

Chief Executive Locks

By Dennis Knight

It is not *why* we remember him, of course, but the hair and beard is *how* we remember Abraham Lincoln, and for that we can thank eleven year-old Grace Bedell of Westfield, New York who wrote to the candidate just weeks before the election, "I have got four brothers and part of them will vote for you anyway, and if you let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you. You would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President."

Mr. Lincoln thanked Miss Bedell and wrote, "As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affection if I were to begin it now?" Lincoln did let his whiskers grow, won the election and, I would surmise, in getting there carried the vote of the entire Bedell family.

Perhaps the finest head of hair in presidential history crowned Andrew Jackson. It was so glorious mere language falls short, but that twenty in your wallet is worth a thousand words to describe the locks swirling about Old Hickory's cranium.

And if you mention the name of George Washington, his hairdo comes to mind. It was popular for a man of his time and stature to wear a white wig, but Washington eschewed that as aristocratic. Instead he powdered his light brown hair to white and tied it in a queue.

In the years since President Lincoln, there have been other bearded or mustachioed presidents, but the last seventeen have been neatly cropped and clean shaven. I suspect the monotony is related more to image management than to presidential personality.

Political cartoonists often find hair to be the essence of caricature. John F. Kennedy had a handsome face, easy to draw, but to this day we would easily recognize him in a cartoon if it showed nothing but the full locks which he seldom covered with a hat.

A cartoonist favorite is Bill Clinton who is easily depicted by his mane of white. These days they usually make him statesman-like, but once in awhile you still see pure lechery in a Clinton cartoon.

Mr. Clinton's two successors to the presidency each have a conservative hair style which is hard to exaggerate, so either is often characterized by comical, oversized ears. If a few squiggles of wavy hair appear between the ears, it's George W. Bush, and if the pate is square and tight, it's Barack Obama.

We can only hope that President Obama will soon get a letter from some young admirer, perhaps one of his own daughters, let his hair grow out, start a beard and greatly enhance his visage for the annals of history. Short of that, perhaps he should inquire about an ear job.