until Lincoln was painted by professional artists, he did not really "arrive" on the national stage. Where Lincoln was concerned, the graphic arts were powerful, not powerless.

Painters Besiege the Candidate

Thomas Hicks, a first cousin and student of *Peaceable Kingdom* artist Edward Hicks who had studied at the National Academy and in Europe, was one of the

earliest to paint the future President. "This is the first time that I have had this specific sort of picture made," Lincoln confessed when the artist began his oil-on-canvas portrait. Hicks had arrived in Springfield after a four-day journey by train to find himself "in the presence of a tall, gaunt man" with "plenty of character with which to make a desirable likeness." Lincoln posed in his temporary office in the Illinois State House from eight to nine o'clock each morning, and Hicks finished the work in just three sittings. Though Lincoln "never wore a frown," Hicks noted "an inexpressible sadness" in his eyes, "a far-away look, as if they were searching for something they had seen long, long years ago." "I see the likeness, sir!" Lincoln declared of the canvas, adding: "I think the picture has a somewhat pleasanter expression than I usually have, but that, perhaps, is not an objection." Hicks' New York publisher certainly did not object, and



Plaster copy of "The Emancipator," 1879, by Leonard Wells Volk. (TLM #4093)



Lithograph (published by William Schaus, New York, 1860) by Leopold Grozelier (1830-1865), after a painting from life by Thomas Hicks (1823-1890), June 14, 1860. (TLM #2367)

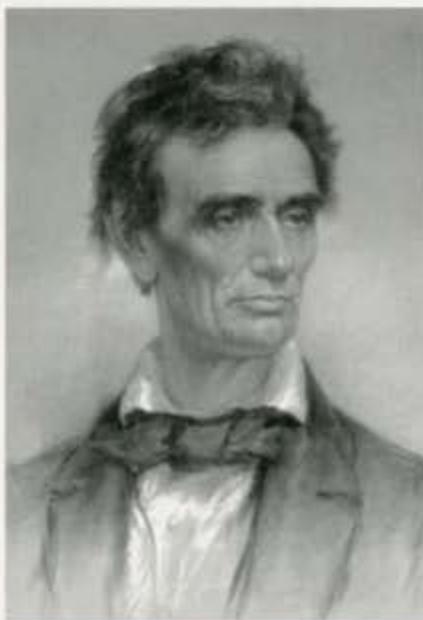
produced a handsome lithographic adaptation shortly thereafter (above).

Alban Jasper Conant was another artist who came to Springfield in 1860, hired by a St. Louis businessman to "jump on a train and go paint this man Lincoln" for the city's new Western Academy of Art. Meeting his subject at the State House, the painter observed not the "coarseness" visible in photographs, but a "peculiarly attractive" smile. He determined to "reproduce faithfully the ...genial expression of the original." Lincoln reacted to the sittings as if they were "a difficult ordeal," the artist recollected. Conant watched helplessly as "his countenance relapsed into impenetrable abstraction...an expression of utter melancholy, almost despair." The artist found Lincoln's features "the most puzzling that could well be imagined." Nevertheless, he managed to create a "smiling Lincoln" after all (page 2 top). Seeing Conant's painting for the first time, Mary Lincoln declared it "excellent," adding of the happy expression: "That is the way he looks when he has his friends about him. I hope he will look like that after the second of November" — election day.

Conant lived to be a very old man, continuing to churn out Lincoln paintings for decades. Since he never again saw Lincoln in the flesh, he contented himself

with copying photographs, but no matter how reliant on other media his subsequent work became, Conant could always claim to have portrayed the sixteenth president once from life — a precious experience that few other artists could boast. When he died, obituaries hailed him deservedly as "Conant, Painter of Lincoln."

Charles Alfred Barry, a teacher of art in Boston's public schools, was engaged by local Republicans to produce a portrait of the new presidential candidate (below left). "They want my head, do they?" Lincoln drawled when they met. "Well, if you can get it, you may have it, that is, if you are able to take it off while I am on the jump; but don't fasten me into a chair." Lincoln agreed to pose only "at cock crowing" — seven a.m. "How vividly it all comes back to me," Barry recalled, "...the great bony figure with its long arms and long, wiry neck, the narrow chest, the uncombed hair; the cavernous sockets between the high forehead; the bushy eyebrows hanging like curtains over the bright, dreamy eyes." Like others before him, Barry had to sketch this "man of moods...while he was busy at his writing table or moving about the room." He thus "had no end of trouble in getting the expression I wanted...his countenance changed so much." When he was finished,

