

The Abraham Lincoln Collections at the Indiana Historical Society

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Most Americans consider Illinois the “land of Lincoln,” due in part to the motto added to that state’s automobile license plates during the sesquicentennial of his birth in 1959. Some also know that he was born in Kentucky. Few understand that he spent his formative years, ages seven to twenty-one, in Spencer County, Indiana. Most biographers and historians have reinforced that ignorance either by overlooking Lincoln’s life as a Hoosier or by giving it short shrift. For example, the author of the best contemporary biography of Lincoln—winner of the 2004 Lincoln Prize—devotes just a few pages to the Indiana years.¹

Fortunately, Hoosiers have a wealth of Lincoln resources. The Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Spencer County, a National Park Service site since 1962, provides high-quality interpretation of the Lincoln family and its years in Indiana (1816-1830). Nearby, Lincoln State Park and Gentryville house other sites associated with Lincoln’s

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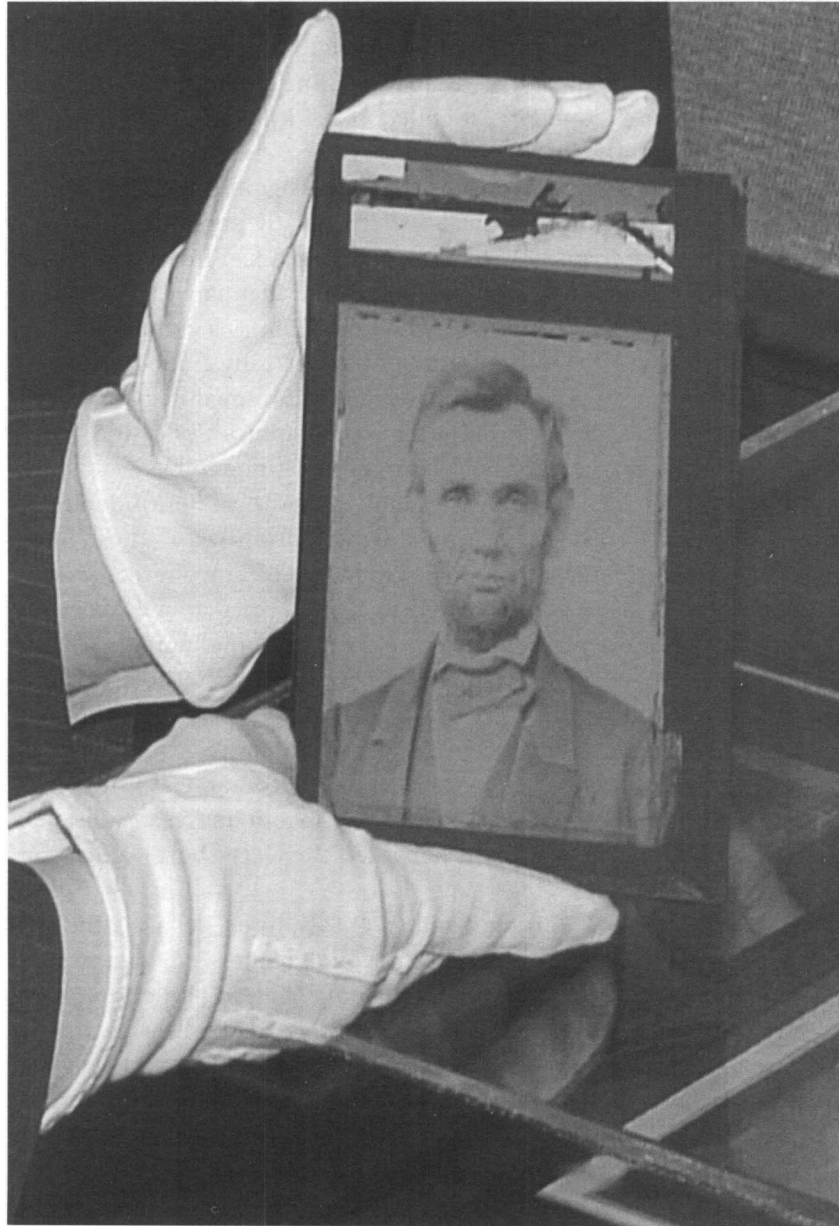
¹Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln* (Harlow, England, 2003). See, by contrast, William Lee Miller, *Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (New York, 2002).

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Indiana years. Three Indiana repositories have Lincoln collections: the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington; the Indiana Historical Society (IHS) in Indianapolis; and the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne (which holds the second largest collection of Lincoln materials in the United States after the Library of Congress).

