

# LINCARNATIONS

The Newsletter of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

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NOW HE BELONGS TO THE STAGES

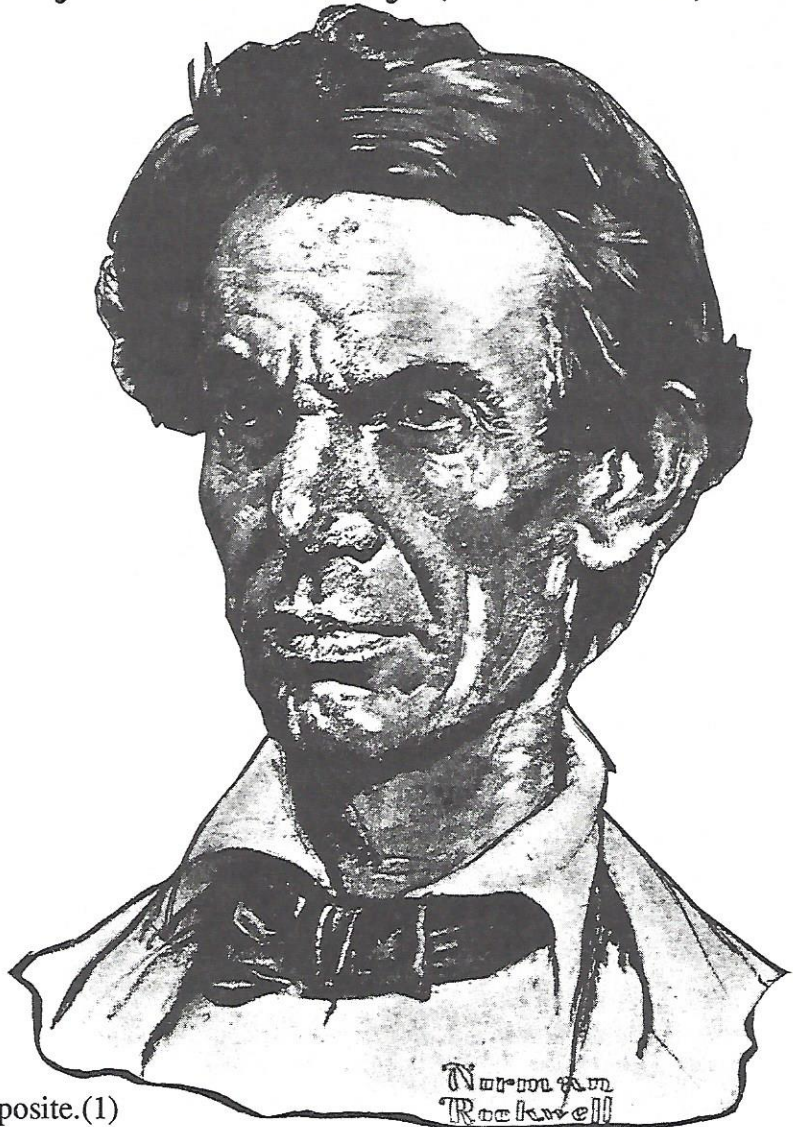
SPRING, 1994

## A Lincoln Portrait of Raymond Massey (1896-1983)

by Dan Bassuk, Ph.D.

Four score and seven years (almost), was the life span of Raymond Massey. His versatility as a Lincoln impersonator kept Lincoln's image shining for a quarter of a century. Six feet three inches tall, with black hair, sunken cheeks, and commanding eyes, he looked every bit like Lincoln, and his voice sounded Lincolnesque. In the world of Lincoln impersonators, Massey is massive.

Raymond Massey premiered as Lincoln on October 15, 1938 in Robert Sherwood's play "Abraham Lincoln in Illinois." Not since Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" starring Frank McGlynn (1919) was there such a successful Lincoln drama. The enormous success of Sherwood's play and its movie adaptation can be largely attributed to Massey's "magical" performance. It was said that Massey took the face of Lincoln off the penny and put it in the hearts of Americans. His face appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine (Oct. 31, 1938), and Norman Rockwell's sketch of Massey seemed to merge the President's visage with the actor's, creating a Lincoln-Massey composite.(1)



In portraying Lincoln, Massey said that in order to achieve a convincing characterization, "a personal sympathy with the man, is much more important to me today, as an actor impersonating Lincoln, than the knowledge I acquired later of his political philosophy. In my case, feeling that I knew his heart helped me to understand his mind." (2) On Broadway, Mary Todd Lincoln was played by Muriel Kirkland, who did not receive good reviews, and in the movie version of "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," Mary was played by Ruth Gordon, who went on to a brilliant career.