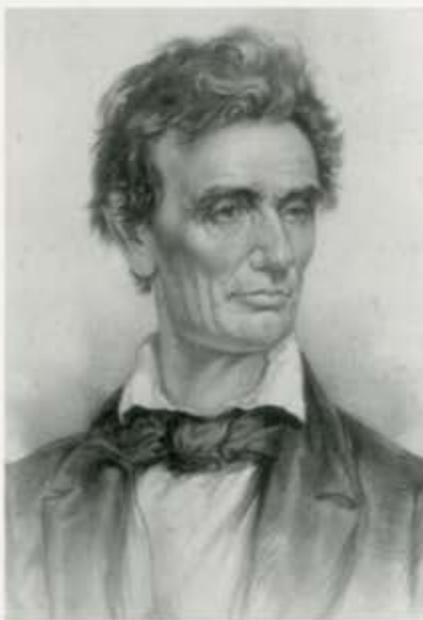


Charcoal and wash on paper, June 1860, Springfield, by Charles Alfred Barry (1830-1892). (Courtesy of Memorial Hall Library, Andover, Massachusetts)

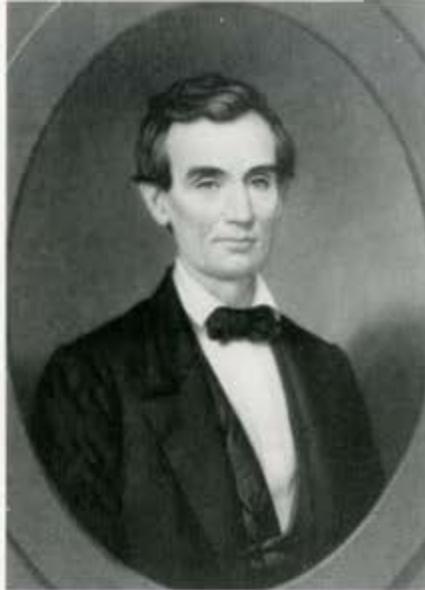
however, the artist remembered Lincoln declaring (with unlikely informality): "Even my enemies must declare that to be a true likeness of Old Abe."

In an era of loose copyright laws, publishers were quick to issue print versions of original portraits, with or without the artist's permission. Barry was pleased to see the publication of a lithograph based on his work and boasted that it was "better than anything Grozelier ever did," a swipe at the adaptation of Thomas Hicks' earlier life portrait. A Boston newspaper predicted that the print of Barry's portrait, which sold for three dollars, would "have a large sale" among loyal Republicans, but despite "a heap of money" invested in the lithograph, it sold poorly, at least judging by the extreme scarcity of surviving copies. Apparently the public did not warm to Barry's attempt to make Lincoln look Jacksonian. A rival artist noted derisively when he arrived in Springfield to try his own hand at portraying Lincoln: "Everybody laughs at [Bufford]'s lithograph in this city. It is very unpopular" (below right).

A leading Pennsylvania Republican, "disgusted with the horrible caricatures of Mr. Lincoln which he had seen," hired the painter John Henry Brown to travel to Springfield to make a "good looking picture," as Lincoln's secretary Nicolay



Abraham Lincoln, lithograph by Joseph E. Baker (active 1850s-1860s), after Charles Alfred Barry, published by J. H. Bufford, 1860, Boston. (TLM #1931)



A. Lincoln, mezzotint engraving (published by James Irwin, Philadelphia, 1860) by Samuel Sartain (1830-1906), based on a miniature on ivory painted from life in Springfield, August 16-25, 1860 by John Henry Brown (1818-1891). (TLM #2797A)

confided, "whether the original would justify it or not." Brown took Lincoln to a local photography studio to make an ambrotype as a model to supplement his sittings. The resulting miniature on ivory (an oval just 4½ inches across) — which Lincoln himself endorsed as "excellent...without fault" — was then engraved in Philadelphia. Nicolay's close involvement in the production of this print suggests that its appearance was a priority for the Republicans that election season. Nicolay proudly judged the resulting image "both very pretty and very truthful — decidedly the best picture of him that I have seen" (above left).

The first portrait of himself that Lincoln purchased (to present to his political ally William Butler) was executed by Connecticut-born artist George Frederick Wright. Wright had come to Springfield to paint portraits of Illinois' past governors, and convinced Lincoln to pose while he was in town. Wright was in the midst of painting this canvas when Alban Jasper Conant asked to begin a portrait of his own. Lincoln said that he could not possibly sit for two painters at once, so Wright offered to postpone his own work and yield his place at the State House to the new man. "My stay in Springfield is unlimited," he explained, "and I can arrange for sittings later, to suit your convenience." When young Tad



A. Lincoln, engraving, ca. 1861, by Samuel Sartain after John Henry Brown. (TLM #2791)

Lincoln spied Wright's unfinished canvas, lying against a wall of his father's State House office, he lifted up its cover and exclaimed: "Here's another Old Abe." Lincoln laughed and said, "Did you hear that...he got that on the street, I suppose."

When Lincoln grew his famous beard in late 1860, he rendered obsolete all his clean-shaven campaign portraits. But print publishers were not about to spend money again sending artists west to record the President-elect's new appearance. Instead, many went back to their original plates and stones and superimposed whiskers onto the old beardless portraits. Samuel Sartain, for example, updated the engraving based on the painting by John Henry Brown (above right). Although no longer a true life portrait, the resulting work signaled the transformation of Lincoln's image from that of "Honest Abe" the Railsplitter to "Father Abraham" the dignified statesman.

