

LINCOLN ON OUR POSTAGE STAMPS.

*The kindly-carnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.*

—LOWELL.

By C. A. Howard.

This year of grace, 1909, will doubtless long be remembered as the centenary of eminent men. To be sure, almost any year for many centuries back may be found to be the foster-parent of some celebrities, and many of course have produced intellectual stars of the first magnitude. But the year 1809 stands out as remarkable for the number of men of genius that it produced. Tennyson, Holmes, Poe, Lincoln, Gladstone, Darwin, Mendelssohn and Chopin are at least enough to start with, and many lesser lights could be added. Among them all Abraham Lincoln naturally claims the most attention from the American people, as their martyr-President and one of the greatest of their historical characters; and the one hundredth anniversary of his birth will soon be fittingly observed by cities, states and nation.

It is hardly necessary for us here to more than touch upon a few points in his life, and that mainly for the benefit of our foreign readers, to whom he is not so familiar as to us. Abraham Lincoln was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, on February 12, 1809. His ancestry was English, the first Lincoln in America having settled at Hingham, Mass., in 1638. Later the family was found in Virginia and then in Kentucky; and Abraham himself, when twenty-one years old, went to Illinois, in which state he made his career up to the time of his election to the Presidency.

It may seem startling, but is a fact, that all of Lincoln's schooling combined would probably not total more than one year. But he was ambitious, tried hard to learn, and diligently studied the few books to which he had access—the Bible, Shakespeare, Æsop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, Pilgrim's Progress, a history of the United States and a biography of Washington. Doubtless these helped largely in forming that mastery of clear and beautiful English which he later displayed in his oratory and state papers. On his removal to Illinois he helped his father clear and plant some fifteen acres, and it was this work that afterwards earned for him the sobriquet of the "rail splitter" during his presidential campaign.

It may be news to most stamp collectors that Lincoln was at one time connected with the Post Office Dept., but such is the fact. He held the position of postmaster at New Salem, Ill., for three years from May, 1833, and he is said to have "carried the post office in his hat", for the mail came there but once a week. He was a lawyer by profession, and from 1834 to 1840 was a representative in the State Legislature. In 1846 he was elected a Representative to Congress, and during his term was again connected with the work of the Post Office Dept. as a member of the Committee on Post-Offices and Post-Roads.

In 1854 Lincoln began his active campaigning in the anti-slavery movement, which finally resulted in his receiving the nomination for President by the Republican party in 1860. He was elected on November 6th of that year and inaugurated on March 4, 1861. A little over a month later Fort Sumter was fired on

and the great Civil War was under way; and from that time until his death at the hand of the assassin, Booth, on April 15, 1865, his political biography is nearly identical with the history of the United States.

Concerning his personal appearance we quote from Lamon, who says: "He was six feet four inches high, the length of his legs being out of all proportion to that of his body. When he sat on a chair he seemed no taller than an average man, but his knees rose high in front. He weighed about 180 pounds, but was thin through the breast, narrow across the shoulders, and had the general appearance of a consumptive subject. Standing up, he stooped slightly forward; sitting down, he usually crossed his long legs or threw them over the arms of the chair.

"His forehead was high and narrow, inclining backward as it rose; his ears were large and stood out; eyebrows heavy, jutting forward over small sunken blue eyes; nose long, large and blunt; chin projecting far and sharp, curved upward to meet a thick lower lip which hung downward; cheeks flabby, the loose skin falling in folds; a mole on one cheek and an uncommonly prominent Adam's apple in his throat. His hair was dark brown, stiff and unkempt; complexion dark, skin yellow, shrivelled and leathery."

Yet, in spite of these rather discouraging physical peculiarities, the personality of the man was altogether lovable. Alexander H. Stephens, former Vice-President of the Confederacy, who knew him well when in Congress, said of him: "He was warm-hearted; he was generous; he was magnanimous; he was most truly, as he afterwards said on a memorable occasion, 'with malice toward none, with charity for all.' He had a native genius far above his fellows. Every fountain of his heart was overflowing with the 'milk of human kindness.'" Lincoln was fond of fun and jested frequently, in spite of the burdens that lay heavy on his soul. He could tell as well as enjoy a good story, and this reputation causes thousands of them to pass current as having been told by him, without their ever having enjoyed that distinction. It is nevertheless true that few great statesmen were more capable than he of perceiving the kernel of a tale.

It is regrettable that the United States Government lacks the broad-mindedness of the English Government in the matter of allowing the reproduction of its postage stamps for illustrative and educational purposes, else might we present with these notes the cuts of the stamps that bear Lincoln's likeness. However, collectors of United States stamps can readily turn to their albums, if their interest warrants, for practically all the stamps with Lincoln's head are within the means of the average collector.

