Mary Todd Lincoln, 1818-1861

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MARY TODD LINCOLN
1818-1861

Paper Offered By
Mary Lutz
as fulfilling the requirements
for the
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INTRODUCTION

Mary Todd Lincoln is perhaps the most undeservedly defamed woman in American history. The truth about Mary Todd Lincoln has been hidden under a myth built up by William H. Herndon and other writers.

The purpose of this paper is, through research, to present the facts about a woman of our nation's history, Mary Lincoln.

People have said Lincoln really loved Ann Rutledge, that his marriage to Mary Todd was a cross, that she was temperamental, that she hurt Abraham Lincoln politically, she embarrassed him financially as well as socially, and inflicted upon him the painful necessity of adjustment to her personality.

The sources of material for the paper are books, magazines, letters, pictures, and notes taken in the "Lincoln Course", taught by Doctor Charles H. Coleman, Instructor, Eastern Illinois State College, Charleston, Illinois.
II
THE EARLY TODDS

The Todds migrated to America from Scotland and Ireland. They settled in Pennsylvania and remained for several generations. Some of them were men of authority in the colony. One of the Pennsylvania Todds, David, sent three of his sons, Levi, John, and Robert, to his brother, Reverend John Todd of Louisa, Virginia, to be educated. Reverend John Todd later obtained from the legislature of Virginia the charter for Transylvania Seminary, and later gave it the first library ever brought to Kentucky.¹

Colonel John Todd, the oldest son of David Todd, is described as "the best educated and most accomplished of all the early pioneers and surveyors of Kentucky".² At the battle of Point Pleasant he was an aide to General Andrew Lewis. In 1777 he was one of the first two burgesses sent by Kentucky County to the General Assembly of Virginia. He succeeded General George Rogers Clark in command at Kaskaskia, and under appointment from Governor Patrick Henry, became the first civil governor of the Illinois territory. In 1782 Thomas Jefferson, then Governor of Virginia, appointed John

¹W. A. Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, p. 35.
²Thomas M. Green, Historic Families of Kentucky, p. 211.
Todd a colonel of Fayette County Militia with Daniel Boone second in command. The three Todd brothers fought the Indians in the Kentucky Militia. John was killed in the Battle of the Blue Licks on August 19, 1782.¹

General Robert Todd was also an active soldier throughout the trouble with the Indians and was severely wounded in the defense of McClellan's Station soon after his arrival in Kentucky. He represented Kentucky County in the Virginia Legislature and was a prominent delegate to the Danville Convention that sought separation from the mother state in 1785. When Kentucky was admitted to the Union in 1792, General Todd became the first senator from Fayette County in the new Legislature at Frankfort, and for many years he was considered one of the ablest jurists in the commonwealth. "No man was more universally beloved by his acquaintances", said the Kentucky Gazette, March 28, 1814, announcing the death of General Todd.²

Levi Todd, Mary Lincoln's grandfather, the third son of David Todd and his wife, Hannah Todd, who was of Welsh descent, married Jane Briggs on February 25, 1779 in the fort at St. Asaph's in Lincoln County, Kentucky. He founded Todd's Station and became the clerk of the first court held in the


²Ibid., p. 43.
In 1780 he moved to Lexington, purchased property at the first sale of town lots, and was appointed the first clerk of the Fayette County Court, which office he held until his death many years later.

Like his two brothers, he took an active part in the military operations of the pioneers. He was a lieutenant under General Clark in the expedition against Kaskaskia and Vincennes, and participated in several retaliatory excursions against the Indians in the Northwest Territory. He was in the thickest of the fight at the ill-fated Blue Licks battle and was one of the few officers to survive the battle. Later Levi Todd succeeded Colonel Daniel Boone in command of the Kentucky Militia with the rank of major-general.

General Todd was deeply interested in every enterprise that went to the development of Lexington and the commonwealth, and for many years he was a member of the board of trustees of Transylvania University. His elegant country estate, called "Ellerslie", situated on the Richmond Pike just beyond "Ashland", the home of Henry Clay, was one of the show-places around Lexington, and here he reared a family of eleven children.

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5 The Court of Quarter Sessions, Spring of 1777, at Harrodsburg. Cited in Townsend, p. 43.

6 Green, op. cit., p. 212.

7 Townsend, op. cit., p. 44. Todd was present at the first recorded meeting of trustees of Transylvania Seminary, November 10, 1783. Trustees Book I, p. 1.
Robert Smith Todd, Mary Lincoln's father, was of the second Lexington generation. He was the seventh child of Levi and Hannah Todd. He was born February 25, 1791.\(^8\) Robert S. Todd was brought up from the time he could read and write in the office of the Fayette County Clerk, and entered Transylvania at the early age of fourteen.\(^9\) He was a member of the Legislature and holder of some other offices. He was a banker, a manufacturer, a farmer, a merchant, and one of the local political group, in close contact with Henry Clay. It scarcely must be added that he and his family stood high in social circles.

