

The Center for Civil War Photography

THE MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHY IS TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS ROLE IN THE CONFLICT; TO PROMOTE THE CONTINUING STUDY OF ITS RICH VARIETY OF FORMS AND FORMATS; TO PRESERVE ORIGINAL CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHS AND EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS THE ORIGINAL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MAKING THEM; AND TO PRESENT INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS THAT USE CIVIL WAR 3-D PHOTOGRAPHS AND REGULAR IMAGES TO THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL.

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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
16 November 2007

LINCOLN DISCOVERED IN GETTYSBURG PHOTOS

The unmistakable profile of President Abraham Lincoln has been discovered by Center for Civil War Photography board member John Richter in the deepest depths of two stereo photographs taken by Alexander Gardner at the dedication of the National Cemetery, just before Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address.

The two stereo views, the negatives of which are archived at the Library of Congress, were previously thought to have shown nothing more than the large crowd that had gathered for the dedication ceremony on Nov. 19, 1863.

But after a careful 3D examination of the smallest details of both photos – an examination made possible by ultra high resolution scans of the negatives made by the Library of Congress – the Center is delighted to report that Lincoln himself appears to be visible in both images.

Any such interpretation is open to debate or dispute, and no one can say with 100 percent certainty that the person is Lincoln, just as no one can say with absolute certainty that it is Lincoln in the other two Gettysburg images taken on Nov. 19, 1863 in which he has been identified. But the visual evidence is more than compelling, and it is backed up by documentary evidence and accounts by people who attended the ceremony.

The twin discovery means that the number of Gettysburg Address images in which Lincoln himself is visible has doubled from two to four. There are no close-up, clear views of Lincoln at Gettysburg, but his distinctive visage previously was discovered in the depths of two other photos.

News of the discovery was revealed to the world on the front page of USA Today's edition for Nov. 16, 2007. The story is available online at www.usatoday.com.

The images were projected for the first time during the premier of "Lincoln in 3D" a digital stereoscopic slide show presented to the annual Lincoln Forum in Gettysburg on Nov. 17.

"All I can say is, "Wow!" said Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer after seeing the images in detail. "Unbelievable."

"I think it's one of the most significant Civil War photographic discoveries in quite some time," said CCWP President Bob Zeller. "It's as if we can ask a Civil War photographer to go back out on the field and take just a couple of more shots of the greatest president in American history."

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In this case, however, the “new” images of Lincoln were found in the backgrounds of two images that were already well known among Civil War photo historians.

After a comprehensive review of the images that included the first detailed 3D analysis of the details within them, Richter has concluded that both images were taken within about a minute of each other, and that they both show President Lincoln riding on horseback through a corridor of soldiers as he makes his way toward the speaker’s stand.

“I think that’s the reason why the photographer’s platform is so far from the speaker’s stand,” Richter said. “It was placed there so Gardner could capture Lincoln as he arrived at the cemetery.”

In the first view, Lincoln is seen in profile between two lines of troops. “When the military units reached the dedication site, they formed lines so the president would have a lane to the platform steps,” author Frank L. Klement writes in *The Gettysburg Soldiers’ Cemetery and Lincoln’s Address*. (1993, White Mane Publishing)

In the second view, Lincoln appears to be saluting the troops with his white-gloved left hand as he continues down the lane. Klement writes that Lincoln had a pair of white riding gloves for the procession, and that the soldiers formed the corridor to salute the president as well as to keep the crowd back.

Although the negatives have survived, no original prints on original Gardner mounts have ever surfaced, suggesting that Gardner never marketed the images. Richter believes that after making the stereo photographs, Gardner never bothered to make prints because the results seemed so disappointing. All he seemed to have on the plates were shots of the crowd, with people mugging for the camera in the foreground. Lincoln was not visible without enlarging the scene, which was not feasible in the commonly used photographic technology of the Civil War.

Fortunately, he kept the negatives, which still survive after 144 years. And with today’s digital technology, scholars can examine the smallest details of these and other Civil War photographic negatives, and gain a greater understanding of what the images show and why they were taken.

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