The first portrait in any artistic medium to show Lincoln with a beard, and the first to portray him after his election was a bust sculpted by Thomas Dow Jones at the St. Nicholas Hotel in Springfield beginning shortly after Christmas, 1860. Jones had been commissioned by prominent Cincinnati Republicans to produce the likeness. A flamboyant eccentric who dressed in theatrical artist's garb, the sculptor posed Lincoln in his

makeshift studio for an hour each morning, as Lincoln busied himself with correspondence. Jones wanted to suggest the "firmness of Jackson" in Lincoln, but called him "a very difficult study," noting that as the inaugural drew nearer, "a deep-seated melancholy seemed to take possession of his soul," transforming his face "from mobility into an iron mask." Nonetheless the President-elect liked the result, exclaiming: "I think it looks very much like the critter." Jones, like Volk before him, mass-produced plaster copies of his work. Although his original patron paid him only twenty dollars for his efforts, Jones was later awarded a handsome \$9,634 commission by the state of Ohio to create a marble version for the state capitol.

During the early months of his presidency, Lincoln stopped posing for artists. He was a recognizable celebrity whose picture was already widely available, and in any case, he was so burdened with new responsibilities that he had little time for sittings. The only artists who portrayed him during this period were the "special correspondents" of pictorial journals like *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. These sketch artists made on-the-spot



Lincoln sleeping in a chair, sketched by Alfred R. Waud (1828-1891). (Courtesy of the Library of Congress LC-US262-123114)

Sarah Fisher Ames

Among the most familiar Lincoln photographs, this full-face portrait (top left) went largely unpublished during the President's lifetime, and the oddly angled side view (top right) was barely known at all. The explanation can be found in presidential secretary John

Hay's diary for November 8, 1863 (just eleven days before Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address): "Went with Mrs. Ames to Gardner's Gallery."

Mrs. Ames was the sculptor Sarah Fisher Ames, and these photos were evidently made at her request to use as models for a bust of Lincoln. Her husband, the well-known portrait painter Joseph Alexander Ames, was not inspired to portray Lincoln until after his assassination, but Sarah Ames determined to do so early in the war. Trained in Boston and Rome, she had already executed busts of several Union dignitaries, while laboring as an anti-slavery activist and Civil War nurse. Whether she enjoyed formal sittings with the President or merely accompanied him to Gardner's gallery and posed him as she wanted him is not known. After Lincoln's death, Congress paid her \$2,000 to produce a marble bust for display in the Senate chamber, where it reposes today (right). A contemporary noted: "Many familiar with [Lincoln's] expression regard it as a most successful portrait." Like some of her predecessors, Ames also issued multiple copies of a smaller, cabinet-sized version.

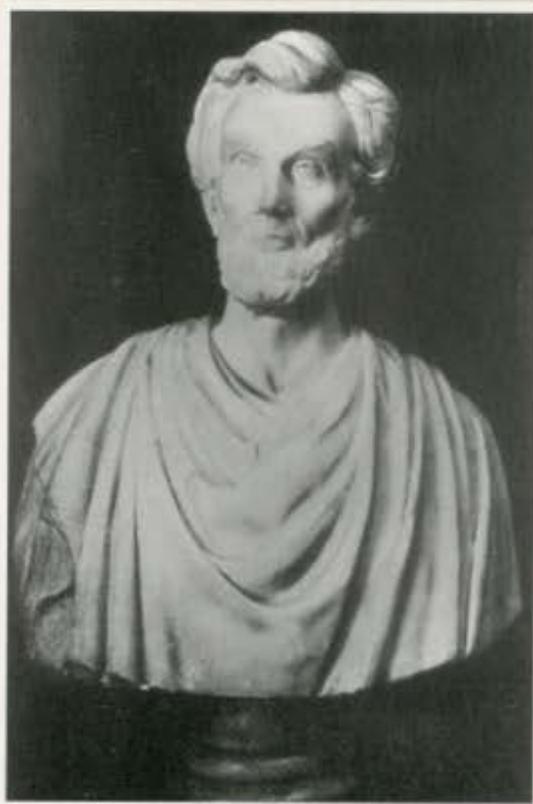


(TLM #O-77)

Photographs by Alexander Gardner, November, 1863.



(TLM #O-80)



Marble, 1868, by Sarah Fisher Clampitt Ames (1817-1901). (TLM #3468)

pictures, such as Alfred Waud's drawing of a napping Lincoln (page 7), that could be adapted for woodcuts and quickly published.

Picturing the "Great Emancipator"

As Lincoln signed the final Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, he said "if my name goes into history it will be for this act." Other Americans shared this view, and artists once again began clamoring for sittings of the President. Now, however, they harbored higher ambitions for their work. The new portraits were not conceived solely as models for popular prints, but as display pieces to grace public buildings. Lincoln was busier than ever at this time, but he made himself available to several artists and sculptors for works focusing on the theme of emancipation. Two — Edward D. Marchant and Francis B. Carpenter — enjoyed open access to the White House, and evolved into American versions of "court artists." Lincoln, who only a few years earlier had described himself as a "very indifferent judge" of his own portraits, became an active, patient, and enthusiastic participant in their production.