There are two statements about Robert S. Todd which should be borne in mind in a discussion of Mrs. Lincoln's inheritance; one is that he was impetuous, high strung, and nervous.\(^10\) So were Mrs. Lincoln and her sons, Robert and Tad. Another is that Mrs. Lincoln inherited from her father her love of fine dress, jewelry, and personal adornment.

By the time Robert S. Todd left college he was nearly six feet in height, erect and graceful in manner, with brown hair and eyes and a ruddy complexion. He immediately entered the office of Thomas Bodley, clerk of Fayette County Court

\(^8\)Townsend, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 44-45.

\(^9\)Certificate of Thomas Bodley, February 6, 1811. Owned by Emilie Todd Helm. Townsend, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.

\(^10\)Evans, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35.
where, says Mr. Bodley, he "supported a fair and unblemished character, remarkable for his industry, integrity and correct deportment".  

He studied law under the tutelage of George M. Bibb, Chief Justice of the Kentucky Court of Appeals, United States Senator, and Secretary of the Treasure under President Tyler, and on September 28, 1811 he was admitted to the bar. It is possible that the young lawyer hung out his shingle for a brief period in Lexington, but if he did there is no record of it. He was more than absorbed in wooing Eliza Parker, seventeen-year-old daughter of Major Robert Parker.

Little is known about Mary Lincoln's maternal grandparents, the Parkers. Major Robert Parker, an officer of the Revolution, the first cousin of Levi Todd, married in March, 1789 Elizabeth R. Porter, daughter of General Andrew Porter, a friend of General George Washington, and veteran of the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine and Germantown. Immediately after the wedding the young soldier and his bride set out on horseback from Pennsylvania over the mountains to Lexington, Kentucky, where they arrived May 3.


12Certificate of George M. Bibb, February 1, 1811, and law license. Owned by Emilie Todd Helm. Townsend, op. cit., p. 45.

13Townsend, op. cit., p. 45.
Major Parker was the first surveyor of Fayette County, the clerk of the first board of trustees of Lexington, and, according to tradition, he erected the first brick residence in town. When on March 4, 1800, Major Parker died at his county seat in Fayette County, the "Gazette" described him as "an early adventurer to Kentucky--of extensive acquaintance--and universally esteemed". 14

Under the terms of Major Parker's will, his widow and children were left a comfortable fortune, consisting of town lots, farmlands, slaves, and other personal property of considerable extent and value. The whole estate was devised to Mrs. Parker during her life, with one injunction: "It is my sincere will and desire," wrote the testator a few hours before his death, "that all my children be carefully brought up and well educated". 15

In 1811 the Widow Parker lived in a stately house on West Shore Street, and her boys and girls attended the best schools in Kentucky. Eliza was a sprightly, attractive girl, with a placid, sunny disposition, in sharp contrast to her impetuous, high-strung, sensitive cousin, Robert S. Todd. On November 26, 1812, at the home of Widow Parker, Eliza was married to Private Robert S. Todd of the Fifth Regiment

14Ibid.

Kentucky Volunteers. The date of the marriage of Robert S. Todd and Eliza Parker has been hitherto unknown, due to the confusion of early marriage records in the Fayette County Clerk's office. The original license was discovered only after an exhaustive search by Mr. Charles R. Staples and William H. Townsend.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., p. 48.
By the year 1817 Robert S. Todd was one of the most enterprising young businessmen of Lexington, deeply interested in political and civic affairs. He was also the father of a growing family which consisted of two daughters, Elizabeth and Frances, and a son named Levi, for his father. On December 13, 1818, a third daughter was born and named Mary Ann. Two years later a son, Robert Parker, was born, but in the middle of the second summer he died. Nelson, the old body servant, hitched up the family barouche and, according to a quaint custom of the town, delivered at the door of his master's friends black-bordered "funeral tickets" which read:

Yourself and family are invited to attend the funeral of Robert P. Todd, infant son of R. S. Todd, from his residence on Short Street, this evening, at five o'clock. Lexington, July 22, 1822.\(^1\)

Mary Ann Todd's mother died from childbirth on July 6, 1825. Her father was left a widower with six small children. His unmarried sister, Ann Maria, came to live with them and helped to keep the family intact. The faithful slaves,\(^1\)

