

# Abraham Lincoln

(1809-1865)

Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States, guided the nation through its devastating Civil War and remains much beloved and honored as one of the world's great leaders. Lincoln was born in Hardin (now Larue) County, Kentucky. He moved with his family to frontier Indiana in 1816, and then to Illinois in 1830. After serving four terms in the Illinois legislature, Lincoln was elected as a Whig to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1846. He did not seek reelection and returned to Springfield, Illinois, where he established a statewide reputation as an attorney. Although unsuccessful as a Whig candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1855, Lincoln was the newly formed Republican Party's standard-bearer for the same seat three years later. In that race, Lincoln captured national recognition by engaging Democrat Stephen A. Douglas in a dramatic series of public debates, but Lincoln ultimately lost to Douglas on election day.

In 1860 Lincoln was elected the nation's first Republican president. By the



**Delaware native, Civil War nurse, and sculptor Sarah Fisher Ames.**  
(Architect of the Capitol)

**F**rustratingly little is known about the life and career of Sarah Fisher Ames. Born Sarah Clampitt in Lewes, Delaware, she moved at some point to Boston, where she studied art. She spent time in Rome, but whether she studied formally there is not known. Wife of the portrait painter Joseph Alexander Ames, she produced at least five busts of President Lincoln, but the circumstances of their production are not well documented. While Ames was able to patent a bust of the 16th president in 1866, the drawings were later destroyed in a U.S. Patent and Trademark building fire.

As a nurse during the Civil War, Ames was responsible for the temporary hospital established in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. One source reports that through this position she knew Lincoln “in an intimate and friendly way,” but she also might have met the president through her activity as an antislavery advocate.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the origin of their association, it likely led to formal sessions with Lincoln, in which Ames was able to sketch, and perhaps model, his features.

Author Mary Clemmer Ames (no relation to the artist) compared one of the sculptor's renderings of Lincoln with Vinnie Ream's full-length statue of the president in the Capitol Rotunda:

Mr. Lincoln's living face was one of the most interesting ever given to man. . . . Mrs. Sarah Ames, in her bust of Lincoln . . . has transfixed more of the soul of Lincoln in the brow and eyes of his face than Miss Ream has in all the weary outline of her many feet of marble. . . . But any one who ever saw . . . his living humanity must thank Mrs. Ames for having reflected and transfixed it in the brows and eyes of this marble.<sup>2</sup>

This effusive praise by Mary Clemmer Ames is not entirely unwarranted. The head of the Senate bust of Lincoln is serene and poised, the gaze level, and the whole work is finely idealized. The pupils of the eyes are only lightly drilled, lending a slight remoteness to the face, and the toga associates Lincoln with the greatly admired Roman republic.

In 1868 the Joint Committee on the Library purchased this bust of Lincoln from Sarah Fisher Ames for \$2,000 for the Capitol. The Massachusetts Statehouse, Williams College Museum of Art, and the Lynn Historical Society—all in Massachusetts—and the Woodmere Art Museum in Pennsylvania hold additional busts of the president by Ames.

Other known works by the artist include a plaster bust of U.S. Grant, which was exhibited at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, and busts of American diplomat Anson Burlingame and railroad engineer Ross Winans. Ames died in 1901 in Washington, D.C.

*Abraham Lincoln*

**Sarah Fisher Clampitt Ames (1817-1901)**

Marble, 1868

35 x 25¼ x 13½ inches (88.9 x 64.1 x 34.3 cm)

Signed and dated (centered on base at back): Sarah Fisher Ames Sculpt / 1868

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1868

Cat. no. 21.00013



time of his inauguration in March 1861, seven Southern states had seceded from the Union, formed their own separate government, and inaugurated Jefferson Davis as its president. Concerned with preserving the Union from dissolution, Lincoln presented an inaugural address that was conciliatory in nature, assuring that slavery would not be abolished where it then existed. But one month later, when Confederate forces opened fire on Charleston's Fort Sumter while Congress was in recess, Lincoln acted decisively. He called up the militia; proclaimed a blockade; and suspended the writ of *habeas corpus*, which ensures a citizen's right to be brought before a court before imprisonment. The war that ensued lasted for four years, during which time Lincoln assumed greater executive power than any previous U.S. president.

Of all Lincoln's actions during the Civil War, he is perhaps best remembered for the Emancipation Proclamation, which he issued on January 1, 1863. Although it did not abolish slavery nationwide, it put slaveholders on notice and gave the conflict an undeniable moral imperative. When Lincoln was reelected in 1864, the war's end was in sight, and the president urged leniency toward the Southern states. His plan for postwar reconstruction advocated the forming of new state governments that would be loyal to the Union, a plan later adopted by President Andrew Johnson. Lincoln's presidency ended abruptly when he was shot by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865, in Washington, D.C.'s Ford's Theater. Lincoln died the following day.

Created as a memorial, this mosaic portrait of President Abraham Lincoln was a gift to the United States from Italian artist and businessman Antonio Salviati. The mosaic was the work of the firm of Salviati, Burke, and Company of Venice and London. The House of Representatives passed legislation accepting the gift on July 24, 1866, and the Senate immediately concurred. Almost 20 years later Salviati's firm gave a similar portrait to the United States in memory of the nation's second assassinated president, James A. Garfield (p. 162).

The gift of the Lincoln portrait came early in Salviati's career, which was dedicated to restoring to prominence the medieval art of mosaic. Salviati founded his "laboratory of mosaic art" in Venice in 1859. He showed his works in 1861 at a national exhibition in Florence and in 1863 at an industrial exposition in Vienna. Doubtless the gift of the Lincoln portrait was both an honest expression of appreciation for the life of Lincoln—described by Salviati as "one of the world's greatest heroes"—and an effort to promote his work internationally. In the years that followed, Salviati exhibited at major expositions in Paris, Naples, London, Milan, and Boston, where he won numerous gold medals and diplomas of honor. At the 1862 London Exposition, the British press touted "the superiority of the enamel work . . . and mosaics sent by the Salviati establishment in Venice." The Salviati company developed a reputation for producing exquisite mosaic portraits of both ancient and modern subjects and for undertaking vast mural decorations for palaces and churches.