The respected Marchant was commissioned by a "large body" of Lincoln's "personal and political friends" in Philadelphia to create a large painting for Independence Hall. The idea of its display in America's most revered shrine no doubt delighted the President, who immediately consented to sit. "My studio was for several months in the White House," Marchant testified, "where I was in daily communication with the remarkable man whose features I sought to portray." The artist regarded the project as "more truly a labor of love than I am often permitted to perform." But like earlier portrait painters, he found Lincoln "the most difficult subject who ever taxed" his skills as an artist. In the end, he relied heavily on an 1861 photograph to supplement his sittings (opposite top). The imposing result showed Lincoln dressed formally in white tie to sign the great act that literally breaks the chains shackling the feet of the "Liberty" statue in the background (page 15). The picture was only briefly (if ever) displayed in Independence Hall, but was instead placed



Marchant employed this 1861 photograph as a model for his 1863 "Great Emancipator" painting, even though Lincoln was by then wearing a different style cravat, and had changed his hair and beard styles as well. (TLM #O-55)

in the Union League Club of Philadelphia, where it hangs today.

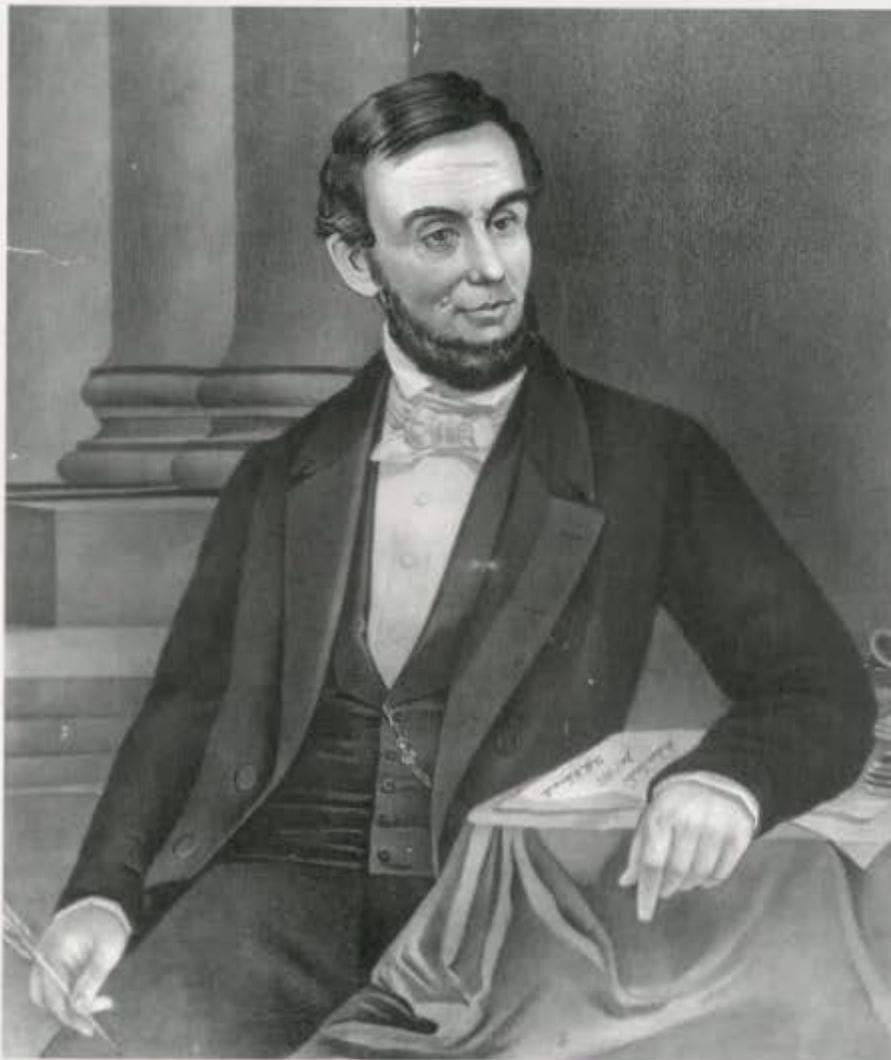
John Sartain created the first — but not the last — print adaptation of Marchant's life portrait of Lincoln, in time for the 1864 presidential election. In contrast to the original canvas, Sartain's print features the clearly visible signatures of Lincoln and Secretary of State William H. Seward on the Proclamation. Demand for the print was so great that at one time nearly a thousand were produced each day while lesser artists churned out still more printed copies (below).