\(^1\)Duff, Collection of Obituaries, Lexington Public Library, as cited by Townsend, op. cit., p. 53.
brought up in the family, made the task easier than it would have been otherwise. Jane Saunders was the housekeeper; Chaney, the cook; Nelson, the body servant and coach, also served the dining room and did the marketing; while the old "Mammy Sally" with the young nurse, Judy, took excellent care of the children.²

We know Mary Todd was born in Lexington, Kentucky, December 13, 1818, but there is no direct information about Mary's life or personality during the life time of her mother. There are bare dates of births and deaths and that is all.³ She came into the kind of home where there was a fan-shaped window about the entrance, the gleam of silver on the sideboard, and rich furnishings reflected in gold-framed mirrors. There were dainty clothes, and gentle brown hands of a "Negro Mammy" to receive her, and a circle of friends to exclaim over the new baby.⁴

Mary was almost seven years old when her mother died. Probably the death of her mother had a lasting effect on her (Mary's) personality. She could remember the strangeness of a household hushed by the passing of its guardian spirit; perhaps she had gazed at the pale still face in the coffin.

²Ibid.,
³Ibid., p. 51.
⁴Ruth Randall, Mary Lincoln, p. 20.
In later life the sight of a loved dead face almost threw her into convulsions.\(^5\) In a medical study of Mary Lincoln's personality, a valuable book, Dr. W. A. Evans writes: "It is a pretty good guess that Mary Todd as a child was subject to temper tantrums". He suggests, with a physician's understanding of a nervous temperament, that she might have "night terrors".\(^6\)

On Wednesday, November 1, 1826, Robert S. Todd and Betsey Humphrey were married at the home of the bride in Frankfort, Kentucky.\(^7\) The young step-mother immediately assumed the duties of the household with poise, tact, patience, and a deep interest in the welfare, education, and training of her step-children. Mrs. Todd soon discovered Mary Ann Todd to be a sprightly, warm-hearted, sympathetic and generous, headstrong and precocious tom-boy, passionately fond of birds, flowers, pretty dresses and other dainty things that delight the feminine heart.\(^8\)

Mary Todd, influenced by her grandmother Parker, took a resentful attitude toward her stepmother. Mrs. Parker and the rest of her maternal relatives resented Betsey Humphrey

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\(^5\)Ibid., p. 21.

\(^6\)Evans, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 71.

\(^7\)"Kentucky Gazette", November 10, 1826, as cited by Townsend, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.

\(^8\)Townsend, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.
Todd. Mary would combat any attempt of her step-mother to discipline her or teach her self-control. Mary grew up without learning the essential lesson of self-restraint, and this had far-reaching results. Mary called her childhood "desolate": "... My early home", she wrote, "was truly at a boarding school."  

When Mary was about eight years old, she entered the Academy of Dr. John Ward, a scholarly, benevolent, but strict Episcopal minister, who, ahead of his time, believed in co-education and conducted a school for over a hundred boys and girls from the best families in Lexington. Dr. Ward believed in recitations at dawn. There was a current idea that the brain worked better when the body was undernourished, that early rising and study were most desirable. So Mary had to get up by candlelight and trudge several blocks to school, sometimes in winter sleet and snow. This was cheerfully done, for neither then nor later was she one to complain or magnify physical discomfort.  

Mary Todd finished the preparatory course at Dr. Ward's when about fourteen, then entered the select boarding school of Madame Leclere Mentelle on the Richmond Pike. Here, according to the announcement in the Lexington Intelligencer in 1838, young ladies could receive a "truly useful and

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10Ibid., p. 24.
'solid' English Education in all its branches. French taught, if desired. Boarding, Washing, and Tuition $120.00 per year, paid quarterly in advance. It was a finishing school where they taught, along with other social graces, letter writing and conversation. In these Mary learned full well, for she became an artist at both.

Mary Todd "desired" French. She made the statement years later than the scholars at Madame Mentelle's were not allowed to speak anything else; she learned to speak and write French and retained that knowledge in her later life. It was to serve her well in the White House when she had distinguished foreign guests and in later life when living in France.

The year Mary Todd entered the Mentelle School, 1832, was an important one for her. On February 18 her oldest sister, Elizabeth, was married to a junior at Transylvania University. Her husband had come of a distinguished family. He was Ninian Wirt Edwards; his father, Ninian Edwards, had been territorial governor of Illinois, United States senator, and later state governor. In 1833 the couple moved to Springfield to live, thus forming a stepping stone on that path that was to lead Mary to the meeting with Abraham Lincoln.