In 2003 one of these repositories made a significant addition to its collection. The Indiana Historical Society already possessed a Lincoln collection of more than 300 objects, including a leaf from a sum book Lincoln used as a boy, manuscripts from his presidential years, and written reminiscences of him by those who knew him as a child and young man. Thanks to a \$2.9 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, the society has now acquired approximately 800 additional items from two Lincoln collectors. The Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection, by far the larger of the two, consists of photographs, lithographs, engravings, and busts of Lincoln. Collected by Jack L. Smith of South Bend and focused on 1860-1865 and the post-assassination years, these items comprise one of the most important groupings of Lincoln images anywhere. The grant also enabled the IHS to acquire the Daniel R. Weinberg Lincoln Conspirators Collection, which consists of photographs, manuscripts, books, pamphlets, and newspapers relating to the president's assassination. Weinberg, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in Chicago, sold the most significant artifact of the entire acquisition: the original collodion wet-plate negative of a photograph of Lincoln by Alexander Gardner. One of the best-known Lincoln images, it was taken eleven days before the president delivered the Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863.

According to IHS President and CEO Salvatore Cilella, Jr., the new purchases resulted from "incredible coincidences." Cilella visited Weinberg in the summer of 2002 to encourage him to participate in the society's Rare Book and Map Fair as well as to purchase a copy of Weinberg's recently published book on Lincoln's assassins. From that visit came the opportunity to purchase the assassination materials. Weinberg also encouraged Cilella to meet with Smith, whose huge collection of Lincolnia covered every wall in his home, the walls of his office, and the hallways at his corrugated paper box manufacturing company, but also filled his private, two-story gallery in downtown South Bend. Smith, who had experienced a serious heart attack that summer, later recalled to a reporter that he thought he should "'do something about this collection' . . . [H]e did not want his collection 'ending up in a museum or a school . . . because they usually buy these things and



The collodion wet-plate negative of a photograph of Lincoln by Alexander Gardner.
Lincoln sat for the portrait on November 8, 1863.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society

show them once . . . When Sal started talking to me about what the historical society's plans were for the collection and how they are going to use it, and the idea of keeping the collection together as one entity, it seemed very intriguing."²

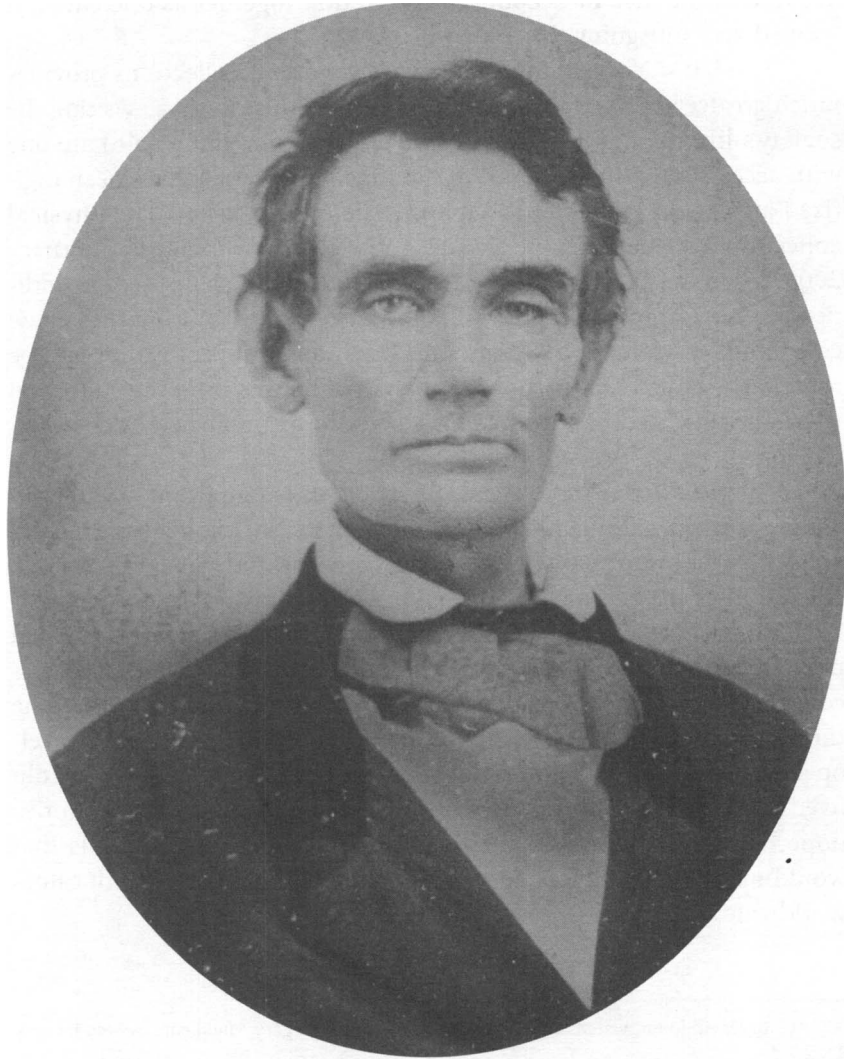
The IHS's acquisition of these two important collections provides much greater access to Lincoln materials—not just to those visiting the society's library and its planned Lincoln exhibits, but also to anyone with access to the Internet. All of the Lincoln materials have been digitized and made available through the society's website.³ The physical collection became available for use at the society's library in February 2005, when the exhibition "The Faces of Lincoln" also opened. In addition, a grant from Bank One will allow the society to bring these new collections into the K-12 classroom. Portions of the collection will be used in traveling exhibitions, and the visual images from the collection will be highlighted in a forthcoming book to be published by the society's press.