Francis Bicknell Carpenter: Image-maker to Lincoln

In an era before public relations consultants, artist Francis Bicknell Carpenter

served as Lincoln's unofficial image-maker. What he lacked in painterly skill, Carpenter made up for with an uncanny sense of public taste. Believing emancipation "an act unparalleled for moral grandeur in the history of mankind," he traveled to Washington to make a heroic painting that would show, as he put it, "how a Man may be exalted to a dignity and glory almost divine, and give freedom to a race." When the artist asked Lincoln to pose in the White House, the President agreed to "turn you in loose here," [sic] as he put it, and gave Carpenter the run of the mansion for nearly six months.

Had he done nothing but paint the large "Emancipation" canvas that inspired one of the best-selling Lincoln prints ever published, Carpenter's place in Lincoln iconography would be secure. But he did much more. He all but invented the image of Lincoln as husband and father. More than any other artist of the age, Carpenter thus forged the enduring image of the public and private Lincoln: determined liberator and loving family man. If the truth was a bit more complicated — the Emancipation Proclamation did not in itself end slavery, and Lincoln's grueling schedule kept him apart from his family for much of the war — it was Carpenter



[Abraham Lincoln], lithograph, ca. 1864-65, by an unknown printmaker, after Edward Dalton Marchant and John Sartain. This clumsy copy omitted the statue of "Liberty" that had loomed over Lincoln in both the Marchant canvas (page 15) and the official print adaptation. (TLM #2393)



Francis Carpenter arranged this pose on February 9, 1864, for his monumental canvas on the theme of emancipation. (TLM #O-92)



Carpenter probably helped to pose this photograph, which launched the image of Lincoln as devoted father. Photograph by Anthony Berger (TLM #O-93)

who successfully softened reality into a dewy myth that endured, all but unchallenged, for more than a century.

Another of Carpenter's accomplishments was to convince Lincoln to sit for some of his best-known photographs. A session at Mathew Brady's Washington gallery three days before Lincoln's fifty-fifth birthday, intended to provide models for Carpenter's emancipation painting, became the most fruitful of Lincoln's photographic sittings, yielding the models for the engravings on the copper penny and five-dollar bill (page 9 right), as well as the touching photograph of Lincoln and his son, Tad (above). Not quite satisfied with the results of the February 9 sitting, Carpenter arranged for Brady camera operator Anthony Berger to come to the White House. The resulting photos were cloudy and dark because they were lit from windows (professional galleries had overhead skylights), but they were to be the only photos ever made in Lincoln's private second-floor office (center).

Before beginning work on his large "Emancipation" canvas, Carpenter made many pencil sketches, some of which survive in a large scrapbook still owned by his descendants. They show that he experimented with various standing and seated poses before he determined how to paint Lincoln. Carpenter also made individual oil sketches of Lincoln and his

Cabinet officers, later donating them to the Union League Club of New York in lieu of membership dues. "Absorbed in his papers," Carpenter remembered, "Lincoln would become unconscious in my presence, while I intently studied every line and shade of expression in that furrowed face. In repose, it was the saddest face I ever knew. There were days when I could scarcely look into it without crying." A longtime friend of Lincoln's called Carpenter's study portrait "the most faithful representation that has ever been...executed" (below right). Carpenter painted copies into the 1890s, with diminishing skill as the years went by. He dated all of them "1864," the year he produced the original.



On April 26, 1864, Carpenter posed Lincoln in his office almost precisely as he would paint him reading the Emancipation Proclamation. (TLM #O-101)

Frederick W. Halpin used the Carpenter portrait to create an engraving that Mary Lincoln called "the most perfect likeness of my beloved husband that I have ever seen." Indeed, it was "so accurate...that it will require far more calmness than I can now command to have it placed continually before me." Carpenter cleverly used this and a similarly enthusiastic endorsement by Lincoln's son Robert to advertise the engraving as "the favorite portrait of the Lincoln family." Copies cost \$15 for artist's proofs, \$7.75 for india proofs, and \$4.75

for plain prints, hefty sums at the time. The *New York Times* thought that the print successfully "refined away" some of Lincoln's characteristic "roughness."

Carpenter's greatest work was his nine-by-fifteen-foot painting, *The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation Before the Cabinet*, which was purchased for the U. S. Capitol for \$25,000 in 1878. It shows the Cabinet as it begins to comment on the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, which Lincoln had just read aloud to the group on July 22, 1862. Carpenter wanted to portray "that band of men, upon whom the eyes of the world centered as never before," with Lincoln the central, "uniting point" between Cabinet Radicals at left and conservatives at right. Lincoln declared of the finished painting: "There is little to find fault with. The portraiture is the main thing, and that seems to me absolutely perfect."

Using a small model (now lost) of Carpenter's work, Alexander Hay Ritchie produced an immensely popular engraving of the same subject (opposite top). Because Carpenter obsessively re-painted the original until he changed — some critics say, impaired — its depiction of Lincoln, Ritchie's print



Francis B. Carpenter's 1864 oil study portrait of Lincoln. Carpenter wrote that in life Lincoln exuded "such a picture of the effects of sorrow, care, and anxiety as would have melted the hearts of the worst of his adversaries, who so mistakenly applied to him the epithets of tyrant and usurper." (Courtesy of the Union League Club of New York)



The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation Before the Cabinet, engraving published by Derby & Miller, 1866, by Alexander Hay Ritchie (1822-1895), after Carpenter. (TLM #2825)

actually gives a better idea of how the massive canvas looked upon its completion. President Lincoln himself became the first subscriber to the Ritchie engraving, paying fifty dollars in advance for an artist's proof. He did not live to receive his copy.