Mary visited the Edwards in Springfield during the summer of 1837, though she probably did not meet Lincoln.

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at that time. She went back to Kentucky and took sort of a post-graduate course. Katherine Helm, Mary Lincoln's niece, states in her book, *Mary, Wife of Lincoln*:

Mary, on her first visit to Springfield, found herself by no means a stranger in the midst of a delightful society of culture. . . . Mary, full of life and animation, was a great toast among her kinsfolk who met her with open arms and vied with each other in entertaining her. She, fresh, young and enthusiastic, was an ardent Whig, and could give them all the latest gossip of all the politicians in Kentucky. She said that her stepmother agreed with her, that all the Humphries believed, like Henry Clay, in the gradual emancipation of the slaves, and the preservation of the Union by compromises or extension.12

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IV
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1809-1837

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States, was born February 12, 1809 in a log cabin in the backwoods of Kentucky, about three miles west of a place called Hodgenville in what is now La Rue County.¹

Fifty years later when he had been nominated for the presidency he was asked for material for an account of his early life. "Why", he said, "it is a great folly to attempt to make anything out of me or my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy: 'The short and simple annals of the poor'. That's my life, and that's all you or anyone else can make of it." Nevertheless there was once extracted from him an awkward autobiographical fragment, and his friends have collected and recorded concerning his early years quite as much as is common in great men's biographies or can as a rule be reproduced with its true associations.²

Abraham Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, was born in Rockingham County, Virginia on January 6, 1778. Thomas

¹Benjamin P. Thomas, Abraham Lincoln, p. 4.
²Lord Charnwood, Abraham Lincoln, p. 2.
Lincoln's father was also named Abraham. He brought his family from Virginia in 1782 and settled near Hughes Station, in Jefferson County, about twenty miles east of Louisville, Kentucky. One morning four years later he (Abraham) was at work near his cabin with his sons Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas when a shot from the bushes brought him down. Thomas, aged six, stayed with his father's body while Mordecai seized a gun and, looking through the window, saw an Indian stooping to pick up Thomas. He fired and killed the savage. 3

Soon after the death of his father, Thomas moved with his widowed mother to Nelson County, Kentucky. In 1803 he bought a farm of 238 acres located on Mill Creek about eight miles north of Elizabeth. On this farm Thomas Lincoln probably lived until a few months after his marriage to Nancy Hanks on June 12, 1806. Little is known about Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks. Lincoln himself seems to have believed that his mother was born out of wedlock to Lucy Hanks, who later married Henry Sparrow. According to notations in the family Bible, his mother was born on February 5, 1784 and married Thomas Lincoln at the age of twenty-two. Tradition differs as to her height, her build, the color of her eyes and hair. Whenever she signed a legal document, she made

3 Ibid., p. 3.
her mark. Acquaintances agreed that she was intelligent, deeply religious, kindly and affectionate.\footnote{Charnwood, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.}

Soon after their marriage, Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln moved to Elizabethtown, where Thomas purchased two lots and built a log cabin for their home. Their first child, Sarah, was born in Elizabethtown on February 10, 1807. In 1808 Thomas purchased a farm on Nolin Creek. The soil was poor and covered with a thick mat of tall, coarse grass. The only attractive feature of the place was a great spring. On a high point above the spring Thomas Lincoln built another rude log cabin. Here Abraham Lincoln was born. In the spring of 1811 the Lincolns moved from his birthplace farm to Knob Creek, the first home that Abraham remembered.

In December, 1816, the Lincolns moved to Spencer County, Indiana. In the late summer of 1818 a dread disease swept through southwestern Indiana known as the "milk sickness". It is now believed to have been caused by cattle eating white snakeroot and passing on the poison in their milk. Nancy Hanks Lincoln became ill and died on October 5.\footnote{Thomas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.}

Abraham Lincoln spent most of his boyhood in Indiana. He had gone to school in Kentucky, but the most of his education was acquired in an Indiana "blab" school. In his
first school Abraham used only the spelling book. The whole of his schooling was less than two years. The school houses were bare, log buildings, with the cracks unchinked. The benches were of puncheon and had no backs.

The books that Lincoln read in his boyhood had a marked influence upon his life. There was the Bible, first of all, the basis of his pure literary style and the foundation of his system of righteousness expressed in law. Other books were Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, and History of the United States. Later he read Franklin's Autobiography and Weem's Life of Marion.

