



# Lincoln Lore

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## LINCOLN, THE MEXICAN WAR, AND SPRINGFIELD'S VETERANS

Congressman Abraham Lincoln had a theory to explain the loss of his district to the Democrats following his single term in the United States House of Representatives. It was a ticklish situation because Lincoln's old law partner, Stephen Trigg Logan, was the unsuccessful Whig candidate for Lincoln's seat. Thomas L. Harris, who had served in the Mexican War as a captain of the Fourth Illinois Regiment, was the successful Democratic candidate. When asked to explain Logan's defeat, Lincoln said:

I would rather not be put upon explaining how Logan was defeated in my district. In the first place I have no particulars from there, my friends, supposing I am on the road home, not having written me. Whether there was a full turn out of the voters I have as yet not learned. The most I can now say is that a good many Whigs, without good cause, as I think, were unwilling to go for Logan, and some of them so wrote me before the election. On the other hand Harris was a Major of the war, and fought at Cerro Gordo, where several Whigs of the district fought with him. These two facts and their effects, I presume tell the whole story. That there is any political change against us in the district I cannot believe; because I wrote some time ago to every county of the district for an account of changes; and, in answer I got the names of four against us, eighty-three for us. I dislike to predict, but it seems to me the district must and will be found right side up again in November.

Unfortunately for history, Logan's close association with Lincoln prevented the Congressman from explaining precisely why a number of Whigs were discontented with Logan's candidacy. Lincoln's gentlemanly reticence caused the loss to history forever of his explanation of Logan's failings. It also helped give rise to the story that the weight of Lincoln's record of opposition to the Mexican War caused Logan's defeat.

Even without Lincoln's explanation of Logan's lack of popularity among some Whigs, the historian has at least a partial theory of the district's surprising Democratic vote. Since the voters turned out in very large

numbers, the important part of Lincoln's theory is its stress on the Mexican War veterans' vote.

Figures for the whole district are not available, but Sangamon County's poll books for the 1848 election show how Springfield's veterans voted. Most of Springfield's veterans had served in Company A of the Fourth Illinois Regiment. Not all of the soldiers in the company were from Springfield, and not all of the Springfield men voted in the 1848 election. Nevertheless, the votes of a number of the Springfield veterans are recorded:

- Captain Horatio E. Roberts (Democrat)
- Second Lieutenant John S. Bradford (Democrat)
- Sergeant Walter Davis (Whig)
- Sergeant David Logan (Whig)
- Sergeant Dudley Wickersham (Democrat)
- Private Grandison Addison (Democrat)
- Private John J. Balantine (Democrat)
- Private William W. Brown (Democrat)
- Private Zebulon P. Cabaniss (Whig)
- Private John Chapman (Democrat)
- Private Harvey Darnell (Whig)
- Private John E. Foster (Whig)
- Private George W. Funk (Whig)
- Private Mathew Murray (Democrat)
- Private James B. Ransdall (Whig)
- Private Charles F. Watson (Whig)

- Private Levi P. Watts (Democrat)
- Private Thomas Whitehurst (Democrat)
- Private Joseph Yeakle (Whig)

Surprisingly, nine of the soldiers voted Whig (for Logan), and nine voted for Democrat Thomas L. Harris.

A number of the 1848 voters had been discharged for various disabilities and were not veterans in the same sense most of those listed above were. Still, they had enlisted to fight and deserve to be considered as men willing to serve their country in the Mexican War. In addition to John S. Bradford, who resigned on September 16, 1846, they were:

- Sergeant William W. Pease (Whig)