In June 1864 Carpenter spent some time with Lincoln and William Marshall Swayne, a clerk in the Internal Revenue office who was commissioned to make a marble Lincoln bust for the Great Central Fair of Philadelphia to raise funds for war widows and orphans. Lincoln posed in the second-floor library of the Treasury Department, where he entertained Swayne and Carpenter by reciting Shakespeare soliloquies and other poetry, including all twelve stanzas of "Mortality" by William Knox. When the sculptor told Lincoln that his family owned a printed copy of the same poem, Lincoln asked if it had been "published in connection with my name," and Swayne replied: "It purported to have been written by Abraham Lincoln." "I have heard of that before," the President said, adding that he had committed the poem to memory years before, "and have frequently recited it, but I am not the Author of it." Nevertheless, printed copies attributed to Lincoln were not uncommon.

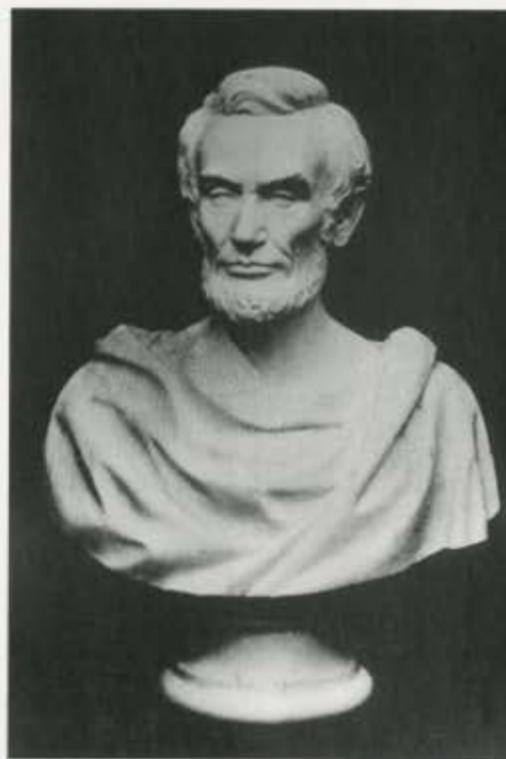
For Lincoln, the hours spent posing for the sculptor offered a welcome diversion. "I like to come," Lincoln told Swayne. "It rests me." Swayne's clay model was

completed on June 8, the day Lincoln was re-nominated for a second term as president. In January 1865, Lincoln saw Swayne at a White House reception and joked: "You are the gentleman who made a mud head of me!" The finished bust was exhibited two months later at the inaugural ball, where a critic saw it and remarked: "The very face that looked down upon us that night is here; the sad eyes, the patient furrows...the story on the lips told in everlasting silence" (right).

While laboring on his "Emancipation" canvas, Carpenter enjoyed almost unlimited access to the White House. Whenever visitors to Lincoln's office wondered aloud about the stranger working in the corner of the room, Lincoln teased: "Oh, you need not mind him; he is but a painter." Carpenter took advantage of his opportunity not only to work on his main project, but to paint Lincoln and the rest of the First Family in other poses, including a unique *clean-shaven* painting of Lincoln as president, which was commissioned (for some unexplained reason) by Frederick Seward, son of the Secretary of State. Carpenter also executed at least two life portraits of the First Lady during his six months at the White House, including one for fellow artist Jasper Cropsey (page 2 bottom). Carpenter enjoyed good relations with Mary Lincoln while working in the mansion in 1864. A few months after the assassination she wrote the artist to declare that "I have always felt great pride, in the success of your great painting." And

in 1866 she gave him as a Christmas present a precious memento of her late husband — a "very plain cane...handled by him." She eventually broke with Carpenter, but for a time Mary appreciated his efforts to immortalize Lincoln, and to flatter her, with his handsome portraits.

Based in part on his experiences with the Lincoln household in 1864, Carpenter later executed a group portrait of the family, showing them as they would have appeared in their first year in the White House. Mary Lincoln had once wittily dubbed Carpenter's "Emancipation" painting the "happy family," and she undoubtedly encouraged Carpenter to portray her less happy private family in similar bliss, however exaggerated (she cautioned the painter against making her look "too stern"). This painting solidified the myth that Lincoln had enjoyed a joyful home life during the Civil War, when in fact eldest son Robert went off immediately to Harvard, Willie died in February 1862, and Lincoln, consumed by work, had little time to read aloud to his youngest boy, Tad (who in any event could not read and was not much interested in books). It was at Mary Lincoln's suggestion that the First Lady was portrayed in a black velvet dress,



Plaster bust by William Marshall Swayne (1828-1918), June 1864 Washington. (TLM #994)



The Lincoln Family, mezzotint engraving (1867, New York) by John Chester Buttre (1821-1893), after Francis Bicknell Carpenter. (TLM #148)

of the sort she later wore in mourning for her son and husband.