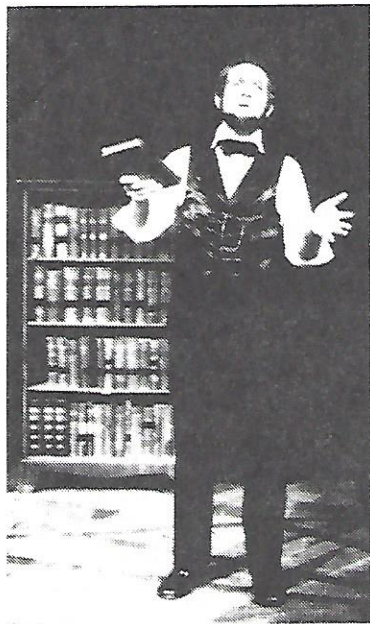
From 1938 on, Massey portrayed Abraham Lincoln on stage and screen, radio and television. At the New York World's Fair in 1939, a film called "Land of Liberty" used clips of Massey in "Abe Lincoln in Illinois." Massey was Lincoln in Norman Corwin's adaptation of the Lincoln-Douglas debates called

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# My Lincoln Portrayal

by James Keeran



Theatre is a powerful medium. I like to think the script and the acting can transport an audience into another time and bring a great man into their lives. And I know that if I believe it, as an actor, so will my audience. At first, I'm sure some people are struck with the idea that I'm too short and my face isn't as gaunt as Lincoln's, but within two minutes those thoughts have passed and they're into it with me. If

they're not, I've blown it.

Why Lincoln? Lincoln is a perfect character for the theater. He was the best writer we've ever had in the White House, so he gives an actor and a playwright some great things to say.

Besides, ever since I was a little boy, I've been intrigued with Lincoln, probably because of the myth, and partly because I visited a lot of the Lincoln shrines in Springfield and New Salem, which are about an hour from where I live. But as I grew up, it was his strength of character, his honesty, his directness, humor, simplicity, and language that intrigued me. He's truly an admirable character.

I remember about 20 years ago when the Old State Capitol in Springfield was taken apart stone by stone and reassembled that I, as a reporter, was taken on a tour shortly before it was reopened. I was in a room on the second floor when the architect told us that from his research it appeared as if Lincoln was standing right where I was when he learned he had been elected President. I got goose flesh.

And then when I got the chance as an actor to play him, it just seemed natural. It still does. (James Keeran portrays Abraham Lincoln in Mitgang's one-man play "Mister Lincoln," and his own play called "An Autobiography of A. Lincoln.")

## Massey continued

"The Rivalry" (1957), and in the film "How the West was Won" (1962). Strange but true, in "Prince of Players" (1954), Massey played Junius Brutus Booth, the assassin's father, and in "The Day Lincoln was Shot" (1956), it was the only time that Massey was "assassinated" while playing Lincoln.(3)

After making more than forty films, Massey turned to television and radio where he portrayed Lincoln in "Not in Vain" (1961), and made numerous appearances as Lincoln in episodes of NBC's "Cavalcade of America." Many of his radio, television, and stage performances are preserved on records or tapes such as "John Brown's Body" (1953), "The Writings and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln" (4 record set, 1961), and Sandburg's "Abraham Lincoln, The War Years."

It is hard to know just how many Lincoln ceremonies Massey participated in, but he came to represent Lincoln. In 1939, he received the Lincoln Diploma of Honor from Lincoln Memorial University, and in the long line of distinguished individuals to be so honored, he was the very first(4).

Broadway, movies, television, radio, recordings and awards, Raymond Massey had such far-reaching appeal, that after his outstanding career in portraying the 16th President, the mystic chords of memory were stretched to living hearts all over this broad land.