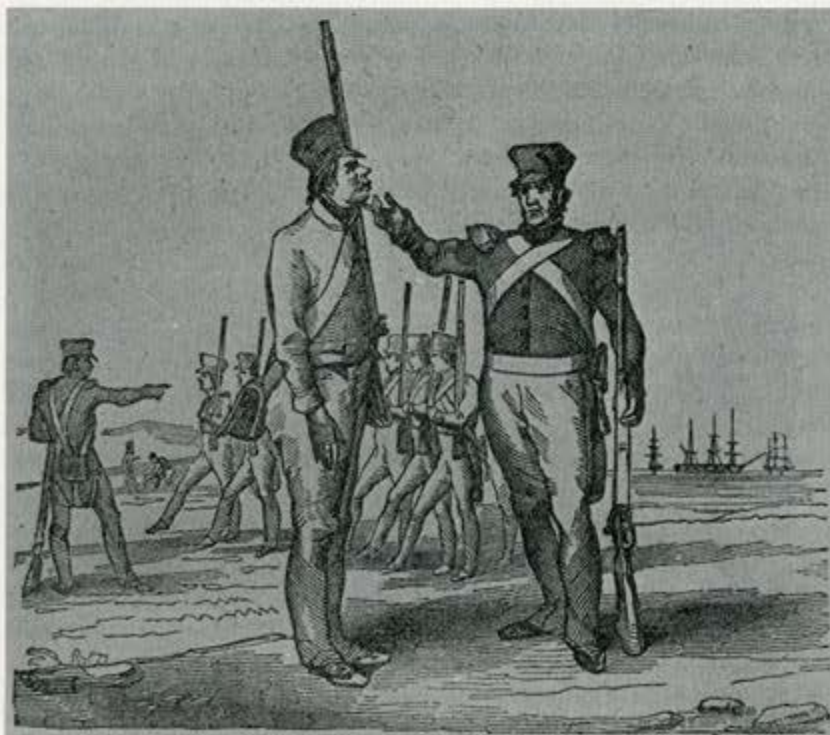


FIGURE 1. Mexican War recruits.

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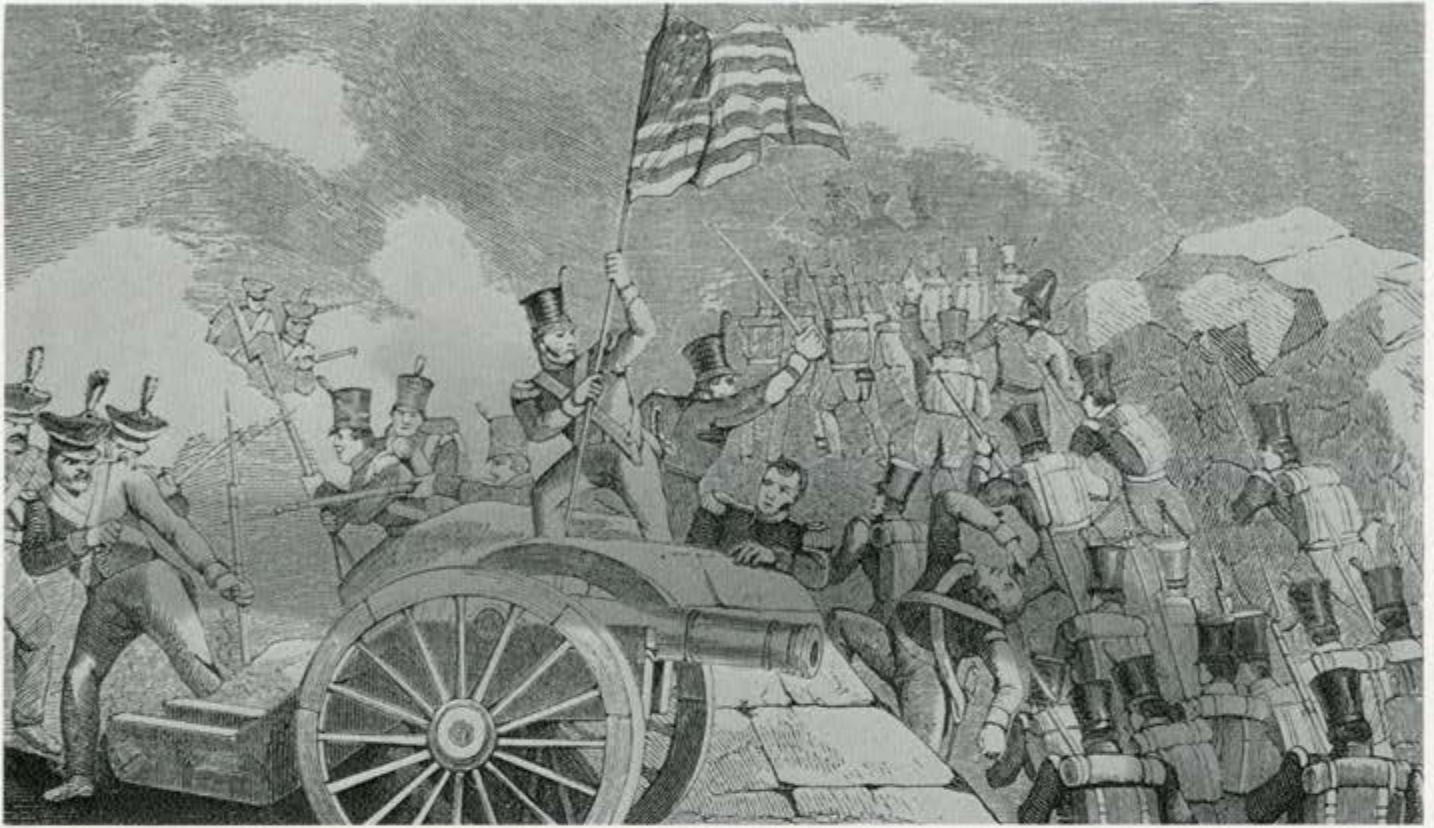