At school he stood well in his studies. He was a good reader, an excellent speller, a good penman, and he was able to compose well. He was an attractive young giant who was rude and uncultured, but he had a good mind, a warm heart, a love of justice that won for him the lasting respect of those who knew him.6

On February 20, 1830, Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, and his wife sold their Indiana farm to Charles Grigsby. The family was again frightened by an epidemic of the dreaded milk sickness. On March 1, 1830 the family set out for Illinois. After a journey of more than two hundred miles they came to a place on the north bank of the Sangamon

River, a few miles west of Decatur in Macon County, Illinois. Here they built a cabin where they remained until the spring of 1831 when they moved again to Coles County, Illinois.

Abraham Lincoln left his parents in Coles County and established himself in the village of New Salem in Sangamon County. Six years later he moved to Springfield, the new capital of the state. He remained in Springfield until February 11, 1861, when he left for Washington to become the President of the United States.7

It was in 1832 while Lincoln was living in the log cabin village of New Salem that he met Ann Rutledge. He was boarding at the Rutledge Tavern and was daily in association with the Rutledge family, including Ann, the young daughter, who about this time was engaged to John McNamar.8

The Rutledge family was a family of more refined type than most of those Lincoln had been associated with up to that time. James Rutledge, the father, was fairly well educated and is thought to have had a library of twenty-five or thirty volumes, an almost irresistible attraction to a young man who had walked eight miles to borrow a grammar.9

7Paul M. Angle, Here I Have Lived.

8Benjamin P. Thomas, Lincoln's New Salem, pp. 80-81, as quoted in Randall, op. cit., p. 25.

Friendship with the Rutledge family meant much to one who called himself a "friendless, uneducated, penniless boy".\textsuperscript{10}

When Ann Rutledge died in 1835, Lincoln was naturally distressed. The tradition of this grief was later unearthed after Lincoln's death, and was to become the starting point of an almost invincible legendary romance.

William Herndon in a public lecture on Ann Rutledge at Springfield on November 15, 1866, said:

Abraham Lincoln loved Miss Ann Rutledge with all his soul, mind, and strength, that she loved him dearly, that Ann was honestly engaged to two men at the same time, that the lovely maiden sickened and died under conflict of emotion and duty, that Lincoln's heart was buried in her grave, and that he went out of his mind as the result of her death.\textsuperscript{11}

Few people, if any, in Springfield had heard of Ann Rutledge before the lecture. Joshua Speed in Kentucky, the one person to whom Lincoln had poured out his intimate confidences in regard to affairs of the heart, said it was all news to him.\textsuperscript{12}

Benjamin P. Thomas states in his book, \textit{Abraham Lincoln}:

\begin{quote}
In the face of affirmative reminiscences, Lincoln students can scarcely declare with certainty that no such romance took place. But most of them regard it as improbable and reject its supposed enduring influences upon Lincoln.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}Randall, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 400.


\textsuperscript{13}Thomas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51.
In April, 1837, the twenty-eight year old Abraham Lincoln rode into Springfield on a borrowed horse with all his possessions in two saddlebags and the knowledge in his mind that he was in debt. He had no money for lodging, and Joshua Speed, liking the young man, offered to share with him the sleeping room above the Speed store. They shared that room for four years.¹⁴

Mr. Lincoln had been a member of the State Legislature at Vandalia. One who saw him there described him as a "raw-boned, tall, very countrified-looking man, yet who spoke with such force and vigor that he held the close attention of all." More than any other person he was responsible for the removal of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield.

Young Lincoln even then had that magnetism which was to draw people to him all his life, a quality compounded of whimsical humor, kindness, interest in people and intellectual power. His appearance showed that he gave more thought to human problems than to dress, but meditation did not take cash and new clothes did. He was always companionable with men. His stories, racy and down-to-earth, were superbly told.¹⁶

¹⁴Randall, op. cit., p. 11.
¹⁵Katherine Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, pp. 67-70.
¹⁶Randall, op. cit., p. 12.
With Springfield's well-dressed and educated ladies (when he finally met them), he was shy and uncertain of himself. In fact, there is evidence that he felt keenly his lack of family background, social training, and formal education when he was gradually accepted by the bright young set who had these advantages. Getting acquainted was hard at first.

Lincoln had a young man's natural interest in girls and had two affairs with women that pointed toward matrimony, one with Mary Owens and the other with Mary Todd.

