

Herman Faber, Civil War Caricaturist

Hermann Faber is not known to history as a cartoonist. This judgement is generally accurate since Faber seems to have done only one cartoon during his life. Instead Faber, a trained artist who emigrated to America from Germany, has been described with his sons as "the founders of medical illustration as a profession in this country."

Faber was born in Germany on January 26, 1832. He attended the University of Giessen and presumably was trained there as an illustrator. He emigrated to America and lived in Philadelphia, where he married in 1853. Faber supported his family by doing anatomical illustration. In 1863, Faber joined the Army and was assigned to the Army Medical Museum (fig. 1).

Dr. William Hammond had been appointed the Army Surgeon General in April 1862 after his predecessor resigned over disagreements with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Among Hammond's first actions was the creation of the federal government's first medical research facility (although it was not described in those 20th century terms). Hammond founded the Army Medical Museum in May 1862. By the beginning of August, Surgeon John Brinton was appointed the Medical Museum's curator and Joseph Woodward his assistant. Like Hammond, Brinton was aggressive about pursuing medical knowledge and was soon scouring the Civil War battlefields of the mid-Atlantic for specimens. The information collected during the war was to be compiled as the *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*. Brinton was to author the surgical material while Woodward dealt with the medical (or disease) section. Completed by the late 1880's, this massive undertaking included over 6,000 pages in its six volumes.

Brinton, after being assigned his part of the *History*, gathered artists for his staff in Washington. He had them enlisted as hospital stewards and assigned to duty in the Surgeon General's office. Faber joined several other German artists on the Museum's payroll. Faber did many illustrations for the Museum, mostly for Woodward's medical sections of the *History* (fig 2).

In 1864 Brinton was relieved of duty at the Museum. He thought his transfer due to any of three reasons: he was an appointee of Hammond (court-martialed over improperly purchasing blankets, but actually due to Stanton's dislike), a cousin of George McClellan (the discredited General and failed Presidential candidate), and the proponent of an unpopular plan to retain volunteer surgeons equal in rank to the regular Army ones at the close of the war. He was assigned to normal medical duties and, after the war ended, returned to Philadelphia to practice medicine. In his autobiography, Brinton maintained a sense of humor about his transfer:

I had been a long time in Washington, and had many friends. To some of these, I said good-bye, and to one of them, Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas, I sent a picture. I had often joked with her when officers had been sent away from Washington under the displeasure of the Secretary of War, -- exiled in fact, for the Secretary looked upon a detail to Louisville or St. Louis as a banishment, quite as in Russia they regard banishment to Siberia. Some officers took removal from Washington as a rather hard fate, but I had often told Mrs. Douglas that I was sure to be decapitated, but that when it

came, like St. Denis (she, Mrs. Douglas, was a Catholic), I would lose my head with good grace. So I requested one of the artists of the Museum, Faber, a German of facile pencil, to make a pen-and-ink sketch of myself as St. Denis leaving the Museum, head in hand, for the region of the setting sun, with the bloody headman's sword, the unfinished work of the *Surgical History of the War*, etc.

Brinton's recollection reveals that he, not Faber, decided to have the cartoon drawn. This original cartoon, once in the possession of Mrs. Douglas, the Senator's wife, may or may not still exist. The cartoon reproduced here (fig. 3) is a recreation of the first (as Brinton continues):

There is an odd sequel to this picture story, which I will give in the words of Dr. Otis, my successor. A month or two afterwards, Dr. [Joseph] Barnes (the new Surgeon General) heard of the St. Denis caricature, and expressed a wish to see it. Dr. Woodward had Faber make a copy from memory. A few additions were made, as the motto by Faber, "So Woodward says, but I suspect our friend of instigating," Dr. Otis writes. Faber's picture was photographed by Dr. Otis. The original was given to the Secretary of War by Dr. Barnes. Barnes, Crane, Thomson, Billings and Otis had copies, and two were sent to me at Nashville, where I then was, and the negative destroyed.

Brinton recalled, "From the motto '*Si tacuisses Philosoph Manisses*' on the latter, you may infer that my tongue had been my enemy. Perhaps it was so, but dear me, what difference! Stanton, Lewis, Barnes, Crane, Otis and my anonymous enemy, all are long since gone, and I can laugh at the very recollection of St. Denis." The motto, which Brinton suspected his well-versed colleague Joseph Woodward of having Faber add, is from Dante's *Inferno*, canto XXVLII, line 113: "O if you had been silent, you would have then remained a philosopher." The location of the second drawing, formerly in Secretary of War Stanton's possession, is also unknown. Fortunately, one of the photographic prints survived. (Brinton, 313-4)

Besides his work in medical illustration, Faber is known to history for his pencil drawing of President Lincoln's deathbed. After Lincoln was shot in the head by John Wilkes Booth while at Ford's Theatre, he was taken across the street to a bed in a boardinghouse. Lincoln died there several hours later on April 15, 1865, without having regained consciousness. Faber sketched the room where the President died immediately after the body was removed. Barnes, who was among the doctors attending the dying president, approved the drawing for accuracy. Of the many artistic versions of Lincoln's deathbed, Faber was the only artist actually drawing from the scene. He also made a second version of this work which resides in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (fig. 4; Henry, p. 44-5)

After the war, Faber returned to Philadelphia and continued his career as a medical illustrator along with two of his sons. (*Ars Medica*, p. 2-10) Due to his Army service he was granted citizenship on October 31, 1868. He does not seem to have practiced caricature again. In later years, he taught at the School of Design. After Faber's death on December 10, 1913,

etcher J.L.G. Ferris said, "He was a master of the classical line, and had considerable erudition. Affable and kindly, he was always ready to give advice to the student. He had short shrift, however, for the lazy or insincere worker. He will be much missed."

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Versions of this paper were presented as a "Hermann Faber: Civil War medical illustrator as one-time caricaturist" lecture, The Fourth International Comics and Animation Festival (ICAF), Bethesda, Md, September 25, 1998 and published as "Drawing on Tragedy," *Hogan's Alley*, 6 (Winter 1999).

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Notes

"Ars Medica". Medical Affairs University of Pennsylvania, October 1968, pps 2-10.

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