

Portrait?

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—News Photo by Bill Beall

Mr. du Tant and the painting.

\$3 PORTRAIT MAY BE LINCOLN

Painting Can Be Called an Early 'Likeness'

By TAD FOOTE

A dusty painting of a young man with light brown eyes, bought for \$3 at the Alexandria Thieves Market, may be the earliest known picture of Abraham Lincoln.

"In my opinion," said Rowland Lyon, a curator for the Smithsonian Institution's National Collection of Fine Arts, "it is Lincoln, but without further authentication it is only conjecture."

ab, 1840!



shaven and the eyes light brown in color. The canvas is old and very brittle.

"From the condition of the canvas, paint and varnish, the painting was obviously at least 100 years old. I placed the date at circa 1840, that is within 10 years or so."

The first known likeness of Lincoln is a daguerrotype dated about 1846.

In 1840, Lincoln, 31, was a rising young lawyer and member of the Illinois legislature, and as Mr. du Tant puts it, "in the throes of a most complicated courtship with Mary Todd."

Mr. Lyon said the style of the painting was similar to that of the famous Indian artist George Catlin, who was known to have been in the Mississippi River area at about that time.

"The fast, free brushstrokes indicate a technique like Catlin used," he said, "but that does not mean it was Catlin. Please emphasize that."

Catlin, who painted hundreds of portraits or Indians during the first half of the last century, also painted portraits of frontier settlers to raise money for his Indian expeditions. Hundreds of his paintings hang in the Smithsonian.

And Mr. du Tant shares none of Mr. Lyon's doubts. "It's definitely Lincoln," said the

JUNK BOX

The unframed canvas was found a year ago by Mrs. Charles du Tant, of 325 A-st se, when she and her husband were poking thru a junk box in the Thieves Market.

"It was kind of folded, rolled and crumpled in the box," said Mr. du Tant. "My wife called me over to look, and sure enough it looked like Lincoln."

"The man asked \$3 for it. We paid him and he laughed and offered \$4 for it back—then \$5, then \$6. I said 'no thanks.' I don't know if he was joking or not."

The du Tants, both amateur artists, took the painting to Mr. Lyon, who ran various tests and gave his opinion recently in letter form.

"This portrait of Abraham Lincoln as a young man has many interesting aspects," Mr. Lyon wrote. "The face is clean