Lincoln's courtship of Mary Owens, as related in his letters, tells a great deal about the young man and his attitudes toward marriage. Miss Owens in 1833 had come from Kentucky to the New Salem community to visit her sister, Mrs. Bennet Abell. There young Lincoln met her, found her attractive and, as he later wrote, "saw no good objection to plodding through life hand in hand with her". 17

Mary Owens was as well educated and cultured a woman as Lincoln had met up to that time. He was intellectually lonely and was reaching out for the things of the mind. He admitted he liked her mental qualities better than her physical: "I also tried to convince myself that the mind was much more to be valued than the person, and in this,

17Photostat, Abraham Lincoln Association. Lincoln to Mrs. O. H. Browning, Springfield, April 1, 1837, as cited in Randall, op. cit., p. 12.
she was not inferior, as I could discover, to any with whom I had been acquainted". He was forced to think of her worthy mind for, when Miss Owens returned with Mrs. Abell to the latter's home near New Salem, three years had brought changes very devastating to the romance. The lady looked "weather-beaten". She had lost some teeth and had got fat. As Lincoln wrote two years later: "... a kind of a notion ... ran in my head that nothing could have commenced at the size of infancy and reached her present bulk in less than thirty-five or forty years". In justice to the lady, it must be stated that she was twenty-eight in 1836 and less than a year older than Lincoln.

Lincoln felt bound to keep his part of the bargain, but it could hardly be called an ardent wooing. He wrote Miss Owens from Springfield in 1837:

I am often thinking about what we said of your coming to live at Springfield. I am afraid that you would not be satisfied. You would have to be poor without the means of hiding your poverty ... Whatever woman may cast her lot with mine should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine that would make me more unhappy than to fail in the effort ... My opinion is that you better not do it.

18 Photostat, Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln to Mrs. O. H. Browning, Springfield, April 1, 1837, as cited in Randall, op. cit., p. 13.

19 Ibid.


Three months later he wrote Mary Owens again, August 16, 1837:

I want at this particular time, more than anything else, to do right with you; and if I knew it would be doing right, as I rather suspect it would, to let you alone, I would do it... If you feel yourself to any degree bound to me, I am now willing to release you; provided you wish it; while on the other hand, I am willing and even anxious to bind you faster... If it suits you best not to answer this, farewell. A long life and a merry one attend you.22

Mary did not answer this letter.

Many years later the son of Mary Owens Vineyard wrote a description of his mother as a young woman which can be applied almost word for word to Mary Todd. "Miss Owens", he wrote, "had a good education, was good looking and polished in her manners, pleasing in the address, and attractive in society". Miss Owens, according to this filial description, was "a good conversationalist and splendid reader--but very few persons being found to equal her in this accomplishment. She was light-hearted and cheery in her disposition".23

22Paul M. Angle, The Lincoln Reader, p. 118.

TODD-LINCOLN ROMANCE

In the fall of 1839 Mary Todd came to Springfield to make her home with her sister, Mrs. Ninian Wirt Edwards. Her home in Lexington was presided over by a stepmother burdened with many children. Marriage was about the only career open to women in that Victorian era, and unmarried girls were at a premium in Springfield.

William Herndon describes Mary when she came to live with her sister as follows:

She was a young woman, twenty-one years of age, of strong passionate nature and quick temper. She was of average height, weighing when I first saw her about a hundred and thirty pounds. She was rather compactly built, had a well-rounded face, rich dark-brown hair, and bluish grey eyes. In her bearing she was proud, handsome and vivacious. Her education had been in no way defective; she was a good conversationalist, using with equal fluency the French and English languages. When she used a pen the point was sure to be sharp, and she wrote with wit and ability. . . ordinarily she was affable and even charming in her manner; but when she offended or antagonized, her agreeable qualities instantly disappeared beneath a wave of stinging satire or sarcastic bitterness, and her entire better nature was submerged.1

The younger set who gathered at the Edwards mansion called themselves "the Coterie". It was a remarkable

1William H. Herndon and Jesse Weik, Abraham Lincoln, p. 192.
selection of vivid undivided personalities and a number of its names were to be written down in the nation's history. The group seethed with interest in politics, literature, romance, parties, and the perennial fun of youth. Some of the members were good letter writers, and with the aid of these faded letters they can be made to describe each other.

It was rumored about this time that the "Little Giant", Stephen A. Douglas—a man of massive head and aggressive personality—was courting the vivacious Miss Todd. No doubt that Springfield gossip coupled the names of the two together. Years later one of her relatives remarked to Mary, "I used to think Mr. Douglas would be your choice". "No," was the emphatic reply, "I liked him well enough but that was all."2

There is evidence that by the end of 1839 Lincoln had been accepted by Springfield society and commenced seeing Mary Todd in the winter of 1839-1840. Katherine Helm, Mary's niece and daughter of Emilie Todd Helm, states in her book, The Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln, that Mary met Lincoln at a cotillion. When presented to her, according to this illustrative story, he said, "Miss Todd, I want to dance with you in the worst way". Mary, after the party (no doubt with her damaged slippers in mind), bubbled with laughter to her cousin, Elizabeth Todd, "and he certainly did".3


Mrs. Ninian Edwards and Mary Todd differed in their ideas as to what constituted a suitable marriage. The older sister had married an aristocrat. An undated statement of Mrs. Ninian Edwards to Herndon states: "Mary said, 'I would rather marry a good man—a man of mind—with a hope and bright prospects ahead for position, fame and power than to marry all the houses, and gold . . . in the world".  

