

There's Only One

Brooks Brothers



by LESTER DAVID

OUTFITTING PRESIDENTS of the U. S. has been almost-routine business during much of the 132-year history of Brooks Brothers, oldest and most famous clothing store in America.

When Abraham Lincoln was shot as he sat in a box of Ford's Theater in Washington, he was wearing a new Prince Albert coat, waistcoat, trousers, and overcoat just delivered to him by the New York firm.

In 1858 the firm opened a branch at Broadway and Grand Street, and while the downtown building continued to operate until 1874, the new home became the principal place of business. The cream of the Union Army during the Civil War had their uniforms made at Brooks, among them Generals Grant, Sheridan, Hooker, and Sherman. But undoubtedly the most illustrious customer was Lincoln, for whom Brooks made, among other things, an overcoat for his Second Inaugural. On the quilted lining was an embroidered eagle holding in its beak a pennant inscribed "One Country, One Destiny."



In 1869, the store moved uptown to Union Square, where Brooks' paneled office overlooked a statue of Lincoln which had just been set up. The senior partner was dismayed to note that Lincoln's trousers flopped around his ankles. Every time Brooks looked out the window, his eyes fell upon Lincoln's metallic sloppiness.

One evening in 1872, a heavy fog descended on the city. Next morning, New Yorkers got a severe jolt when they saw the statue. During the night Lincoln had made an about-face, turning his back to the Brooks store. When asked about the phenomenon, old John Brooks stared vacantly into space.

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September, 1950: p. 90

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