

IN THE WINTER OF 1857, Lincoln was in Chicago attending a lawsuit and campaigning for the new Republican party. Some of his attorney friends asked for a photograph. Lincoln had none. Possibly he had not faced a camera since Shepherd posed him in Springfield eleven years earlier.

“I don’t know why you boys want such a homely face,” said Lincoln. “I’m really not dressed up to have my picture taken.”

Declared an eyewitness: “He went in Hesler’s gallery with his hair in a tumble. . . . Hesler passed his hand twice through Mr. L’s hair to get it away from his forehead.”

Lincoln looked in a mirror, then combed his hair with his fingers. The result delighted his friends and amused Lincoln.

Lincoln commented later: “A short time before my nomination [for U. S. senator], I was in Chicago. . . . A photographer of that city [Hesler] asked me to sit for a picture, and I did so. This coarse, rough hair of mine was in a particularly bad tousle at the time, and the picture presented me in all its fright. After my nomination, this being about the only picture of me there was, copies were struck to show those who had never seen me how I looked. One newsboy carried them around to sell, and had for his cry: ‘Here’s your likeness of Old Abe! Will look a good deal better when he gets his hair combed!’ ”

To James F. Babcock, Lincoln wrote that he considered Hesler’s photograph “a very true one; though my wife and many others do not. My impression is that their objection arises from the disordered condition of the hair.”



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ALEXANDER HESLER
Lincoln’s campaign photographer