Mary was determined to marry the man she loved even though he came from hardscrabble beginnings and was, as one of her sisters put it, "the plainest looking man in Springfield".

Mary's attitude toward her marriage which was entirely free from snobbishness, has been entirely overlooked. Chiefly emphasized have been her remarks that she intended to marry a future president.

During the summer and fall of 1840 it was apparent to their intimate friends that Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd were taking more than casual pleasure in each other's company. Rumors of a prospective wedding went the rounds. And then on New Year's Day, 1841, something happened between them. They ceased to see each other. To her friends Mary Todd seemed as gay and flirtatious as ever, but Lincoln was crushed. For a week or two he was too ill to attend the

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5 Randall, op. cit., quotes Townsend, p. 19.
Legislature regularly and when he did recover he was dejected, morose, and inclined to shun his former friends. The gossip was that Mary had jilted him.6

The months wore on. Mary Todd succeeded in covering a wound with flashing but superficial gaiety, while Lincoln struggled with the tormenting doubts which had driven him to break the engagement on "that fatal first of January, 1841".7

That the engagement of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd was broken on January 1, 1841, is accepted, and while it is not known for a certainty which one of the young people was responsible for the misunderstanding, it is not evident that there was any demonstration on the part of either one of them that caused any expression of disrespect. Two factors which undoubtedly contributed to the temporary separation was Lincoln's fear that Mary might not be happy in having to share his humble station, and the influence of Mary's aristocratic relatives who looked with much disfavor on the match.8

The story of Lincoln as a defaulting bridegroom was the work of William H. Herndon, who became Lincoln's junior
law partner in 1844 and his biographer with the publication of Herndon's *Lincoln*, forty-five years later.

Albert S. Edwards, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards, years later said that the cause of the break in the engagement of Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln was the opposition and disapproval of his parents. They had nothing against Lincoln except his poverty and lack of prospects, but they thought he could not support Mary in a manner which they felt to be essential. "During 1841 and 1842", said Albert S. Edwards, "my mother did what she could to break up the match". After the marriage he said, "Normal social relations were resumed, but Mrs. Lincoln, I think, always was a little cool toward my mother for the course she had taken to discourage the engagement."9

Early in October, 1842, Lincoln was meeting Mary secretly. A wedding was being planned at these secret meetings. Lincoln was soon to have a wedding ring engraved with words that seem to indicate the couple's ideal of their attachment for each other. "Love is Eternal" was inscribed in the wedding ring worn by Mary Lincoln.10

At the stolen meetings the engaged couple had to work out details of their wedding. Of course they could not have a


festive wedding, much as Mary would have liked it, for there was no place to have it. It was agreed that they would go quietly to Dr. Charles Dresser, the Episcopal minister, and have the ceremony at his home.\(^\text{11}\)

Things began to happen on the morning of November 4, 1842. Lincoln dropped around to the minister's home on Eighth Street while the family was still at breakfast and said to Dr. Dresser, "I want to get hitched tonight".\(^\text{12}\) Sometime early that morning the young lawyer met Ninian Edwards on the street and announced to him that he and Mary were going to be married at the parsonage that evening.

Meanwhile Mary had broken the news in the Edwards mansion. A storm of protest followed. Mrs. Edwards, according to her sister Frances Todd Wallace, "with an outburst gave Mary a good scolding, saying to her vehemently, 'Do not forget that you are a Todd'".\(^\text{13}\) The Edwardses were confronted with the fact that Lincoln and Mary had made up their minds to be married and they were powerless to prevent it.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards advanced the view that since Ninian was Mary's guardian, the marriage vows must be performed at

\(^{11}\)Helm, op. cit., p. 70. Had the plan been carried out, they would have been married in the same house they later bought and lived in for seventeen years.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 71.

\(^{13}\)Randall, op. cit., p. 71.
the Edwards mansion with guests. Lincoln could hardly have wanted to be married in this aristocratic home from which he had been shut out for so long. One suspects that the decision was Mary's, she so loved parties, and that Lincoln gave in for her sake.