New York print publisher John Chester Buttre paid Carpenter \$500 to create his Lincoln family canvas in shades of white, gray, and black as the model for a black-and-white engraving (above). Carpenter later admitted that he enjoyed only a "brief glimpse of the home life of the President," though he described it as sufficient to provide a "gauge to his entire domestic character," which he judged "beautiful." Although reliant on photographic models, too, Carpenter's was to be

the only Lincoln family painting from life by any artist.

After Lincoln's death, Carpenter's fame soared with the appearance of two books about his experiences painting the President. In 1866, he published his memoir, *Six Months at the White House: The Story of A Picture*. It became one of the most frequently consulted original references on Lincoln's presidential years. The second book, *The Picture and the Men*, was compiled by New York editor Fred B. Perkins in 1867 as "a companion and key to Mr. Carpenter's great picture." Both volumes concluded with extensive testimonials and sales pitches for the prints based on Carpenter's paintings. When a publisher later re-issued *Six Months at the White House* under a new title, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln*, the late president's infuriated widow labeled Carpenter a "stranger" and a "silly adventurer." He certainly knew how to use other media to promote himself.

Teenage Sculptor: Vinnie Ream

Lavinia Ellen "Vinnie" Ream was a diminutive teen-aged student of the well-known sculptor Clark Mills when she first determined to ask President Lincoln to pose for her. Influential admirers — including Congressmen and Senators — wrote endorsements attesting to her talents, and the President supposedly granted her access — although later claim that she visited him for a half hour

a day for five months is undoubtedly exaggerated. One legend holds that Senator John Sherman brought her along on a visit to the White House in late 1864, introducing her as a poor young western artist. According to legend, Lincoln replied: "She is poor, is she? Oh, well, that's nothing agin' her. Let her come."

Ream's first attempt to sculpt Lincoln resulted in a crude bas relief (bottom left). Her second was more accomplished, a bust that suggests that her art education was taking place as she worked in the White House (below). She recalled her subject as "an absolutely heartbroken man. Sometimes for these sittings his face wore a look of anxiety and pain...at other times he would have that far away dreamy look that somehow presaged the tragic fate awaiting him... I was modeling him in clay, but all the time his personality was sinking deeper into my soul." She later remembered Lincoln's "great



Bas relief, plaster, ca. 1864 by Lavinia Ellen "Vinnie" Ream (1847-1914) This crude relief medallion was probably the initial result of her opportunities to sketch Lincoln from life. (TLM #909)



Vinnie Ream with her bust of Lincoln. She described herself as "the merest slip of a child, weighing less than ninety pounds." (Courtesy of the Library of Congress LC-US267-10284)



Ream's full-size statue, unveiled at the Capitol in 1871. (Courtesy of Architect of the Capitol)

form slouched into the chair at his desk...his head bowed to his chest, deeply thoughtful. He never told a funny story to me. He rarely smiled."

After Lincoln's death, Ream won a \$10,000 commission from Congress to create a full-length marble statue for the Capitol Rotunda, despite warnings from Lincoln's widow that "the most mortifying failure can be anticipated" owing to the artist's "inexperience," not to mention her "forwardness and unladylike persistence." But her six-foot, 11-inch-high statue, unveiled at an elaborate ceremony on January 25, 1871, evoked much praise (above). Acclaimed painter G. P. A. Healy declared that she had successfully captured "the very manner of our noble president and martyr," predicting that the statue would "give great satisfaction to our people."

Later Images

In June 1864 an unidentified artist drew a series of informal sketches of Lincoln. Traditionally they have been attributed to Pierre Morand, of whom little is known, except that he emigrated to the United States in 1846 and became the American agent for a French merchant. He met Lincoln in Washington in 1864 and (presumably) sketched him several times in relaxed, informal settings — lounging at his summer residence, the Soldiers' Home, strolling with his wife near the White House, or walking the streets of the capital carrying an umbrella. "In life Mr. Lincoln's features and movements impressed me so vividly," Morand claimed, "that I made several good sketches of him in various attitudes." But the handwritten caption on one of the surviving sketches, identifying the picture as "in possession of Col. D. H. Strother," has raised the possibility that it may be the work of Strother himself, a writer-artist known to the public as "Porte Crayon."

The last painting of Lincoln from life was done by Matthew Wilson. Wilson executed two versions simultaneously as the President posed in his office — one on commission for Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, and an identical copy from which to make later replicas (he may have painted as many as five more). Wilson noted in his diary that all of his time was being devoted to his "interminable, everlasting Lincolns." Wilson's diary also reveals that the photographic portrait of Lincoln long thought to have been taken in April 1865, just before his death, was in fact made at Alexander Gardner's gallery on February 5 (page 14 top). When Welles told Lincoln that he thought this an excellent likeness, Lincoln was reminded of the story of a frontier woman who judged a portrait of her husband "horridly like" the original. "And that," the ever-modest Lincoln laughed, "seems to me a just criticism of *this!*" Welles paid Wilson \$85 for the finished work, which shows Lincoln painfully gaunt, but with a faint smile curling on his lips as the long, bloody war finally nears an end (cover). The painting was acquired by The Lincoln Museum in 1979.