FIGURE 2. The Battle of Cerro Gordo, where Illinois's soldiers fought.

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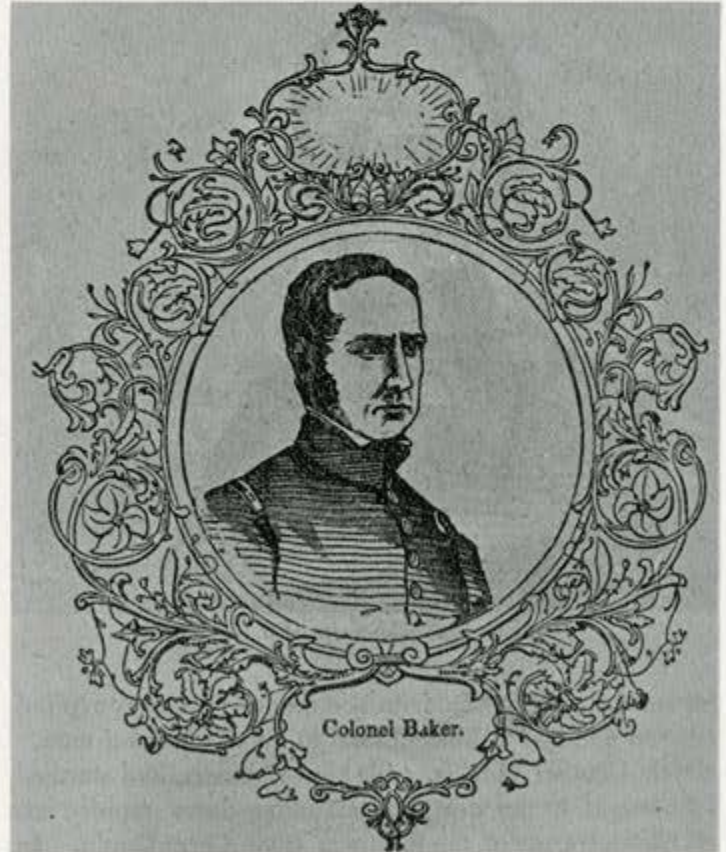
Private Samuel Cole (Whig)  
Private Marion F. Mathews (Whig)  
Private George C. Whitlock (Democrat)  
Private James A. Waugh (Whig)

If these are added to the other veterans' votes, the Whigs captured the veteran vote in Springfield, 13 to 10.

A number of qualifications should be noted. Springfield was overwhelmingly Whig in politics in this period. Therefore, if Whigs and Democrats enlisted in numbers proportionate to their strength in the population at large, a Whig preponderance is to be expected. Problems in interpreting the handwriting in the poll books make the use of some of the names listed above questionable. Mathews, Foster, and Wickersham are questionable interpretations of the names listed in the poll books. Eliminate these three (two Whigs and a Democrat), and the vote stands at 11 to 9.