### Footnotes

1. For Rockwell's drawing see playbill of "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," 1938, and the cover of paperback edition of Sherwood's play.
2. New York Times, Feb. 12, 1939.
3. I owe this information to Richard Sloan, see Lincoln Herald, Summer, 1993, p 70.
4. Lincoln Herald, July, 1939, p.14-15.

### Awards of the ALP

1. The Glenn Schnizlein Memorial Award to the best Lincoln team:  
1993 - Max and Donna Daniels.
2. The Abraham Lincoln Award:  
1992 - James Getty  
1993 - Dan Bassuk



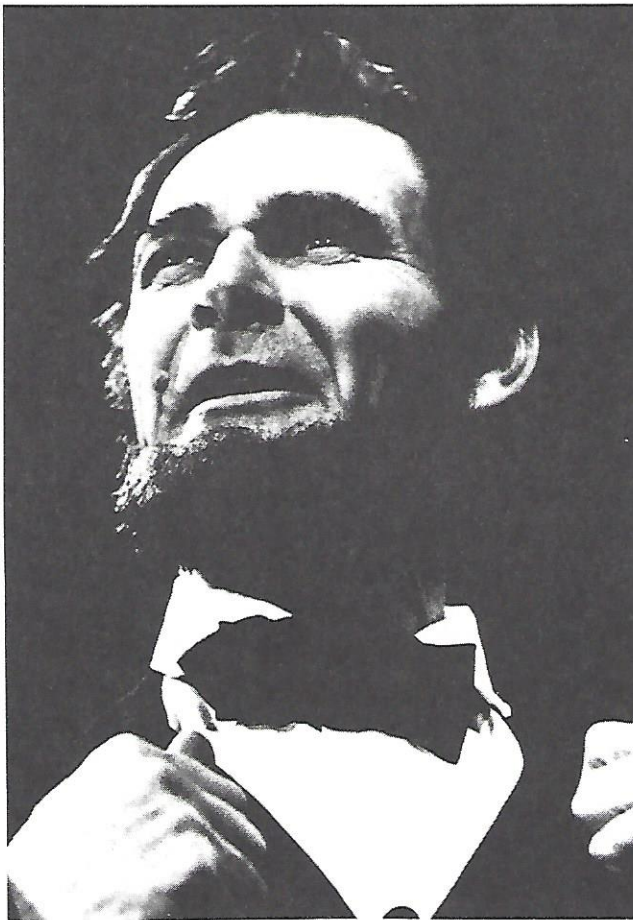
# My Lincoln Career

by Richard Blake, Scottsdale, AZ, December, 1993

Having recently been elected President of the INTERNATIONAL LINCOLN ASSOCIATION, I have been urged by many Lincoln friends to become a member of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS. I have procrastinated because I never considered myself a Lincoln impersonator, although technically I am one. Please find my check for membership in the ALP.

My first love is acting. No matter what character I play, I get inside the character, including Lincoln. That's not to say I don't have a resemblance. I do. I am 6 feet 4 inches tall and my foot matches the brass outline of Lincoln's foot in the museum near Springfield, IL. My hand matches perfectly the cast of Lincoln's hand made by Volk. But these are physical resemblances. What is most important to me is the inner feeling in portraying Lincoln. It takes years of study and acting ability to be able to convince an audience that they are seeing and hearing Lincoln. A stovepipe hat and beard "does not a Lincoln make."

When I first started to play Lincoln in 1965, I did so as a favor for a Boy Scout meeting. Fortunately, the Lincoln scholar, Paul Angle, saw the presentation and urged me to continue. I spent several years traveling the Midwest and East Coast visiting more than 2500 schools. Then I made a TV special and was invited to perform at the Old State Capitol in Springfield. I met many Lincoln scholars and state officials and moved to Springfield. During that period I performed for state



conventions and special events, including the re-enactment of The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, and Lincoln Riding the 8th Judicial Circuit, both bicentennial events sponsored by the state of Illinois

While in Springfield, I met many Lincoln impersonators, most of whom are member of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS: Harry Hahn, Bruce Hanks, Bill Horsley, Fritz Klein, Basil Moore, Charley Ott, and Harlington Wood, Jr.. I also met Lincoln scholars: Wayne Temple, Ray Phipps, Lord Longford,

Frank Williams, Phil Wagner, Lloyd Ostendorf, and Jim Hickey. They have all given me encouragement. After the bicentennial year, I thought I would leave Lincoln behind when I moved to Arizona in late 1976. But Lincoln wasn't going to let go of me. I performed in theaters, TV, commercials, and film. The president of the local screen actors guild saw an ad for an actor to play Lincoln for a major national corporation, and suggested that I audition. Competing against many Lincolns, I got the part, and thus met Jim Getty who was hired as my understudy.

