

It took Francis Bicknell Carpenter only six months to paint his 15-foot-wide canvas of the *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln*. As the title suggests, the scene shows members of Abraham Lincoln’s cabinet gathered at the White House on July 22, 1862, to hear the president read his draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. Depicted in the painting are, from left to right: Edwin M. Stanton, secretary of war; Salmon P. Chase, secretary of the treasury; President Lincoln; Gideon Welles, secretary of the navy; Caleb B. Smith, secretary of the interior (standing); William H. Seward, secretary of state (seated); Montgomery Blair, postmaster general; and Edward Bates, attorney general. Soon after completing his masterpiece, Carpenter commissioned Alexander Hay Ritchie to create an engraving of the painting in hopes of advancing its popularity. Ritchie, who emigrated from Scotland in 1841, was a successful and accomplished painter and



*First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln*  
by Francis Bicknell Carpenter, 1864, oil on canvas.  
(U.S. Senate Collection)

engraver of historical and allegorical subjects, and also created superb mezzotint portraits. The *New York Evening Post* predicted that the engraving would “take its place among the pictures which the people hang upon their walls to commemorate one of the great and most notable acts in the nation’s history.”<sup>1</sup> President Lincoln himself signed on as the first subscriber, requesting an artist’s proof. 🌀

<sup>1</sup> Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln. The Story of A Picture*. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867, appendix.



THE FIRST READING OF THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION BEFORE THE CABINET.

*As it appeared in the House of Representatives.*

**The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation before the Cabinet.**

Alexander Hay Ritchie after painting by Francis Bicknell Carpenter  
Derby and Miller, 1866

Metal engraving, black and white  
23 ½ x 33 ½ inches (59.7 x 85.1 cm)

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See appendix p. 482 for key