Even making these qualifications, one can see that Lincoln's theory—at least insofar as Springfield was concerned—was probably not correct. Whig soldiers fought in the war while Whig politicians opposed the war at home, but Whig veterans continued to sustain the Whig cause when the war was over. Could it be that some of the nine or ten Democratic votes came from men who previously voted Whig? Probably not. In the first place, companies elected their officers, and Company A had a Democrat as a captain. Probably a majority of the soldiers were Democrats. In the second place, soldiers were young men. Since the Fourth Illinois Regiment left for duty before election day in 1846, these men could have shown their political preference most recently only in 1844. A check of the 1850 census returns reveals that three of the ten soldiers listed in that census were too young to vote in 1844. They, and probably several of the others, were showing their political preference for the first time in 1848.

The most important qualification to bear in mind is that Lincoln was discussing the whole district. The impact of service in the Mexican War may have been much different among rural veterans. Nevertheless, the vote of Springfield's Mexican War veterans is interesting. These men did not turn against the Whig party because Lincoln had opposed the Mexican War, and a majority of them would happily have seen their old captain, Thomas L. Harris, go down to political defeat.



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FIGURE 3. Edward D. Baker was a close friend and political ally of Abraham Lincoln's. He and John J. Hardin, the other strong Whig leader in Lincoln's congressional district, chose to serve in the Mexican War. Lincoln always had complete confidence that such Whig veterans shared his view that the war was unconstitutional and unnecessary.

## A LIFE MASK DISCOVERED

A hospitalized parishioner, a pawn shop, and a Methodist minister with a good memory were the unusual factors in the recent discovery of a superb bronze casting of Leonard Wells Volk's famous life mask of Abraham Lincoln. The ailing parishioner drew Dr. O. Gerald Trigg, Senior Minister of the Gobin Memorial United Methodist Church in Greencastle, Indiana, to Terre Haute, some fifty miles away. When Dr. Trigg arrived, the patient was undergoing tests and could not have visitors for at least an hour. The vexations of pastoral visits never bother Dr. Trigg, for he is a book collector and can always kill an hour browsing dusty shelves for early books by and about Methodists.

Like most book collectors, Dr. Trigg has trouble confining his interests to one field of collecting. Curiosity is one of the most untamable of human traits. As he browsed in a Terre Haute shop, a Lincoln mask caught his eye. He might well have dismissed it as a curio had he not recalled seeing a very similar mask in the Smithsonian Institution years before. Trigg examined the mask closely and asked the proprietor where he got it. A woman from Illinois had placed it in the shop for sale more than a year previously. It had been in her family's possession for a long time, she had claimed. At the price she wanted, there had been no takers. Trigg passed it up too. He visited his parishioner and drove back to Greencastle.

Like all good collectors, Dr. Trigg was willing to do some research. His church is on the campus of DePauw University, and it was relatively easy to go to the library and consult old issues of *Lincoln Lore*. He quickly discovered that it was a Volk mask, and he decided that he should purchase it.

Nothing increases curiosity like monetary investment. Trigg began to write letters and make telephone calls to numerous historical institutions to establish the exact identity of the mask. He could tell just by looking that the mask was of high quality, but he wanted to know precisely how good it was. Travel was out of the question, but study was not. He continued to study the history of the Volk life mask carefully.

The key to explaining the quality of Trigg's casting of Lincoln's mask lay in the name "Berchem." That name appears nowhere on the mask, but the person who sold the mask originally had been married to a man named Berchem.

A poor copy of a poor copy of a 1964 letter in the files of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum provided the essential clue. The letter was written from James E. Morris, Reference Librarian at the Chicago Historical Society, to L.E. Minkel, a collector curious about the number of casts of Lincoln's hands Volk had made. In the course of the letter, Morris said, "It seems that Mr. Jules Berchem received the original set from Leonard Volk and from these made copies both in plaster and bronze, of which the first set made from the original was presented to the Society."

The letter gave Trigg the clue he needed. Jules Berchem, who operated a bronze foundry in Chicago, is famed for casting bronze statues and busts. He did some work for fellow Chicagoan Leonard Volk, including some late copies of the Volk mask which bear in the inscription: "Copyright 1886 by L.W. Volk—J. Berchem." Dr. Trigg's mask bears a different inscription: "A. LINCOLN. 1860 L. W. VOLK • Fecit." A further complication is the mask in the Smithsonian, which is claimed to be the "original" cast because the original molds were destroyed in Volk's studio in the Chicago Fire of 1871.