I traveled to 48 states doing performances for Lincoln National Life Insurance Co. During that time I had the privilege of meeting governors, senators, mayors, and cabinet members, and even had the opportunity to meet Abraham Lincoln's great-grandson, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith. I performed in Ford's Theater, in the Kennedy Cen-

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## Abraham Lincoln's Influence on U.S. Grant

This is the second in a series of articles on Lincoln's influence on our Presidents, prepared by Ted Zalewski who portrays Teddy Roosevelt.

The President had been at City Point since March 23, visiting with his soldiers and spending time with Lt. General Ulysses S. Grant - "the man," as Lincoln himself had once said, "that makes things git!"

The two men got on well. But then, they shared much common ground. Both were Mid-westerners, had been erstwhile farmers, had known failure and hardship. Yet each in his individual way had doggedly persevered until success came to him. They shared a belief in how the war should be run - Lincoln trusting his general's judgment in all matters military, Grant staying out of politics altogether (as several of his predecessors, regrettably, had failed to do). When it was suggested, the previous year, that Grant run for the presidency, he scoffed at the idea - the right man was already in the White House.

So it was that the two men agreed on how the war should be conducted; yet it still remained to be seen if their views would correspond in matters of reconstruction - and this, at last, was the main reason for Lincoln's visit, to discover if his two great warriors, Grant and Sherman, would abide with his "let 'em up easy" proposition, outlined in his recent Inaugural Address.

On March 27, Sherman arrived. The President then gathered his two trusted captains into a cabin of the "River Queen", and closed the door. What transpired there was never revealed by any of the participants. Yet soon afterward, on April 9th, Grant completely and magnanimously paroled Lee's army, including the commander himself. The question of prison camp for the Union's former enemies was thus permanently closed. "This," pronounced General Lee, "will have the best possible effect upon my army, and will do much to reconcile our people."

There it was, yet another sharing of vision: "let 'em up easy" was the course to be followed. The Rebels were again with Grant when his turn at the White House came around, and there it would be severely tested. But that, as they say, is another story.

John Miller, former Chief of Interpretation at the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site in New York bore a striking resemblance to U.S. Grant and portrayed him in conjunction with Pres. Lincoln (Jim Getty) and Teddy Roosevelt (Ted Zalewski). He wrote this article for LINCARNATIONS shortly before his death in December, 1993.

**THE ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS** is a non-profit association dedicated to the proposition of supporting and encouraging the presenting of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. Membership in the ALP is \$20. Annual renewal is \$5.00, \$7.50 for an Abe-Mary team. Life membership is \$100.

Officers are Dr. Daniel Bassuk, President; Max and Donna Daniels, Vice-Presidents; Patricia Thomas, Treasurer. Please address inquiries and correspondence to Daniel Bassuk, 1143 River Road, Neshanic, New Jersey 08853, or call (908) 369-7648.

## Blake's Career continued

ter, before members of Congress and on TV. One performance earned an EMMY and another an EMMY nomination.

The tour for Lincoln National Life lasted from 1979 through 1984. During that time I changed the format of my one-man show which had me portraying Lincoln with and without a beard, to a bearded Lincoln at all times. I also created a performance that was a Press Conference with Lincoln. Having no idea what would be asked, and to be knowledgeable enough to answer as Lincoln, I had to keep my nose in the books.

No, I have not retired from performing Lincoln. I love portraying him. I do performances for the International Lincoln Association, local affairs, conventions, and special Lincoln conferences.

### Life Members of ALP

1. Dan Bassuk
2. Phillip Chetwynd
3. Max and Donna Daniels
4. Milburn Howard
5. B. F. McClerren
6. Jim Sayre
7. Bruce Schnizlein
8. Lois Schnizlein
9. Richard Swanson