Antonio Salviati died in Venice on January 25, 1890, leaving his business to his two sons. The firm's mosaic work occupies important architectural spaces in St. Paul's Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Abbey in London, and in the Albert Memorial Chapel at Windsor Castle in England. In the United States, the Stanford Memorial Church at Stanford University in California is decorated with massive Salviati mosaics. The exterior of the north facade depicts *Christ Welcoming the Righteous into the Kingdom of God*; when completed in 1901 it was the largest mosaic in America. The devastating 1906 San Francisco earthquake destroyed this priceless work, but it was recreated from the original drawings, preserved in Italy, several years later. Salviati's company continues today to produce glass art of the highest quality.



*Abraham Lincoln*

**Antonio Salviati (1816-1890)**

Enamel mosaic, 1866

22¾ x 20¼ inches (oval) (57.8 x 51.4 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of the artist, 1866

Accepted by concurrent resolution dated July 25, 1866

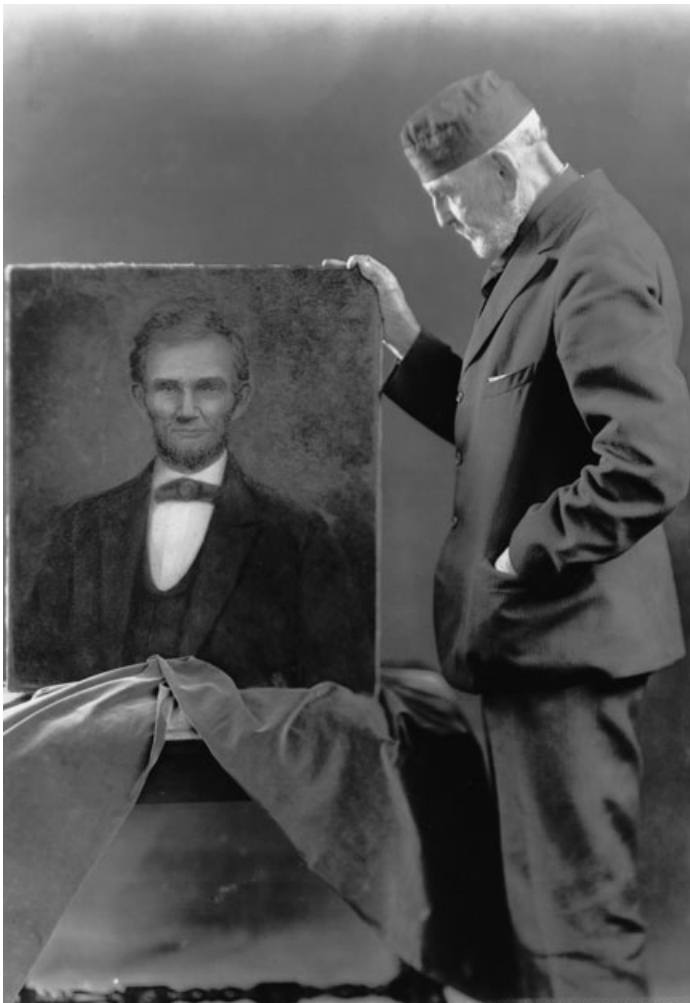
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According to artist Freeman Thorp, this portrait of Abraham Lincoln was originally executed in approximately 1879 from life sketches in a specially created studio on the fourth floor of the Senate wing of the U.S. Capitol. Four decades later the portrait was purchased from Thorp for the Capitol. At the time of its acquisition in 1920, Thorp described in a letter to the Joint Committee on the Library the intensity with which he had observed Lincoln: “I studied him very carefully and thoroughly from life just before his inauguration, and later at the White House and at Gettysburg when he made his famous address, sketching him, making a descriptive delineation such as artists use, memorizing his expression and how he looked when animated.” The artist believed that these observations allowed him to create an accurate portrait of the president, and that “it would be impracticable for any future portrait painter who had not known him in life to put the real Lincoln on canvas.”

By a Senate resolution approved April 5, 1920, the Joint Committee was directed “to engage an artist of reputation and ability to paint an oil portrait of the late Abraham Lincoln, former President of the United States, and to place the same in the Senate wing of the Capitol building, at a cost not to exceed \$2,000.”<sup>1</sup> Several weeks later, the committee authorized payment of \$2,000 to Freeman Thorp for his portrait of Lincoln. While an 1872 newspaper article acknowledged that some viewers considered Thorp’s portraits “too dark,” the writer suggested that this feature instead gives the works a “richness of tone,” lending facial expressions a “wonderful distinctness.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, Thorp painted a number of portraits of prominent Americans, including several other U.S. presidents. The Smithsonian Institution’s Inventory of American Painting and Sculpture lists 46 works by Thorp; eight of these, including the painting of Lincoln, are now held within the U.S. Capitol. Thorp’s other work in the Senate is the oil portrait of Assistant Doorkeeper Isaac Bassett (p. 28).



**Artist Freeman Thorp with his portrait of Abraham Lincoln, 1920.**  
(Architect of the Capitol)



*Abraham Lincoln*

**Freeman Thorp (1844-1922)**

Oil on canvas, ca. 1879-1920

29<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (74.6 x 61.9 cm)

Signed (upper and lower right corners): Thorp

Commissioned by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1920

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1920

Cat. no. 31.00008