The IHS's acquisition of Lincoln materials is significant, in short, in adding to the quality and accessibility of Lincolnia held in Hoosier collections. Fort Wayne's Lincoln Museum possesses a similarly large collection of lithographs, prints, etchings, engravings, and other artifacts that reflect the many ways in which Lincoln's image permeated popular culture during his presidency and afterwards. The Lilly Library's collection is similar, although smaller than the other two. Together, the three collections constitute an important part of the IHS's plan to develop a heritage trail linking the southwest part of the state, where Lincoln lived as a boy, to central and northeastern Indiana. The three repositories hope, moreover, to create a database of their Lincoln materials that would make all of these collections available to scholars and educators worldwide.⁴

²Quoted in David Mannweiler, "Lincoln artifacts boost state legacy," *Indianapolis Star*, January 23, 2003.

³To access the collection, go to http://www.indianahistory.org/library/digital_image/digitalpics.html. The Lincoln collections are searchable by a variety of categories; clicking on "View Images" within the descriptive paragraph on each collection will bring up all of the digital images from that collection.

⁴Other collections already on the Internet or in the digitizing process include the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov>) and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (<http://www.state.il.us/HPA>). Other important on-line collections include the Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (<http://www.hti.umich.edu/lincoln>) and the digital library of Northern Illinois University (<http://www.lib.niu.edu>).



An early photograph of Lincoln, without a beard, taken in August 1858. Printmakers later altered such images to match the president's post-election appearance.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection

The IHS's Lincoln materials are primarily visual—iconographic images. These are a valuable means of telling the Lincoln story, not just as illustrations that supplement the written record, but also as evidence of the regard with which fellow Americans held Lincoln before and after his death.⁵ Because of technological advancements in photography and printing, Lincoln was the first president whose image became well-known to most Americans. The mass marketing of prints—in a time before television and the internet—made it possible for candidates to distribute their pictures to the public and made high-quality printed images affordable for ordinary people. Lincoln and his campaign managers understood the power of the press and believed it was vital for images of him to be flattering. Consequently many included a more pleasing appearance, with a restyled nose, eyes or hair. Images of Lincoln became plentiful during his 1860 campaign via posters, sheet music, paintings, and prints that were available through bookstores, newspaper offices, and the mail.

When Lincoln grew a beard after his election, printers rushed to create new, updated images. Newspapers did not have the technology to reproduce the few photographs available to them and instead used engravings made from the photos. One of the most widely adapted was the photograph taken by Matthew Brady just before the Cooper Union address in February 1860.⁶

During Lincoln's presidency many prints included members of his family, often in pastoral settings; others focused on patriotic symbols, especially connections with George and Martha Washington. Lithographs and engravings of prominent men and events of the Civil War also appeared, especially after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The president's assassination led to still more images—representations of the shooting; of his final hours on his deathbed with his family, cabinet members, and generals; of the honors by thousands of citizens as his body lay in state and was returned to Springfield for burial; and of his apotheosis.⁷

⁵Harold Holzer, email to author, July 1, 2004.

⁶Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York, 2004) provides background on this photograph.

⁷Harold Holzer, Gabor S. Boritt, and Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Lincoln Image: Abraham Lincoln and The Popular Print* (Urbana, Ill., 2001).



