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Alum Lends Lincoln Likenesses

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Cutline: George Allison, Illinois Wesleyan Class of 1951, and Meg Miner, archivist and special collections librarian at The Ames Library, pose with photos of Abraham Lincoln Allison has loaned to The Ames Library for display.

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - On Friday, Feb. 6, a display in The Ames Library (1 Ames Plaza, Bloomington) became the temporary home of two Abraham Lincoln photographic reproductions on loan from Illinois Wesleyan alumnus George Allison, Class of 1951.

The prints will join other Lincoln memorabilia, including faculty meeting minutes that announce the University's closure for the 16th president's funeral in Springfield, Ill., in the display commemorating Lincoln's 200th birthday.

The images, which depict a beardless Lincoln posing pre-election at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, were taken by Alexander Hesler on June 3, 1860. "They confirm the power of the man himself," said Allison. "When you look at his picture, you can see the integrity and the determination of the man even then. You can imagine the effect he must have had on his contemporaries and realize why the images are called the 'pictures that elected a president.'"

Over 100 years after Hesler made the original glass wet-plate collodion negative, which was damaged beyond repair in 1933 during transit to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C., Allison acquired prints of the photograph from his friend, the late King Hostick, a historical document dealer and Lincoln specialist.

Hostick located Hesler's positives of the image, the only known set of undamaged plates in existence today, among items from George Ayres' estate. "What is amazing is that the copies were unlabeled and unknown since 1866 and that they survived after that period of time," said Meg Miner, University archivist and special collections librarian.

"It was terribly exciting when Hostick told me he found the photographer's own duplicate set of plates," said Allison. "They're special to me because I was sort of on the inside of the discovery."

Hostick commissioned prints from Josef Karsh, who made 125 copies using a gold wash technique before destroying the negative he made from

Hostick's plates. Allison acquired two of these copies from Hostick in 1975.

For additional information about the display, contact Miner at (309) 556-1538. For additional information about the photographs, contact Allison at (765) 642-7982.

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