

SMITHSONIAN MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTIONS
VOLUME 95, NUMBER 18

TWO ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHIC NEGATIVES
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(WITH FOUR PLATES)

BY
ALEXANDER WETMORE
Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution



(PUBLICATION 3400)

CITY OF WASHINGTON
PUBLISHED BY THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
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Among recent accessions in the Section of Photography of the United States National Museum there are two original photographic negatives of Abraham Lincoln that are of great interest as they present an outstanding figure in American history at an important point in his career. These negatives have come to the national collections through the Post Office Department.

According to the records accompanying them, the two negatives in question were made by Alex. Hesler of the Hesler Studios, located in early years at 113 Lake Street, Chicago, Ill. Sometime after the presidential election of November 1860, and before the inauguration of the following March, friends of Mr. Lincoln arranged to have Hesler go to Springfield, Ill., where the President-elect sat for the photographer. The usual wet plate process of the period was used, with results that are reported to have been satisfactory and pleasing both to Lincoln and to his friends.

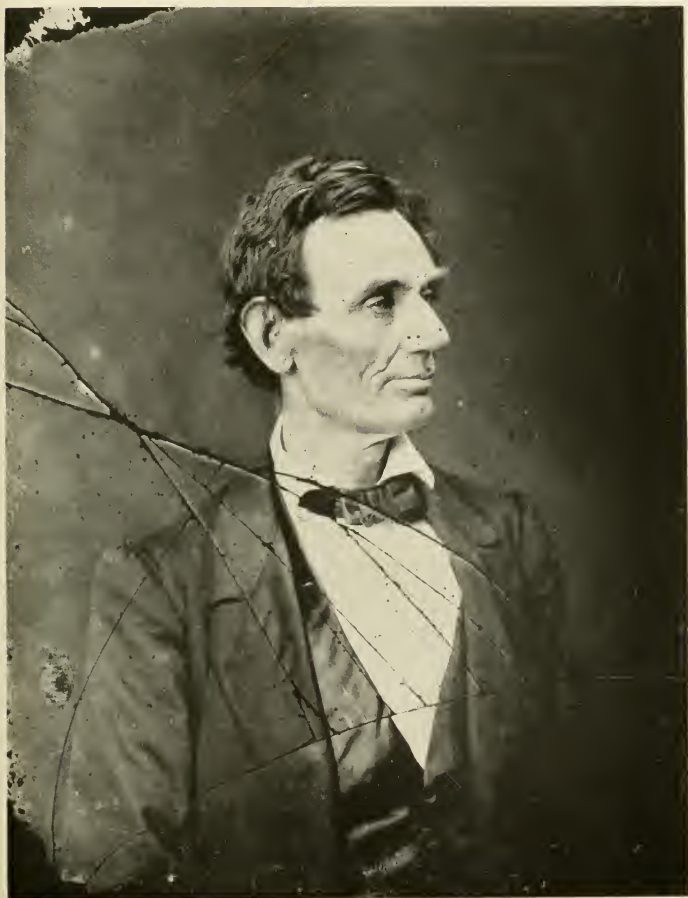
When Hesler retired from business, his studio came into the possession of George B. Ayres, who removed later to Buffalo, N. Y., and then to Philadelphia, Pa., taking these negatives with him—a fortunate circumstance, as otherwise they probably would have been destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. Mr. Ayres' property in time passed to two daughters, Mrs. Edith L. Bunce and Anne Smith Ayres, the latter coming into sole possession of the Lincoln negatives on the death of Mrs. Bunce. After Miss Ayres' death they were purchased from her estate by William H. Woodward, of Philadelphia. During shipment by parcel post to St. Louis in 1933 the negatives were accidentally broken, which led to their acquisition by the Post Office Department in settlement of a claim for damage.

In the course of this settlement the postal authorities made an extended investigation, which through the advice of experts established without question the authenticity of the photographic plates as originals. Realizing their great historical importance, the Post Office