Originally issued by a Boston publishing house, this engraving of Lincoln portrays him with one hand resting on a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection

Jack Smith began collecting when he discovered a photograph of his great-grandfather as a Union soldier. He began purchasing prints of Lincoln and Ulysses Grant in 1959. Over forty years he acquired 752 objects that provided a visual record of Lincoln's life, from humble beginnings to the presidency to his lasting image as an American icon. The collection shows Lincoln as politician, family man, and national martyr.⁸

⁸*Picturing Lincoln: The Changing Image of America's 16th President* (South Bend, Ind., n.d.), passim.



This lithograph is one among many images that paired Lincoln with George Washington.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection

All of the Lincoln collections have finding aids and a detailed description of each item. The Jack Smith Collection has been catalogued into seventeen series: Boyhood, Campaigns and Elections, Political Cartoons, Presidency, Politicians, Civil War, White House Years, Quotes and Speeches, Emancipation, Assassination and Death, Iconography, Family, Mary Todd, Residences, Graphic Portraits, Photographic Portraits, and Statues, Busts, and Plaques. Each series is organized alphabetically by artist and title. The composition of the collection is quantitatively uneven. Graphic Portraits, with nearly two hundred items, constitutes the largest series. Iconography ranks second, with eighty-six. Following that are Assassination and Death, with seventy-eight; Photographic Portraits, with sixty-eight; and Statues, Busts, and Plaques, with sixty-seven. Together, these five series account for two-thirds of the collection. Of the remaining twelve series, Boyhood includes the least number of items (seven) and Family the most (thirty-eight).

Each user will find items of special interest in the collection. The reviewer, for instance, appreciated the images of the dubious "birthplace



A lithograph of Lincoln and his family. This composite image was produced after the president's death.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection

cabin” and the lithograph advertising excursions to Lincoln’s birthplace (both catalogued in the Residences series, although they might have been better placed in Iconography). Eleven iconographic images link Lincoln to Washington. (One of them, out of deference to the latter’s symbolic stature, makes the former physically shorter.) Several demonstrate how obsolete items could be resold. The print “Apotheosis of George Washington” became “In Memory of Abraham Lincoln” when the printer placed Lincoln’s head on Washington’s body. An 1852 print featuring the authors of the compromise of 1850 was remade in 1861 with Lincoln’s head on John C. Calhoun’s body. (It was remade one more time, after Lincoln grew a beard.)

The series of political cartoons from the 1860 campaign provides a number of unflattering portraits of the Republican candidate for president. The graphic portraits include Lincoln’s image on “La Flor de Lincoln,” a cigar box label. The photographic portraits series contains the first and the last photographs taken of Lincoln. The family series includes mostly idyllic scenes of the Lincoln family together. These are composite creations, using individual photographs to create posed family settings, since the family was never photographed together.

Daniel R. Weinberg assembled the materials that constitute the Daniel R. Weinberg Collection for a book that was published in 2001.⁹ He has been in the business of purchasing, selling, and appraising items of Americana since 1971. His specializations are in Lincolniana, the American Civil War, and the American presidency. He has helped to build some of the major collections in the United States and has lectured to a number of historical groups.

The Weinberg Collection comprises six series: Assassination, Apprehension, Trial, Execution, Transportation, and Books and Pamphlets. Numerically, the twenty-seven books and pamphlets relating to the conspiracy, published between 1865 and 1997, constitute the largest of the six series. The next largest is the Execution series, which includes the photographs of Alexander Gardner, the only person whom the War Department allowed to document the executions. Many will consider them the most poignant of the images in this group.

The collection contains artifacts, manuscripts, newspapers, and photographs. Artifacts and newspapers account for the smallest number of items (three each). The manuscript collection of twenty-seven items includes eight letters and Winfield Scott Hancock's copy of the original order of execution, used on the scaffold by General John Hartranft to read the charges to the prisoners. Photographs, many of them dealing with the execution, constitute half of the collection.

The public's demand for news, set in the context of the recent murder of the president and the end of the Civil War, spurred the demand for photographs of those who had allegedly conspired with John Wilkes Booth to kill Lincoln and to attempt to kill members of his cabinet. The physical appearance of the prisoners attracted great public interest, because at the time looks were considered important evidence of character. One item in the collection is an albumen carte-de-visite featuring a composite of photographs of seven male conspirators, including Booth. The eighth person tried for conspiracy was boarding-house keeper Mary Surratt, whose son was linked to John Wilkes Booth and whose boarders included Lewis Powell, the would-be assassin of Secretary of State William Seward. Surratt was the only woman and the eldest among the

⁹James L. Swanson and Daniel R. Weinberg, *Lincoln Assassins: Their Trial and Execution: An Illustrated History* (Santa Fe, N. M., 2001). To place these events in larger perspective, see Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Lincoln's Avengers: Justice, Revenge, and Reunion after the Civil War* (New York, 2004).



