

LINCOLN LORE

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PRESENTATION PHOTOGRAPHS OF LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln's photograph, "autographed," was apparently more desired by his correspondents than an autograph, "with a sentiment." Many of Lincoln's admirers wanted his picture for their own personal satisfaction. Some of the requests for his likeness came from agents of Sanitary Fairs where the anticipated donation could be sold. Other requests were received from those who had in mind commercial projects where a picture of the President was necessary to carry out their designs. The Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress make available a large number of letters asking for a photograph of the President.

William Seymour Alden of Leister, Vermont, sent this request: "Enclose please find twenty-five cents which I send you for your photograph, carte-de-visite." As far as we have been able to observe, this is the only solicitor who was willing to pay for a picture, or at least make a partial payment. On the back of this letter John W. Nicolay, private secretary of the President, wrote this endorsement: "Money returned and photograph sent."

Lincoln autographed some photographs at the request of children. A letter of acknowledgment dated Oct. 22, 1864, came to him from Green Bay, Wisconsin, thanking him "for the Picture sent" and signed, "I remain your true little friend. Emmeline H. Whitney."

Among the appeals for donations of various items, the Sanitary Fairs outnumbered them all and among the requests, autographed photographs seemed to be most desirable, with the possible exception of such important papers as the Emancipation Proclamation and copies of the Gettysburg Address, which were sold through the fairs. The Western Sanitary Fair to be held at Quincy, Illinois contacted the President on Sept. 12, 1864 asking for a photograph, but instead of the autograph on the picture, they desired in addition, an autographed letter.

One letter in the Lincoln Papers asking for autograph photographs caused the director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation to raise his eyebrows slightly. Several years ago he was able to purchase two autograph photographs along with the following letter which John Hay had written in forwarding them. The letter was dated Oct. 10, 1864 and read: "Dear Madam: In reply to your request for a donation to the Tazewell County (Ill.) Fair the President desires me to transmit six photographs with autograph." The letter was addressed to Mrs. Mary P. Westerman, Pekin, Ill. The letter Mrs. Westerman sent to the President requesting the donation is now in the Lincoln Papers. It follows verbatim:

"Pekin, Illinois

Oct. 2, 1864

"President Lincoln, Dear Sir:

"A second time I importune you for a donation to the Tazewell County Fair, Sanitary Fair I should say, and I cannot give up this idea of our President giving us something. If you remember, I stopped you at the White House steps on one cabinet day and you asked me what I wanted you to do. I told you and you said that you were worn out and could not go up again for us for anything, but said you would remember my petition. Now this time if you cannot conveniently give us anything else we insist on your sending a large picture of yourself which we can make a great deal on it. It is the earnest wish of our Soldier Aid that you would do something as it would inspire others to donate. If you wish to find out anything concerning me whether I am an imposter or not please inquire of Mr. John Albert Jones, who is in some office in the Treasury Department. I disremember which, but he is an old citizen of Tazewell County and can vouchsafe for my purpose as he is personally acquainted with me from childhood. What you send will

have to be done immediately as our Sanitary Fair commences on the 18th of October.

President Mrs. Henry P. Westerman
President Soldiers' Aid Society
Pekin, Illinois

"(P.S. By so doing you will be rewarded from above.)"

Possibly the public demand for the photographs was not as great as Mrs. Westerman had anticipated, or possibly she was disappointed in not getting a large one instead of six small ones. The fact remains however, that two of the six autographs remained in her hands, possibly by her own purchase, and later passed on to her descendants, then to the Foundation.

Most of the solicitors limited their request to a print or two but Julia C. Mills of Indianapolis was confident that if she could get a negative she could have great numbers of them made for the fair. She had Dr. J. D. Cobb write to the President for her from Camp Carrington on Nov. 18, 1864, these words of solicitation in part: "She now requests your negative photograph so as to make sales and get revenue for support of the Fair."

Still another Sanitary Fair request went a step further. Many requests came for just a picture, many for autograph photographs, one for a negative as we have observed, and now we find a Washington photographer, William Metcalf, proprietor of the Whitehurst Galleries asking on March 4, 1864, for a sitting, that he might give a picture of the President to the Sanitary Fair. It is not known that the President responded to this request as thus far we have been unable to identify an original photograph of him made by Metcalf.

All through his administration Lincoln was approached by commercial interests who requested to use his photograph for the purpose of producing an artistic design, embellish a lithograph, or in some other way reproduce his likeness. He was usually very cooperative in answering their requests. One appeal for his picture which Lincoln would certainly answer came to him from Zanesville, Ohio, in Jan. 1864 where a boy, Frank P. Bailey, a young artist, requested his picture. He told Mr. Lincoln the Fair which was to be held next month wanted him, "To make a bust of you . . . I am a poor boy and cannot get to Washington. Have just finished a splendid bust of Secy. Chase."

A letter received on March 17, 1864 from Rice and Hart of Philadelphia, publishers of *The National Portrait Galleries of Distinguished Americans*, put forth this request, "We are desirous of adding to our work the portrait and biography of President Lincoln. Having received the kind aid of five former Presidents, we venture to ask you to do us similar favors. Having been unable to find here a portrait that is satisfactory, we ask you to do us the favor to sit at Mr. Brady's Gallery for a photograph. He is advised of our desire to obtain your photograph for our work. Should Mr. Brady fail to take a likeness that is satisfactory to yourself and family could you refer us to any that has here-to-fore been taken that you would prefer . . . We also desire your autograph to engrave under the portrait."

The photographs which Lincoln presented at the request of visitors at the White House far outnumbered the written requests. Cassius Clay of Kentucky was one of those fortunate recipients and he not only received a picture of Mr. Lincoln but one of Mrs. Lincoln as well for which he expressed his thanks. It is strange that although there were so many autograph photographs presented by Lincoln, that so few of them are now known to exist. Possibly the confusion between an actual autograph and a facsimile signature has allowed many of the originals to pass by unnoticed.