

ENCOUNTERS *with*
LINCOLN
*images
and
words*

THOMAS J. TRIMBORN

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Introduction

The life of Abraham Lincoln is the story of a man who stands at the center of American history. Born in 1809 to a poor farming family on the American frontier, he ascended to the presidency of the United States. Even as a very young man, Lincoln knew that he wanted more for himself and that he needed to be educated to reach his goals. He overcame his lack of formal schooling by studying any books he could lay his hands on and teaching himself history, mathematics, surveying, and even the law. In addition, he became a great orator and gifted writer.

As a young man, Lincoln was admired by his friends and neighbors for his hard work, honesty, and strength of character. They encouraged him to enter politics; he lost his first election, but ran again in 1834 and was sent to the Illinois state legislature, where he served four terms. In 1846, Lincoln was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, but lost in his run for the U.S. Senate in 1854.

As the nation became divided over the issue of slavery and its spread into new territories, Lincoln spoke vigorously against it, and against anything that would divide the young nation. His debates with Stephen Douglas propelled him into the national spotlight and helped him win the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 1860. By the time he became president, the nation was on the verge of breaking apart.

Before the 1860 presidential election, southern leaders had urged their states to secede from the Union if Lincoln should win. In December 1860, just a month after the election, South Carolina became the first to do so, followed in January 1861 by five additional states: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana. In March, just two days before

Lincoln was inaugurated, Texas joined the Confederacy. After Fort Sumter was fired upon in April, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee also joined the Confederacy. Eleven states had withdrawn from the Union in the few short months since the election.

Determined to preserve the Union, Lincoln raised an army and vowed to reunite the country. As the war continued, it became more obvious that slavery was the main issue dividing the nation. Lincoln's opposition to slavery caused him to issue the momentous Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, declaring millions of slaves in the Confederacy "forever free." Later that year, Lincoln gave his immortal Gettysburg Address, calling on the nation to finish the task of ensuring freedom and equality for all begun by the soldiers who died in the Battle of Gettysburg.

In April 1865, the war was finally over. Only five days after Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered to the Union, Lincoln was assassinated while attending the theater by actor John Wilkes Booth, who thought he was helping the Southern cause. A shocked and grief-stricken nation hailed Lincoln as the Great Emancipator who had freed the slaves, the savior of his nation and a race of humanity, and a martyr killed for his idea that the nation should be united in peace and equality. Thousands of mourners filed past his remains to pay final respects to their fallen leader, and hundreds of thousands more watched as a funeral train carried his coffin back to his home in Springfield, Illinois.

Prominent religious leaders praised Lincoln in sermons on the Easter Sunday following his death, saying "We had looked up to him as our saviour, our deliverer"; "Ye people, behold a martyr!"; and "The life of Lincoln has

been offered, a bloody sacrifice, upon the altar of human freedom.” The *Chicago Tribune* quoted an Ohio resident’s description of the crowd waiting to see Lincoln’s funeral train as “a great people thus bowing down and worshipping the great dead.”¹

In the decades that followed Lincoln’s passing, a story spread of an African American woman who was part of a Springfield crowd of approximately 75,000 mourners that filed past Lincoln’s open casket when he lay in state there. She patiently held her toddler for hours in the warm May sunshine, slowly inching her way along. When she reached the president, tears streaming down her face, she whispered to the young child between her sobs, “Take a long look honey, he died for you.”²

Since that day long ago, Lincoln’s story has continued to grow and inspire generations

of people. The memory of his honesty, his devotion to justice, his love for the American people, and his determination that this nation should be united in peace and freedom endures. He lives with us as we observe his birthday in February, recall his passing in April, celebrate our country’s birth with a nationally televised concert and fireworks near his memorial in July, and remember his goodness and devotion on each Thanksgiving Day. He is part of our national consciousness and his legacy lives with us still. Just as he led the American people more than 149 years ago, the example of his words and his deeds can lead us now. Abraham Lincoln’s story is our story because Lincoln was and is us at our very best.³

Description of Artwork

Lonely Leader. Colored pencil, 17 x 11 inches ii

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

Springfield's Lincoln. Colored pencil and watercolor, 20 x 15 inches 5

ICON

The Faces of Lincoln. Colored pencil, 15 x 20 inches 7

Hats. Pen and ink, 10 x 15 inches 9

CHARACTER

Mind of Steel. Pen and ink, 17 x 11 inches 11

Melancholy Man. Colored pencil and watercolor, 20 x 15 inches 13

In Prayer. Scratchboard, 18 x 15 inches 14

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This portrait was inspired by Lincoln artist and photographic expert Lloyd Ostendorf's ink wash rendition of a laughing president on the cover of *Lincoln Herald Magazine* (Fall 1987).

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LIVING LEGACY

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