A day before his fifty-sixth and last birthday, Lincoln sat for a new plaster cast of his face by Clark Mills. Ironically, both

the first and last known life portraits of Lincoln thus turned out to be life masks. Mills' technique was more efficient and less painful to the sitter than Volk's, but when the sculptor arrived, Lincoln greeted him by moaning: "If you want to kill me, just take a knife and cut my throat, for I hear that taking a cast is just about the same." Mills insisted that he could accomplish the task "without tweaking a hair." Lincoln "consented with some misgivings." His head was covered by a tight cap before the plaster paste was applied. It dried in only fifteen minutes, whereupon Mills asked the president to twitch his face until the mask came apart in pieces and fell safely into a towel held by the sculptor. The pieces were later re-assembled. Mills used the mask as the model for a bust, but as with Volk, the work's great fame came with reproductions of the original mask (below).

John Hay, Lincoln's secretary, later compared the two life masks: "The first is of a man, fifty-one, and young for his years. The face has a clean, firm outline; it is free from fat, but the muscles are hard and full; the large mobile mouth is ready to speak, to shout, or laugh;



Plaster cast of life mask made February 11, 1865, by Clark Mills (1810-1883). (TLM #1722)



Photograph by Alexander Gardner, February 5, 1865, at Lincoln's last photograph studio sitting. (TLM #O-117)

the bold curved nose is substantial, with spreading nostrils; it is a face full of life, of energy, of vivid aspiration. The other is so sad and peaceful in its infinite repose that the famous sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens insisted, when he first saw it, that it was a death mask. The lines are set, as if the living face, like the copy, had been in bronze; the nose is thin, and lengthened by the emaciation of the cheeks; the mouth is fixed like that of an archaic statue; a look as of one on whom sorrow and care had done their worst without victory... ."

Artist Carl Bersch was sitting on the balcony of a building across the street from Ford's Theatre on the evening of April 14, 1865, sketching a parade of victorious Union soldiers, when suddenly a commotion arose. The theater doors flew open, and a "hushed committee" carried the mortally wounded president outside. He had just been shot by John Wilkes Booth. Bersch quickly incorporated "this solemn and reverent cortege" into his drawing and later elaborated the impression into a dramatic painting. Bersch thus became the last artist to see Lincoln alive, but Lincoln was to "pose" one more time. When Pierre Morand, who had drawn the president in 1864, saw Lincoln lying in state at the top of the staircase in New York's City Hall rotunda at two a.m. the day

of the late president's funeral in that city, he quickly executed several hasty but deeply felt sketches. Of course, these do not qualify technically as life portraits; Lincoln had been dead for ten days. But they do exquisitely portray the long-anguished man at last at rest — in what John M. Hay called "the dreadful peace of death."

Lincoln's death ignited a huge public demand for new images. Mathew Wilson produced a copy of his portrait within days for adaptation by lithographer Louis Prang (who achieved his greatest fame as father of the Christmas card), resulting in a printed version that may have appeared as early as May, 1865 (below).

The demand for images of Lincoln continues to the present. His face now appears everywhere, engraved on coins and bills, carved into mountains, splashed across advertising signs, and rendered in paintings, prints, statues, busts, and other media. But however talented they may be, the innumerable artists who still strive to capture the image of Abraham Lincoln must always return for their inspiration to the original artists of the 1860s, those who sat in the same room with him, those who watched him working, talking, thinking, and laughing, those who had the privilege of trying to portray Lincoln from life.

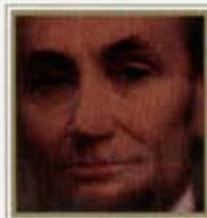


Abraham Lincoln./Copied by permission from the original picture by Mathew Wilson —/now in possession of Hon. Gideon Welles, Secy. of the Navy. Lithograph, 1865, by Louis Prang (1824-1909), after Matthew Henry Wilson (1814-1892). (TLM #2470)



Oil on canvas, 1863, Washington, by Edward Dalton Marchant (1806-1887) (Courtesy of the Union League of Philadelphia)

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National Premier of Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him

Saturday, April 24, 1999
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Dinner — 10:00 p.m.

"Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him" opens with a special fundraising event. Actor Sam Waterston and guest curator Harold Holzer will discuss the challenges of portraying Abraham Lincoln in traditional media as well as on the stage and television screen. Guests will have an opportunity to preview the exhibit and meet the speakers at a reception at the Summit Club, followed by a private dinner with Mr. Waterston and Mr. Holzer.

Lecture and Reception — \$100.00 per person
Lecture, Reception, and Dinner
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Seating is limited. Please call 455-7494 for reservations. ☐



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University of Illinois at Springfield, organized
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