

Collection #
P 0420

**GLASS-PLATE NEGATIVE OF ALEXANDER GARDNER
ABRAHAM LINCOLN PORTRAIT,
CA. 1864**

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Processed by

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25 May 2004

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 wet-plate collodion glass negative, 1 envelope, and 1 print

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1864, ca. 1920s, 2004

PROVENANCE: Daniel R. Weinberg, Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, Inc., Chicago, Illinois. Acquired through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, 28 January 2003.

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http://indianahistory.org/library/digital_image/digitalpics.html

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics collection (P 0406); Daniel R. Weinberg Lincoln Conspirators Collection (P 0409); Abraham Lincoln-Related Pictures (P 0452)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2003.0193

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alexander Gardner was born in Paisley, Scotland, on 17 October 1821 to James Gardner and Jean Glenn. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Glasgow, where his twin sisters and younger brother were born. When Alexander was young, his mother encouraged his academic studies, and he excelled in astronomy, botany, and chemistry. At the age of fourteen Gardner left school and became apprenticed to a jeweler, where he stayed until 1842.

Because of his position as a jeweler's apprentice and craftsman, Gardner held a privileged place in society. However, with his Calvinistic upbringing and his interest in the socialist ideas being advocated by Robert Owen, he developed an interest in the plight of the working class. In 1848, Gardner dreamed of forming a semi-socialistic colony in the United States. In June 1850, Gardner, his brother James Gardner, and eight others traveled to the United States, where they purchased land near Monona, Iowa. Alexander Gardner never lived there; instead, he returned to Glasgow to help raise more money and recruit new members.

With some of his earnings Gardner purchased a newspaper, the *Glasgow Sentinel*, in April 1851. The newspaper was published every Saturday and reported on national and international news. Gardner wrote the editorials, and in them he promoted social reforms that would benefit the working class. The *Glasgow Sentinel* became the second-best selling newspaper in the city within three months of Gardner purchasing it.

In May 1851, Gardner visited the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, London, where he saw the photographs of Mathew Brady, the premier American photographer. Upon his return to Glasgow, Gardner began to experiment with photography and started reviewing exhibitions of photographs in the newspaper. Early in 1852, he pulled out of active association with the paper and devoted his time to learning about the new art of photography.

In the spring of 1856, Gardner and his family immigrated to the United States. When they arrived, Gardner received news from the colony in Iowa that most of his friends and family had fallen victim to tuberculosis. Upon hearing this news, he decided to keep his family in New York and initiated contact with Brady.

Brady hired Gardner in February 1858 and placed him in charge of Brady's gallery in Washington, D.C. Gardner had become an expert in the new collodion (wet-plate process) photographs that were rapidly replacing the daguerreotype, and he quickly developed a reputation as an outstanding portrait photographer. Gardner invented the Imperial photograph, which was a large print measuring 17 by 21 inches. These were very popular, and Brady was able to sell them for between \$50 and \$750, depending on how much retouching was required.

With Abraham Lincoln's victory in the November 1860 presidential election came the threat of war. Gardner began preparing for the changes it would certainly bring to a photographer working in Washington, D.C. There was a dramatic increase in the demand for Gardner's work as soldiers wanted to be photographed in uniform before going to the front line. Most of the soldiers thought the war would be a short one and wanted to have a picture of themselves in uniform to send to their loved ones while there still was a war.

In July 1861, Brady, his assistant, a newspaper reporter, and Alfred Waud, a sketch artist working for *Harper's Weekly*, witnessed Bull Run, the first major battle of the war. It was because of Gardner's relationship with Allan Pinkerton, who was head of the intelligence operation that became known as the Secret Service, that Brady's idea to photograph the war front was presented to Lincoln. Pinkerton then recommended Gardner for the position of chief photographer under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Topographical Engineers. In November 1861, Gardner was appointed to the staff of General George McClellan, who at that time was the commander of the Army of the Potomac. With his appointment, Gardner's management of Brady's Washington, D.C., gallery ended. Gardner was granted the honorary rank of captain and photographed the battle of Antietam (September 1862), developing in his own traveling darkroom.

When Lincoln dismissed McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac on 7 November 1862, Gardner's responsibilities as chief photographer were reduced. This led him to reconsider his association with Brady, and sometime in early November he decided to split with Brady. During the winter, Gardner worked in the field following General Ambrose Burnside, taking photographs at the Battle of Fredericksburg (December 1862). He then followed General Joseph Hooker. On 26 May 1863, Alexander and his brother James opened their own studio on the second floor of a building on the corner of Seventh and D streets in Washington, D.C. When the studio opened, the Gardners obtained the services of Alexander's old associates at Brady's—Timothy O'Sullivan, James Gibson, William Pywell, David Knox, John Reekie, and W. Morris Smith. During this time Alexander Gardner photographed the battle of Gettysburg (July 1863) and the siege of Petersburg (June 1864–April 1865).

After Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, Gardner was asked by the War Department to take pictures of the accused Lincoln conspirators who were being held on the ironclads *Montauk* and *Saugus*, and he was the only photographer allowed to view the execution of four of the conspirators on 7 July 1865. Gardner was also the only photographer allowed to photograph the execution of Captain Henry Wirz, who was the commander of Andersonville Prison, on 10 November 1865.

After the war Gardner's gallery continued to prosper with a variety of projects, and he published a two-volume collection of one hundred photographs taken during the Civil War, titled *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War*. In 1867, Gardner began his involvement with the Union Pacific Railway Expedition as chief photographer. In September of that year, Gardner traveled with his son and friend William Pywell to St. Louis to document the building of the railroad. In April 1868, Gardner was asked to be the official photographer for the Fort Laramie Treaty. Gardner took two hundred photographs

of the Native Americans of the Northern Plains and published them as *Scenes in the Indian Country*.

Gardner spent his later years working in a philanthropic capacity. He copied a thousand daguerreotypes for the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C. He worked with the Masonic Mutual Relief Association, becoming its president on 18 November 1882, and helped found the Saint John's Mite Association to help Washington's poor. Early in December 1882, Gardner became ill and his condition deteriorated rapidly. He died on 10 December 1882 at the age of sixty-one.

Moses Parker Rice was born in Nova Scotia, Canada, in May 1840 to Robert Muckford Rice and Sarah Maria Ingraham. He was an assistant to Alexander Gardner and later had his own studio, Moses P. Rice and Sons, in Washington, D.C. He died in 1925 and was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Sources:

Katz, D. Mark. *Witness to an Era: The Life and Photographs of Alexander Gardner: The Civil War, Lincoln, and the West*. New York: Viking, 1991. General Collection Folio: TR140.G37 K37 1991

Folsom, Ed. "Notes on Major Walt Whitman Photographers" in *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1986, p. 66 (<http://www.ir.uiowa.edu/wwqr>). Accessed 6 February 2012.

The Edmund Rice Association. *Nova Scotia Planter Descendants of Edmund Rice* (<http://www.george-king.com/Planter/p72.htm#i256244>). Accessed 6 February 2012.

U.S. Census, 1870, 1880, 1900 (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>). Accessed 6 February 2012.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of a ca. 1864 contemporaneous wet-plate collodion glass negative of the original Alexander Gardner wet-plate collodion image taken of Abraham Lincoln on 8 November 1863, the envelope in which IHS received the negative, and a 2004 print made from a duplicate negative (a negative of a transparency output from a digital scan of the ca. 1864 negative). The fate of the original 1863 negative is unknown. The ca. 1864 negative was most likely made by Moses P. Rice (1840–1925), who was one of Gardner’s studio photographers in Washington, D.C.

Collodion wet-plate negatives were made from an early photographic technique invented by Frederick Scott Archer of England in 1851. The process was a much faster way of making negatives than previous methods. A wet plate collodion negative on glass is a polished glass plate that has been hand-coated with a film of liquid chemicals, chiefly cellulose nitrate in ether and alcohol (collodion), and light sensitive silver nitrate. The coated glass plate was placed into the camera, exposed, developed, and fixed while still wet. Dried plates were then varnished.

Gardner photographed Abraham Lincoln on seven separate occasions. In 1863, artist and sculptor Sarah Fisher Ames commissioned Gardner to make this portrait of Lincoln. Lincoln sat for it on 8 November, just eleven days before delivering the Gettysburg Address. He went to the studio with his two secretaries and had five poses taken. This pose is one of the rare photographs of Lincoln looking directly at the viewer. It shows a haggard president with heavy lines on his face. His “lazy” left eye is noticeable. It is one of the best-known photographs of Lincoln and was used by sculptor Daniel Chester French as the model for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

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Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, wet-plate collodion glass negative, likely made by Moses P. Rice, ca. 1864, from the portrait taken by Alexander Gardner on 8 November 1863

Kodak envelope, ca. 1920s, in which IHS received the negative. Written on envelope: "This is the original plate of Lincoln made 1864 (by Rice)."

Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, photographic print, 2004

CONTAINER

Glass Negatives,
Box 1
*Restricted

Manuscript Collections:
Folder 1

Photographs,
Folder 1

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0420).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.