Dr. Trigg is cautious in his claims for his mask, but he is certain that it is at least one of the earliest casts. Since it has an "M" stamped inside it, it is probably a "Master," an important casting. It is possible, since Trigg's mask incorporates all the distinctive marks of the Smithsonian mask, that Volk made new molds after the fire from the bronze Berchem master. And these molds are the ones that provided the Smithsonian casting. Such an argument, of course, hinges critically on the truth of the statement in the Chicago Historical Society letter.

To see the mask is to be willing to grant that Dr. Trigg has a plausible case. Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, former editor of *Lincoln Lore*, stated upon examining it that it was the best he had ever seen. Likewise, Harold Holzer, New York City's authority on Lincoln iconography, examined photographs of the mask and also called it the best he had seen.

Among private collectors, there are two breeds: "private" private collectors and "public" private collectors. The former, usually from fear of thieves, hoard their valuables and shun publicity. The latter, from both pride and public spirit, are willing to share their good fortune with others. Happily, Dr. Trigg is among the latter sort, and he plans to lend his fine mask for display at the DePauw University Archives and the Indiana State Museum in the future.

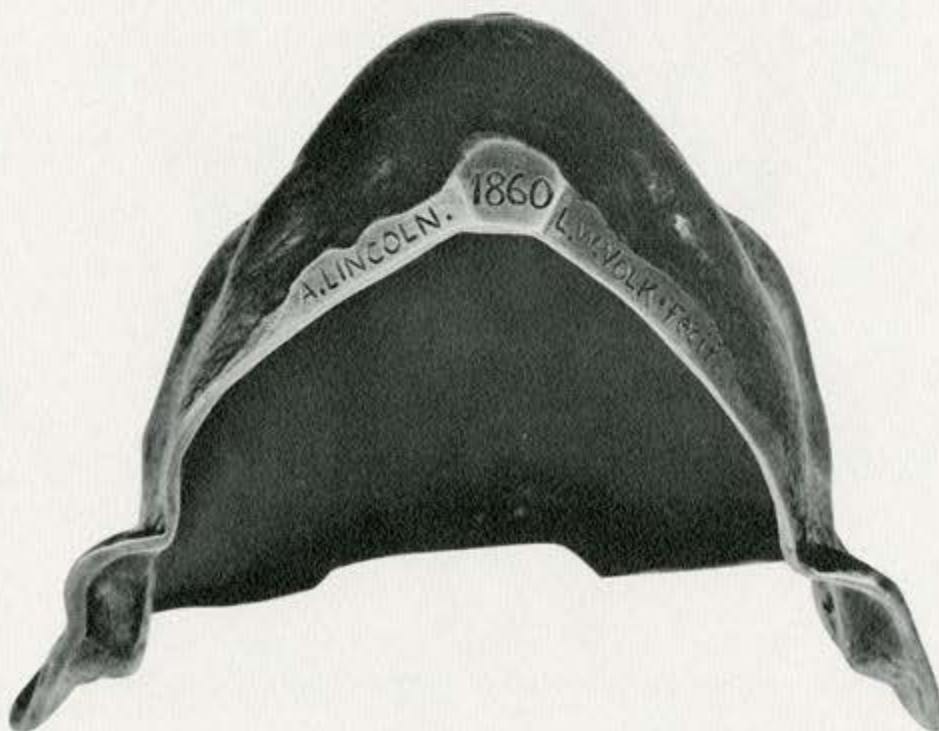


FIGURE 4. The inscription under the chin of the Trigg mask.

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**FIGURE 5.** Note the fine detail in the Trigg bronze mask. Volk used the original mask as the basis for numerous Lincoln busts, none of which equal the mask in dramatic quality. Volk could not resist somewhat idealizing the busts he produced. Despite the eerie quality of the mask (which necessarily lacks eyes and hair), it is a wonderful piece of work. Although numerous inferior plaster copies exist, it is hard to find a good bronze or plaster copy even in museums with substantial Lincoln collections.