A lithograph of Mary Surratt, the only woman executed as a conspirator in the assassination of President Lincoln.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Daniel R. Weinberg Lincoln Conspirators Collection

four eventually executed. Efforts to obtain mercy from President Andrew Johnson were unavailing (although later, in the context of the congressional-presidential struggle to control Reconstruction, Johnson became an *ex post facto* supporter of the notion that Surratt's execution had been vindictive). The collection includes a lithograph of Mrs. Surratt, as no photographs were taken of her between her arrest and execution. This was the public's only means of knowing what she looked like. The military tribunal's decision that four should die and the others spend their lives in prison was endorsed by President Johnson and announced to the public just two days before the hangings on July 7, 1865.

The Weinberg acquisition also includes a collodion (wet-plate) negative dated November 8, 1863, that was taken by Alexander Gardner

(1821-1881). Born in Scotland, Gardner developed an interest in the ideas of Robert Owen regarding the plight of the working class. He and nine others came to the United States in 1849 to purchase land in Iowa for a semi-socialistic colony. Upon his return to Scotland, he purchased a weekly newspaper in Glasgow. His visit to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, where he saw the photographs of Matthew Brady, America's leading photographer, changed his life. Within a year he began to devote most of his time to the new art form. He and his family returned to America in the spring of 1856 and settled in New York.

Gardner initiated contact with Brady, who hired him and placed him in charge of his Washington gallery. Gardner became an expert in the new collodion process which was rapidly displacing the daguerreo-type and quickly gained a reputation for being an outstanding photographer. The coming of the war brought him substantial business, as soldiers wanted to be photographed in uniform before going to the front line. Gardner's relationship with Allan Pinkerton, head of the intelligence operation later known as the Secret Service, helped him to secure appointments as chief photographer in the U. S. Topographical Engineers and as a member of the staff of General George McClellan. Gardner's management of Brady's studio in Washington ended, and his government duties were reduced when McClellan was dismissed in November 1862. His ties with Brady already severed, he and his brother James opened their own studio in Washington in May 1863, and hired six of Brady's former associates. Gardner continued to photograph battle scenes thereafter.

Gardner took photographs of Lincoln on seven separate occasions. The photograph taken eleven days before the delivery of the Gettysburg Address is one of the few portraits to show Lincoln looking directly at the viewer. It reveals a haggard president with heavy lines on his face. His "lazy" left eye is noticeable. One of the best-known photographs of Lincoln, it was used by Daniel Chester French as the model for the sculpture in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.¹⁰

The IHS has also digitized its previously extant Lincoln-related collection of some 300 items, dating from the 1820s to the late 1930s, and

¹⁰D. Mark Katz, *Witness to an Era: The Life and Photographs of Alexander Gardner: The Civil War, Lincoln, and the West* (New York, 1991).

has created a useful finding aid which describes in detail objects drawn from a number of collections in the William Henry Smith Memorial Library. It has four parts: "By Lincoln," "To Lincoln," "Certification and Endorsements," and "About Lincoln." By far the largest, the last of the four ranges in date from 1865 to 1938 and includes a number of letters. It also contains nineteen items from the John E. Iglehart Collection (1915) that represent the Evansville attorney's attempt to collect the memories of those who knew Lincoln when he lived in Spencer County.

We are fortunate that the Indiana Historical Society has enhanced its Lincoln collections so substantially and made them accessible to the public in such a variety of ways. Teachers in visual arts as well as social studies and language arts, for example, should be able to utilize these objects to demonstrate the evolution of photographic technology, the use of photographs in creating mass-produced images for newspapers and other media, the impact of such images in a pre-electronic time, and the use of visual imagery in the American political process. The many examples of iconography provide ample opportunity to encourage reflection on the process whereby the collective memory of a people is created.

With the coming of the Lincoln bicentennial, many activities and projects are being planned in Indiana and the other two "Lincoln states."¹¹ The IHS's commitment to ensuring that Indiana's Lincoln will be a significant part of this process is laudable. These acquisitions will help Americans know more about our sixteenth president and, it is hoped, will also lead to Indiana historical societies, libraries, and museums being able to secure more manuscripts and artifacts relating to Lincoln.



¹¹Planning at the national level can be accessed via the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Web site: <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov>.