



Ostendorf collection Variant O-5

HERE IS LINCOLN as he appeared in court on the day he won his most famous case. Defending Duff Armstrong against a murder-at-midnight charge, Lincoln produced an old almanac to show that the state's witness could not have seen Armstrong kill the victim because there was no moonlight.

After the acquittal, Lincoln was stopped in the street by Abraham Byers, an eighteen-year-old amateur photographer who had acquired his gallery in settlement of a debt. Recalled Byers: "Lincoln was attending court and boarded at the National Hotel, where I did. After dinner he stepped out on the street ahead of me. I caught up with him, as I went to my rooms, and said to him: 'Mr. Lincoln, I want you to go upstairs with me to my gallery; I wish to take an ambrotype of you.'

"He cast his eyes down on his old holland linen suit which had no semblance of starch in it, and said: 'These clothes are dirty and unfit for a picture.' But I insisted and he finally went with me."

When Byers took his picture, he used the process of ambrotyping, a method of photography which had supplanted the daguerreotype about 1856. The ambrotype was a collodion or wet-glass plate which, when developed and dried, could be used as a negative to produce an unlimited number of duplicate pictures on paper, or could become a positive likeness when mounted against a dark background. Unlike the daguerreotype, it was free from reflective glare.

Of the known photographs of Lincoln, twelve are ambrotypes. Byers took two ambrotypes of Lincoln, retaining one. It was not until 1895 that the second turned up, published by Ida Tarbell in *McClure's* magazine. The two photographs are so similar that they are here classified as a single pose. In 1947, Byers' widow willed her original to the University of Nebraska.