

Oak Leaves

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River Forest conservator to discuss Lincoln forgery

By JENNIFER SCHUMAN October 29, 2012

RIVER FOREST — Resident Barry Bauman discovered an 1864 portrait of former first lady Mary Todd Lincoln was a fake.

The River Forest resident made the discovery while cleaning the painting, which had hung in the governor's mansion for 32 years, fooling Abraham's Lincoln's descendants and historians.

Bauman works as a conservator and is a former associate conservator of paintings for the Art Institute of Chicago. He offers complimentary conservation services to museums and non-profit organizations.

According to Bauman, the painting in question is actually of an unknown woman and was made to look like Mary Todd Lincoln.



Art conservator Barry Bauman sits in his studio surrounded by his tools and art he is working on. Bauman is an art conservator who does pro bono work for museums and non-profits. | Jon Langham~for Sun-Times Media

"A little piece of the history of art is now forever realized," Bauman said.

A cross necklace on the original was deliberately covered up and a brooch with the president's picture was added.

"No one thought to second-guess the painting since she was wearing the brooch," Bauman said.

Bauman also pointed out the signature of Francis Bicknell Carpenter was added at a later date.

"I knew the painting was a forgery," Bauman said.

After his discovery, Bauman presented his findings to James Cornelius, curator of the Lincoln Collection for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

"I knew it would hit him like a bombshell," Bauman said.

Bauman shared the moment of realization in his case study.

"As we looked at the portrait on my easel, I could feel what he was thinking. There was a long silence, finally broken by his epiphanous words – 'It's not Mary Lincoln' – and my reply – 'Not only is it not Mary Lincoln, it's not Francis Carpenter.' He ended his visit and agreed to contact me in a few days with his decision on how to proceed," he wrote.

Bauman will review his discovery at 3 p.m. Nov. 4 in a presentation titled "The Demise of Mary Lincoln" at Dominican University in its Performing Arts Center, Martin Hall.

Cornelius will also discuss the history of Lincoln forgeries.

Admission is free, with reservations encouraged through Dominican's public information director Jessica MacKinnon, at (708) 524-6289.



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