When an eleven-year-old girl advised Abraham Lincoln to grow some whiskers and appear as she suggested, he did so.

The picture was a lithograph copy of a portrait in oils, painted for campaign purposes just after Lincoln's nomination to the presidency, dated June 14, 1860. The painting is reproduced above.

The story of its origin, and of its influence on Lincoln's physical appearance, is not well known.

When news of Lincoln's nomination reached New York, Publisher W. Schaus commissioned a painter named Thomas Nast to paint a picture of the candidate, and make the portrait. It was the first oil portrait of Lincoln ever painted. Until then the only photograph of the young lawyer had been a crude woodcut of an old daguerreotype.

Lithographic copies of Hicks' painting were widely distributed during the campaign. A New York feeling election grew so tense that even children took sides. Eleven-year-old Grace Bedell listened with interest when her father and four brothers argued the merits of candidates, but she made up her own mind and settled on Mr. Lincoln. She studied his campaign picture curiously and decided that his chances for winning would be improved if he grew some whiskers.

She promptly wrote him a letter to that effect, pointing out that if he grew a beard he would look better because your face is so thin.

The letter arrived in the fall when Mr. Lincoln was away campaigning, and one of his friends found it and trying to arrive at some solution that would keep the country from splitting. It was very different from the many other campaign letters that came in his mail.

Grace Bedell wrote:

Westfield, Chautauqua Co., N.Y.

Oct. 15, 1860

Hon. A. B. Lincoln,

Dear Sir:

My father has just come from the fair and brought home your picture and Mr. Hamlin's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much, so I hope you won't think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are.

Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got a brother and part of them will vote for you any way and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you and you then will be President.

My father is going to vote for you to and I was much obliged to you for that. If I could see you I will try and get everyone to vote for you that I can I think that rail fence around your picture makes it look very pretty I have got a little girl only nine weeks old and is just as cunning as can be. When you direct your letter direct it to Grace Bedell, Westfield, Chautauqua Co., and the County New York. I must not write any more answer this letter right off.

Good bye.

Grace Bedell

Beards and mustaches were worn by many men in the fifties and early sixties, but most men of fashion were clean-shaven in this era. Abe Lincoln, like his father, Robert Lincoln, had beards worn a beard or mustache. Grace Bedell's letter made him think seriously for the first time about growing whiskers. He was also touched by the little girl's concern, as is shown in his answering letter:

Springfield, Illinois

October 19, 1860

Miss Grace Bedell:

You little dear Miss. I am very agreeable letter of the 15th is received. I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters. I have two, but the one to one nine, and one seven years of age.
They, with their mother, constitute my whole family. As to the whiskers, having never worn any, very few people would call it a piece of silly affection if I were to begin it now!

Your very sincere well-wisher.

A. Lincoln

Apprently Lincoln decided to brave the criticism, for very shortly thereafter he began to sprout whiskers. An item in the Evansville Daily Journal appearing on December 27, 1860, comments on the subject as follows:

They say that Old Abe is raising a pair of whiskers. Another item of the cockney persuasion remarked that he was apt to put on (h) airs.

A caption for a picture appearing in the New York Herald referred to "the new whiskers looking as if not yet naturalized." On January 26, 1861, a photograph of Lincoln, a Springfield photographer, shows a much heavier beard. A later photograph taken by the same photographer indicated that by the time he left Springfield for Washington he had quite a full beard.

The Little Girl in the Crowd

Lincoln did not forget the little girl. In February, 1861, when he made his famous trip from Washington to Springfield for the inauguration, his special train moved into Westfield. A large crowd awaited it on the platform every stop. Her fair hair freshly braided, wearing her best pinafore and clutching a bunch of flowers, Grace had been at the station since early that morning. As the crowd grew larger she had been pushed farther and farther back. She heard Lincoln speak, but there were too many grommets in front of her to see whether her hero was wearing whiskers.

As Lincoln finished his greetings he called out in the informal manner that endeared him to the masses, "I have a correspondent here and if she is present I would like to see her.

No one came forward.

"Who is it? Give us her name!" came from the crowd.

"Her name is Grace Bedell. She wrote to me that she thought I would be better looking if I wore whiskers."

Amid laughter Grace was led and carried toward the platform. The President stepped off the platform and shook the small girl's hand. Then he kissed her: "You see," he said, "this is my beard, "I let these whiskers grow for you, Grace."