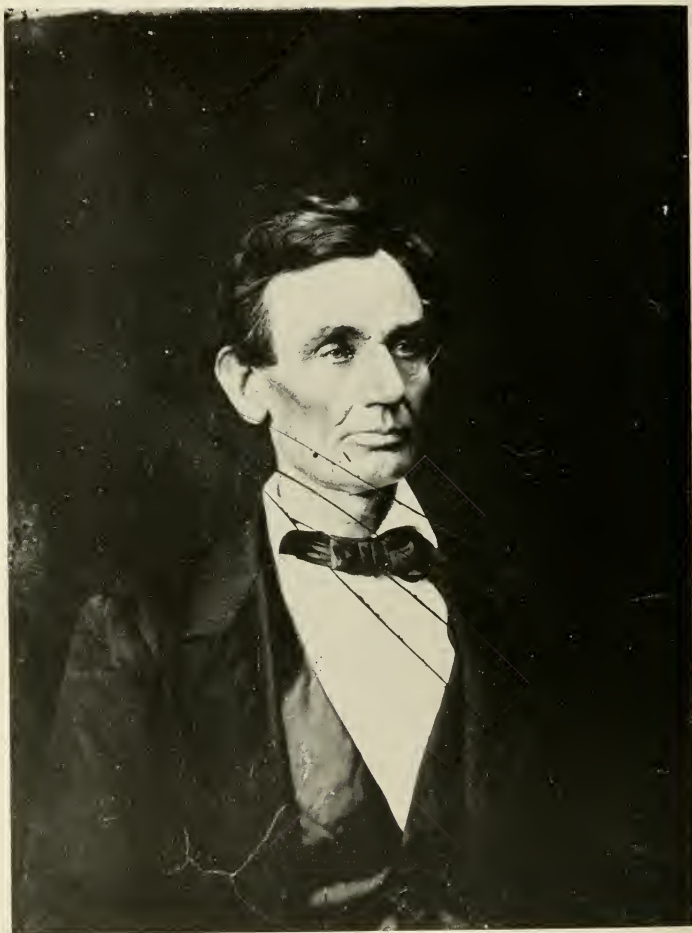
Department transferred the negatives, through W. W. Howes, First Assistant Postmaster General, in a letter dated January 22, 1935, to the United States National Museum for permanent preservation as part of the national collections. They were placed directly in the hands of the writer by the Superintendent of the Division of Dead Letters and Dead Parcel Post on January 29, 1936.

Plates 1 and 2 show prints made directly from the negatives. In plates 3 and 4 the lines of breakage and other imperfections have been eliminated by a skillful artist. It will be noted that in these pictures Lincoln is shown as smooth-shaven. It is reported that in October 1860 a letter was written to Mr. Lincoln suggesting that he grow a beard—advice that he seems to have followed, since he wore one on his inauguration the following March. Apparently, therefore, these negatives were made soon after the election of the previous November.

As stated above, according to report Lincoln considered these pictures as among the best made of him at the period. Fortunately the damage to the plates has not destroyed the likeness, as may be seen from the accompanying illustrations. These negatives form an important addition to the many treasures of the collections of the United States National Museum.



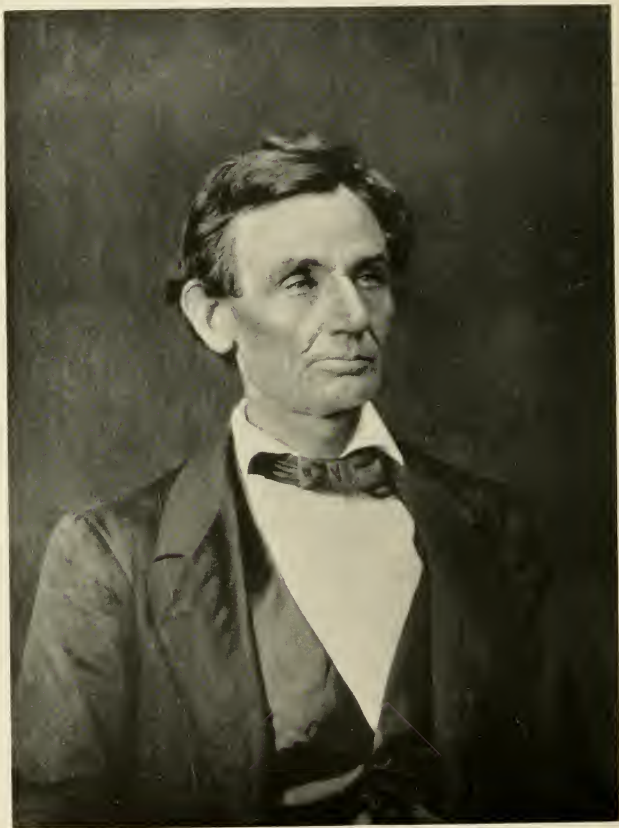
ORIGINAL NEGATIVE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS RECEIVED FROM THE
POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT



ORIGINAL NEGATIVE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS RECEIVED FROM THE
POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT



RETOUCHED PRINT FROM NEGATIVE SHOWN IN PLATE 1



RETOUCHED PRINT FROM NEGATIVE SHOWN IN PLATE 2