

Rare, significant photographic image of Abraham Lincoln will headline University Archives' online-only auction, April 23

The interpositive - a silver gelatin positive transparency on glass - is perhaps the most vivid and lifelike photographic likeness of Lincoln ever produced.

WILTON, CT, UNITED STATES, April 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Wednesday, April 23rd, auction house University Archives will present an extraordinary artifact: a [photographic image of President Abraham Lincoln](#), created circa 1895-1900 by George B. Ayres (1829-1905) using Alexander Hesler's (1823-1895) original 1860 collodion negative of Portrait Sitting No. 2. Objects of this profound historical consequence and rare visual immediacy rarely come to auction.

"The [interpositive - a silver gelatin positive transparency on glass](#) - represents perhaps the most vivid and lifelike photographic likeness of Lincoln ever produced," said John Reznikoff, the president and owner of University Archives. "It is offered in time for [the 160th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination](#), in 1865, and will be the star lot in an auction featuring items signed by other U.S. presidents, in addition to many other luminaries throughout history."

Here is a link to the interpositive on the University Archives website:

https://www.universityarchives.com/auction-lot/best-image-of-abraham-lincoln-closest...-to-seei_05a4e26847. It is the headliner lot in the online-only Rare Autographs, Books & Photos auction, beginning at 10am Eastern time. Internet bidding will be facilitated by LiveAuctioneers.com, Invaluable., Auctionzip.com and UniversityArchives.com.



The interpositive measures 8.625 inches by 11 inches and is housed in an elegant, custom-built cabinet presentation case designed by Arnold VanDenburgh of Rochester, N.Y.

The interpositive was cleaned and restored by experts at the George Eastman House & International Museum of Photography & Film (Rochester, N.Y.) in 2007, following a two-year exploratory research phase. It measures 8.625 inches by 11 inches and is housed in an elegant custom-built cabinet presentation case designed by Arnold VanDenburgh of Rochester, N.Y.

The mahogany veneer case has a slanted top with two hinged doors. It's illuminated by a hidden light source that dramatically backlights the image when the doors are opened and extinguishes it upon closure. The elegant mechanism offers an extraordinary viewing experience. The case measures 14.5 inches by 16 inches by 13.5 inches.

The Lincoln interpositive was prominently featured in George Eastman House events in January 2009, to celebrate the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. The item's provenance traces it to the family of Lincoln scholar King Hostick, by descent through a close friend. The lot will require third-party shipping. University Archives can recommend a fine art shipper.



Photographic image (interpositive) of President Abraham Lincoln, created circa 1895-1900 by George B. Ayres, using Alexander Hesler's original 1860 collodion negative.

Abraham Lincoln is reputed to have said of the photograph: "That looks better and expresses me better than any I have ever seen; if it pleases the people I am satisfied." Lincoln's law partner, W.H. Herndon, said of the portrait that "no other artist has ever caught it," referring to Lincoln's special essence.

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Grant Romer, George Eastman House's Director of Photograph Conservation for decades, described this interpositive as "the closest you will ever get to seeing Lincoln, short of putting your eyeballs on the man himself."

Every detail of Lincoln's visage is rendered with stunning precision: from the furrowed brow and coarse texture of his hair to the mole upon his right cheek and the singular curve of his lower lip. Glass plate photography like this provides an incredible degree of high-definition detail that is

normally dulled by paper print photography.

Comparable objects of this caliber are virtually nonexistent in private hands. Ayres's interpositives, as well as those of other photographers (particularly ones of this size, clarity, and historic resonance), probably have never been seen before on the market.

"Consulting recent prices achieved through private sales and at auction inform our valuation of this interpositive," Mr Reznikoff said. "Notably, in June 2024, Sotheby's sold a daguerreotype photograph of Dolley Madison, slightly larger than three inches by four inches, but with a cloudy history, to the National Portrait Gallery for \$465,000."

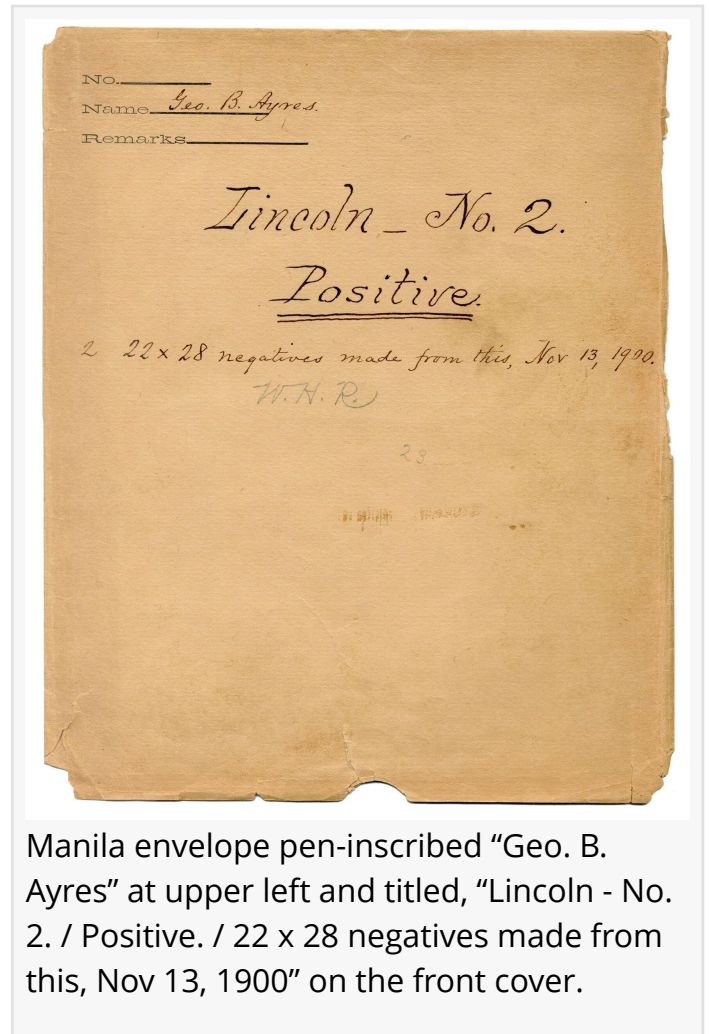
A much less significant, small stereoscopic view of Lincoln taken from a much later photograph sold at Cowan's Auctions in 2012 for \$35,000. Prints made after the fact trade often. Topping the list would be the large Alexander Gardner prints of a less defined and less desirable image of Lincoln. Gardner prints measuring 15 inches by 18 inches each fetched around \$100,000 at auction in 2004 and 2011.