Grace Bedell, who later became Mrs. George N. Billings of Delphos, Kansas, remembered all her life how surprised and embarrassed she had been by the President's unexpected conduct.

"I ran home as fast as I could, dodging in and out of horses and buggies and once crawling under a wagon," she recalled later. "Such was my confusion that I completely forgot the bouquet of roses that I was giving to the man to whom I had offered such rare advice. And when I arrived home I had the stems, all that remained of the bouquet, still tightly clutched in my hand."

The press made much of the incident. The New York Sun said, "Old Abe Kissed by Pretty Girl" and the St. Louis Republican declared jokingly, "If honest pretty girls are a presidential privilege, Mrs. Lincoln, who knows her rights and knowing daren't maintain them, ought to insist on them herself."

There were no flash bulbs in those days to preserve the kiss for posterity.

The historian's portrait of Lincoln beardless is little known to the public.

The painting was bought from the artist's studio in 1861 by Edson Bradley, Sr. Few collectors knew of its existence and it was bought lost.
In 1936 it was exhibited for the first time, by Mrs. Herbert Sheldon, Mr. Bradley's granddaughter, at the Life and Times of Abraham Lincoln exhibition in New York.

Put up for auction in 1940, the painting was purchased for $11,000, the highest price ever paid for a portrait. It will eventually go to the Metropolitan Museum.

Accompanying the portrait is a manuscript letter written by the artist, January 21, 1879, in which Mr. Hicks gives an account of the sittings.

Artist Describes the Sittings

"When I stood in the presence of a tall, prominent man, with a decided expression on his well-marked features and had had, bony, handshake from his long, swinging arm, I saw in him more than a hint of character with which to make a desirable likeness. . . . He asked me if I wanted a photograph to show for my work. There was a very suitable light in his office and it was quickly arranged that I should do my work there. In an hour I had the easel up and had commenced the bust sitting. Mr. Lincoln was already taking an interest in everything, and, at the conclusion of the sitting during which I had made the usual charcoal sketch, looking at it in the large mirror, he said, "I found that Mr. Lincoln's temper was keen, his voice mild and persuasive, and that he had the rare ability to advise, rather than to rebuke. Mr. Lincoln was at once silent and thoughtful, but he never wore a frown, and I loved him from my first day with him."

Mr. Hicks recalled that Lincoln, who had given him his practice that he might be free to campaign, had many visitors daily, most of them from the Northern and Western states. Lincoln, said Hicks, cracked jokes and told stories with a hundred men from behind and across him. There were many of them who came to pay their respects to him and others who came to spend a few quiet moments or to strengthen new ones; but all were delighted to listen to his quaint remarks and humorous stories.

"The Democratic State Convention was in session the week I was in Springfield. After the daily adjournments the delegates and their friends would spend hours of the evening in the dining hall, and large numbers of ten or twenty to pay their respects to Mr. Lincoln, and the odd thing about these calls was their lack of hurry. In company with him, they invariably addressed him as Mr. President."

The portrait was finished on June 13th. Mr. Lincoln was pleased with the result. He remarked with customary candor: "It will give me no trouble as long as I have a correct idea how I look at home. And in fact, how I look in my office. I think the picture has no expression as good or even as good as I usually have, but that, perhaps, is an objection."

Mrs. Lincoln did not agree that the picture mattered any way. She was to come to the office to see the finished work, but on the day the picture was finished, Mr. Hicks took the portrait to her house. Describing the scene, Mr. Hicks said: "The portrait was given to Mrs. Lincoln in the dining room where I put it in a proper light to be seen and placed a chair for Mrs. Lincoln. Sitting down in the chair she said, yes, that is Mr. Lincoln. It is exactly like him, and his friends in New York will see him as he looks here at home. How I wish I could keep it, or have a copy of it!"

The next time the artist saw President Lincoln was in 1863. The War between the States was being bitterly fought and the President was weighted down with many burdens. Mr. Hicks, writing of the great changes that had taken place in the appearance of Mr. Lincoln, said: "When I saw him in Washington the elements which I had studied in our intercourse at Springfield, newly developed, were so broadened and sharp-
The first oil portrait ever made of Abraham Lincoln. Artist Thomas Hicks painted this in 1860. Note that Lincoln is clean-shaven.