



Suggested for families

## Seeing Mr. Lincoln: Portraits of a President

Abraham Lincoln is one of the best-known American Presidents. He is immediately recognizable to us today, even though he lived over 150 years ago and none of us have ever met him. How is that possible? The answer is because of **art**!



In 1860, when Lincoln was running for President, artist Leonard Wells Volk used plaster to cover Lincoln's face, creating a mold. From that mold Volk made a 3D life mask, and ever since we have known exactly what Lincoln looked like!

A few months later, Volk made molds of Lincoln's hands. His right one was swollen "on account of excessive hand-shaking the evening before."

Bronze versions of Lincoln's life masks, made from these same molds, are now part of MAG's collection.

Volk later used his life masks of Lincoln's face and hands to create several statues of Lincoln, including one topping the [Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Rochester's own Washington Square Park](#).

This small bronze version of that statue is part of MAG's collection too.



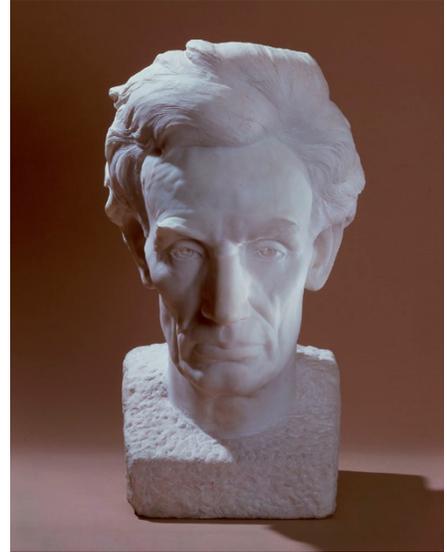
Top: Leonard Wells Volk, *Life Mask and Hands of Abraham Lincoln*, 1886. Bronze. Gift of Thomas H. and Marion J. Hawks, by exchange, 1998.37.1-2a-b

Right: Leonard Wells Volk, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1891. Bronze. Maurice R. and Maxine B. Forman Fund, 2008.29



Long after Lincoln's death, other artists including George Grey Barnard used Volk's life mask as a model for their own portrait works.

Even though Lincoln famously wore a beard, notice that he is clean-shaven—without any beard—in both portraits by Volk and Barnard.



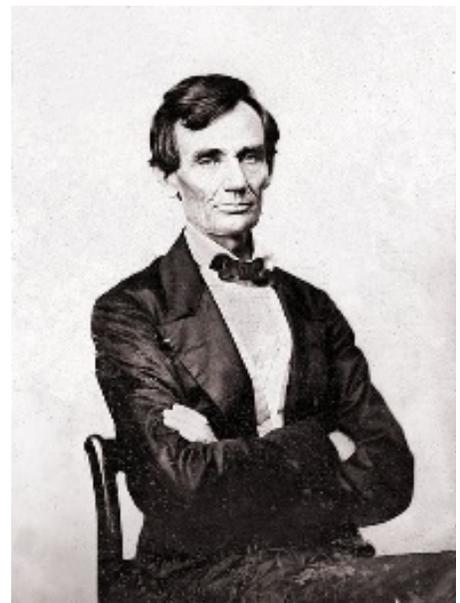
Left: A young visitor meets the marble bust (portrait sculpture) of Abraham Lincoln by artist George Grey Barnard, on view in MAG's Cameros Gallery. Photo by J. Adam Fester.  
Right: George Grey Barnard, *Abraham Lincoln*, ca 1918. Marble. Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 1986.5

He also appears beardless in portraits of him made with the relatively new art form of photography.

***Did you know?***

President Lincoln was among the first politicians and presidents to be photographed.

We even know exactly when and why Lincoln grew his beard . . . read on!



Preston Butler, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1860.  
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



## Advice from a child . . .



While Lincoln was running for President (just about the time his life mask was made), he received a letter from 11-year-old Grace Bedell, who lived in Chautauqua County, western New York. She wrote,

*". . . if you will let your whiskers grow . . . you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President."*

Lincoln took Grace's advice and won the election. On his way to Washington, D.C. for his inauguration, Lincoln's train stopped in western New York so Mr. Lincoln and Grace could meet in person!

Douglas Warner Gorsline, *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*, ca. 1978. Brush and black and gray ink on paper. Tribute Fund, 1995.41.2

The story of Grace and her letter to Lincoln is the subject of a book, called *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*. The illustrations in this book are by Douglas Gorsline, a Rochester artist. His original ink drawings are now in MAG's collection.



### ***Did you know?***

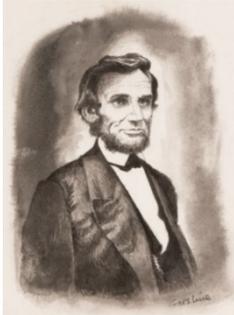
President Lincoln became the first US President to wear a full beard.

Left: Anthony Berger, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1864. Chromolithograph. Gift of Henry C. Matheis Family Trust. 2007.4.  
Right: US one-cent coin



Douglas Gorsline made several drawings for *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*. See if you can match the images below with the text on the next page.

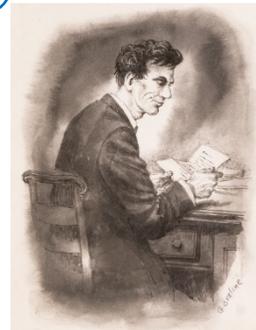
A



B



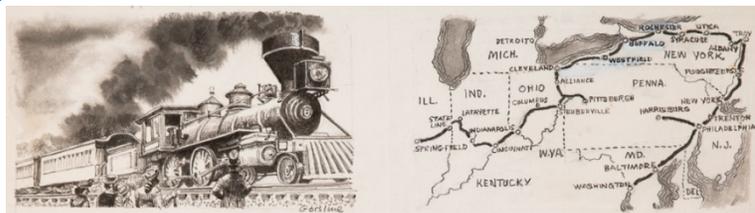
C



D



E



F



G



H



I



Douglas Warner Gorsline, *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*, ca. 1978.  
 Brush and black and gray ink on paper. Tribute Fund, 1995.41.2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

- \_\_\_ 1) [To] Hon. A B Lincoln, Oct. 15, 1860  
Dear Sir,  
I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be president of the United States very much...
- Good bye,  
Grace Bedell
- \_\_\_ 2) [To] Miss Grace Bedell, Springfield, Ills. October 19, 1860  
Your very agreeable letter of the 15th is received. . . . As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it . . . silly . . . if I were to begin now?
- Your very sincere well-wisher,  
A. Lincoln
- \_\_\_ 3) The people of Springfield, Illinois celebrate the news that Abraham Lincoln has just been elected President.
- \_\_\_ 4) Mr. Lincoln is photographed with his new whiskers as he leaves his home in Springfield for Washington.
- \_\_\_ 5) Mr. Lincoln traveled from his home to Washington by train, stopping in as many cities as he could.
- \_\_\_ 6) From the train President-elect Lincoln introduces his wife to the people, "Here we are—I'm giving you the long and short of it."
- \_\_\_ 7) Mr. Lincoln greets Grace Bedell at the station. "I let these whiskers grow just for you."
- \_\_\_ 8) People liked Mr. Lincoln's new look and forgot that he had ever been seen without his beard.
- \_\_\_ 9) Abraham Lincoln's bearded face later appeared on coins and stamps, in paintings and photographs, and on statues.

Answers:  
1-C; 2-F; 3-B; 4-A; 5-E; 6-I; 7-D; 8-G; 9-H