As we all know, the first stamp to bear the portrait of the then recently assassinated President was the 15 cent issued on August 15, 1866, just sixteen months after his death. This was a new value in the then current set, made

necessary by the adoption of a registration fee of 15 cents, and the new stamp very naturally had Lincoln as its subject. It might really be termed our first mourning stamp, since the color appropriately chosen for it was black.

The portrait that appears upon this stamp is from a photograph by McNulta, taken at Springfield, Ill., just previous to Lincoln's departure for Washington in January, 1861. It is accounted about the truest portrait of Lincoln ever made. His friends at home esteemed it so highly that they chose it as the model for a painting made for the Illinois State House. The original negative, an old-fashioned "wet plate", was not long ago in the historical collection of H. W. Fay, Esq., of De Kalb, Ill.

The next stamp to bear Lincoln's head was the 90 cent of 1869. A careful comparison of this stamp with the 15 cent of the preceding issue will show that the two portraits are identical; in fact this is hardly more than could be expected, since both sets were engraved by the National Bank Note Co., and they naturally used the portrait die already in their possession for the new stamp.

The short-lived issue of 1869 was soon supplanted by the series of 1870, which made a material change in designs and subjects. The Postmaster General's report for that year states that "the designs were selected from marble busts of acknowledged excellence", and names the profile bust of Lincoln shown on the 6 cent stamp as "after Volk". In Melville's valuable little book on United States stamps, under "Biographical Notes" we find: "Volk, Leonard Wells, The portrait of Lincoln on the 1870 issue is probably a copy of this sculptor's portrait bust of the President, made in 1860, and which was burned in the great fire in 1871."

It is true that Volk took a life mask of Lincoln at Chicago, just before his nomination for the Presidency in 1860, but at that time Lincoln wore no beard, and a copy of this bust before me shows his features clean shaven, which had been his wont up to that time. About the time of his election, however, he grew the beard with which we are familiar in his usual portraits, and if we look carefully at the bust on the 6 cent stamp of 1870 we shall be at once convinced that it is *not* the bust that Volk made from the life mask in 1860, but must be a later one since the beard is plainly visible. I find that Volk also made a statue of Lincoln for the Capitol at Springfield, Ill., and though I have no picture of this at hand, I presume it must be the one from which the profile on the stamp is taken.

It will be remembered, of course, that the design of this 6 cent stamp, bearing the profile, was used for the official stamps of that value in the Agriculture, Executive, Interior, Justice, Navy, State, Treasury and War Department sets of 1873.

Once again, in 1890, another new series of stamps, in the reduced size now so common, brought a change in the subjects presented. Portraits were again introduced, among them being Lincoln's, this time on the 4 cent stamp.

The official description says: "Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, after a photograph from life." In default of this note, which apparently settles it, one would say that the stamp portrait was an almost exact copy of the painting by William Marshall. This may all tally, possibly, for Marshall *may* have done his portrait from a photograph, or perhaps the photograph was really of Marshall's painting! Such things have happened. However, Brady, the Washington photographer, who took quite a number of photographs of Lincoln, afterward sold his original negatives to the Government and the head on this stamp may have been taken from one of these, which are now in the War Department collection.

With the series of 1902, we have again a portrait of Lincoln, transferred to the 5 cent value. It is similar to that on the 4 cent of 1890, and is evidently also from a photograph. The same portrait

appears on the 12 centavos of the current issue for the Philippines, both stamps having been engraved by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

One curious representation of Lincoln is found in the medallion profile on the large 25 cent newspaper stamp of 1865. The official description calls it "a misty style of engraving", and it is evidently intended to suggest the cameo effect of a coin or medal.

The appearance of the newest issue of United States stamps, limited in design to Washington's profile with the sole exception of Franklin's, has brought forth a great amount of criticism particularly on account of the omission of Lincoln, who might also have been retained on the 5 cent stamp both from sentimental and historical reasons. The fact that this is the centenary of Lincoln's birth has caused more than usual notice to be taken of it, and the outcome of a

resolution introduced in Congress by Representative Dawson of Iowa is that a commemorative 2 cent stamp is to be issued on February 12 of this year. The stamp will conform in design to the present series, but the head will be a profile of Lincoln, turned to the right, taken from a copy in the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington of the statue by Saint Gaudens at the entrance to Lincoln Park in Chicago. The statue is of bronze, eleven and a half feet high, and is considered a wonderfully real, yet ideal portrait of the martyred President. The only addition to the regular stamp design will be a ribbon beneath the oval bearing the legend: 1809—FEB. 12,—1909.

This is well enough for commemoration, but let us work to get the profile permanently back on the 5 cent stamp where it rightfully belongs, in company with Washington.

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