



*“His ambition was a little engine
that knew no rest”*

WILLIAM HERNDON

LINCOLN WAS CONTINUALLY UNDERESTIMATED BY HIS OPPONENTS, and even his friends. Because he had not served long in national politics—only one term in the House of Representatives—he was seen as a nonentity; the smart money certainly did not consider him of presidential timber. Quietly ambitious, Lincoln launched himself as a major figure in the Republican Party, promoting northern unionism in his senatorial campaign against Democrat Stephen Douglas in 1858. Moreover, Lincoln created a focused campaign organization that won him the Republican presidential nomination. By 1860, with the national political parties splintered, Lincoln ran against three opponents, the most prominent of whom was Douglas. After a hard campaign, in which the South ratcheted up the secession rhetoric, Lincoln won with a plurality of the popular vote and an overwhelming Electoral College advantage. With “Black Republicanism” triumphant, South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20.

George B. Ayres (born 1867), after Alexander Hesler, Platinum print, 1860 (printed c. 1881), National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

“Stand by your principles, stand by your guns”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ALEXANDER HESLER’S 1857 “TOUSLED HAIR” PORTRAIT WAS PRODUCED in 1860 and printed in tiny copies so that it could be cut out, placed in a frame, and worn as a campaign pin or locket during the campaign. Such partisan political symbols had long been a staple of American elections, but the heated political climate of 1860—and the need for the Lincoln organization to mobilize all its supporters—led to a plethora of new and creative ways to energize a public immersed in the political culture of the time. Political participation and partisanship was a major source, probably second only to religion, of most Americans’ identity in the mid-nineteenth century. Wearing Lincoln’s likeness was a particularly personal way for good Republicans to flaunt their allegiance to both man and party as they joined in the public rituals of American politicking.

Unidentified artist, after Alexander Hesler, Albumen silver print, c. 1857 (printed c. 1860), National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



Actual size