But the Hesler prints, probably made from this same Ayres interpositive, consistently fetched \$3,000-\$15,000 privately and at auction, depending on their size and condition. Prints possibly made from the present object in the modern era range from \$300-\$1,000. A well-known Lincoln dealer has offered Gardner modern prints for \$2,500.

Chicago photographer Alexander Hesler captured four portraits of Abraham Lincoln - just announced the Republican presidential nominee - as the latter sat by a window in the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield on June 3, 1860. In 1865, fellow photographer George B. Ayres bought Hesler's studio and negatives when Hesler retired.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Ayres specialized in making and selling prints of Lincoln, and it was during this time that he created this interpositive, using Hesler's original wet-plate collodion negative to create it. On November 13, 1900, Ayres made 22 inch by 28 negatives from the interpositive, from which in turn he created prints.

Hesler's original glass plate negatives - and perhaps also this interpositive, because the glass



Manila envelope pen-inscribed "Geo. B. Ayres" at upper left and titled, "Lincoln - No. 2. / Positive. / 22 x 28 negatives made from this, Nov 13, 1900" on the front cover.

shatter patterns are very similar - were tragically broken during a postal shipment to St. Louis in 1933. The post office paid the claim, and one of the original negatives ended up in the Smithsonian Institution's vault. Some of the duplicate plates found their way to the Chicago Historical Society, now the Chicago History Museum.

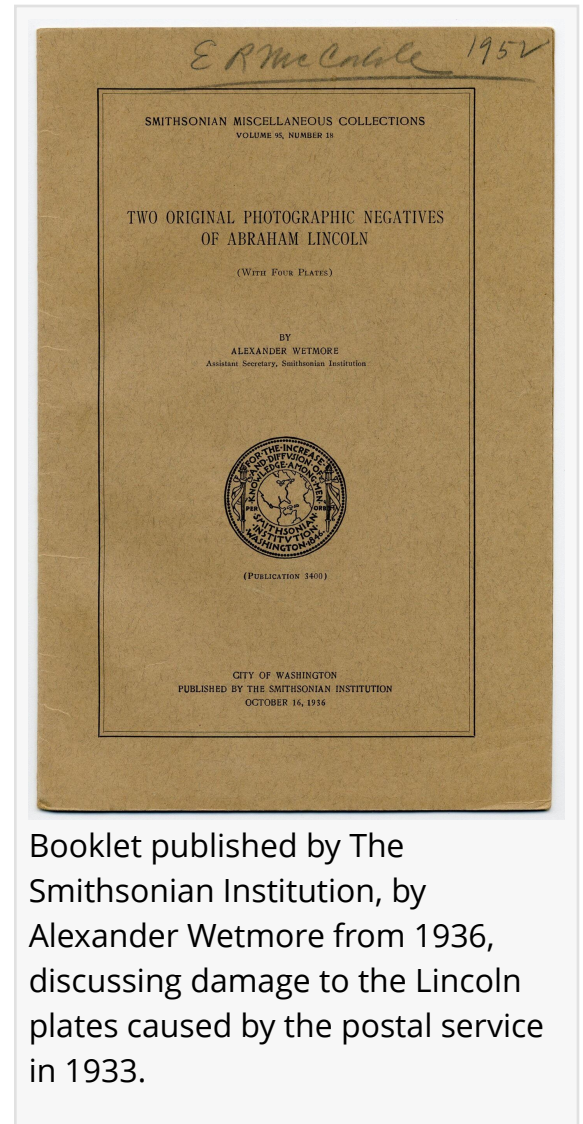
The interpositive is accompanied by extensive paperwork and carries a pre-sale estimate of \$800,000-\$1 million. Interested parties are encouraged to get in touch with John Reznikoff at University Archives, either by phone (203-454-0111); or via email, at john@universityarchives.com.

Here is a link to the April 23rd auction catalog on the University Archives website:

https://www.universityarchives.com/auction-catalog/rare-autographs-books-photos-abraham-lincoln-coll_DU5FC9TF63?scrollPosition=05a4e26847&algoliaParam=upcoming_lots_lotNumber_asc_prod%255Bpage%255D%3D2

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Booklet published by The Smithsonian Institution, by Alexander Wetmore from 1936, discussing damage to the Lincoln plates caused by the postal service in 1933.



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This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/800935128>

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