According to Katherin Helm, Mary's close relatives and a few of the most intimate friends were notified; not more than thirty friends were present.

One of Mary's relatives described the wedding as the story had come down in the family circle. The ceremony was held in front of the fireplace. The wedding supper was placed on a long table whose handsome lined cover had an appropriate turtle design. Because of the hurried preparations the wedding cake was still warm. According to this account the nervous little bride spilled coffee on the bodice of her wedding dress after the ceremony.¹⁴

As to what Mary Lincoln wore at her wedding, we are not certain. The only safe statement we can make is that she wore a new dress of some pleasant material. We know that Mary was a most attractive girl with a pretty figure and vivid face and that she had a way of dressing herself becomingly.

The tall figure which stood beside her was undoubtedly grave, as serious-minded men are when they take their

marriage vows. The sensitive man doubtless saw some tight-lipped disapproval on the faces of the bride's relatives. He could hardly have been at ease. It would have been easier to have gone to the minister's, as he and Mary had planned to do.

There are many contradictory accounts of the wedding. What we know for certain is that on the evening of November 4, 1842, in the presence of about thirty people, Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd stood side by side before the minister, Dr. Dresser, joined hands, and took each other, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish" till death did them part.¹⁵

Seven days later the young husband wrote a friend: "Nothing new here, except my marriage, which to me is matter of profound wonder".¹⁶

¹⁵Randall, op. cit., p. 74, quotes Helm, p. 95.

In 1843 Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln were living at the Globe Tavern. The two-story wooden structure made a plain setting for the young couple. Mary undoubtedly missed the beautiful furnishings and association of the Edwards home.

The Lincolns boarded and roomed at $4.00 per week in the Globe Tavern, where their first baby came August 1, 1843 and was named Robert Todd. Soon after, they moved into their own home, bought for $1500, a story-and-a-half frame house a few blocks from the center of Springfield. The framework and floors were oak; the laths, hand-split hickory; the doors, the door frames and weather-boarding, black walnut. In the back lot were a cistern, well and pump, a barn thirty by fifteen feet, a carriage house eighteen by twenty feet. Three blocks east the cornfields began, and farms--mile after mile.

Mrs. Lincoln never called her husband Abraham; he was Mr. Lincoln to her except when he was "Father", after the children came. No proper wife of that era was so disrespectful as to call her husband by his first name. There were

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1Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln, The Prairie Years and the War Years, p. 78.
the usual jolts before the marriage settled firmly upon its foundation. Mary was nervous, quick-tempered, and subject to migraine headaches, and Lincoln considered his own nerves defective. There were the adjustments of living closely together. Mary's natural cheerfulness was an excellent foil for Lincoln's periods of depression.

Family tradition tells that Mary usually celebrated February 12 and recalls her pretty speech to her husband on his first birthday after their marriage, a speech that ended: "I am so glad you have a birthday. I feel so grateful to your mother".2

Springfield was dirty and smelly in the middle of the 1800's. Outside toilets were a matter of course and there was a corollary to this: the oil lamps, the candles that were used were home made. Gas for illumination was not available until the fifties.

The house the Lincolns bought had no fly screens; windows having no weights were propped up on sticks. Heating for the new home was by wood fires. This meant chopping the wood, which Lincoln himself did when at home, carrying it in, and constantly watching and replenishing. Fires must be banked at night to keep coals over until morning.

2Helm, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
Laborious as cooking was, it had to be done on an extended scale that the present generation with its infinite resources of canned and frozen food finds it hard to visualize.³

Lovable as Lincoln was, he had traits that were exasperating to one who had to keep house for him. Living in a log cabin during his formative years he was, through no fault of his own, ignorant of details of refined living. He was unsystematic at the office, scattering papers in such disorder that frequently documents were lost. Mary had enough to do at home without continuously picking up after him.

Mary had a different standard; she had been brought up to consider conventions important. It annoyed her that he came to the dining table in his shirt sleeves. It was all right for him to be on the floor reading, with the back of a turned down chair for a pillow, but when the quaint little doorbell on the wall of the dining room tinkled, it was proper to let the maid (when they had one) answer it. From Harriet Hanks, a cousin of Lincoln's who had lived at their home for a year and a half, comes the story of his going to the front door in his shirt sleeves to admit two lady callers (probably very stylish ones), ushering them into the parlor and telling them in his quaint amiable way that he would

³Randall, op. cit., p. 87.
Records of Lincoln's appearance in early life mention his careless dress. It fell to Mary to see that he did not go around with one pant leg rolled up and the other down, as he had in New Salem days. Mary had to make sure that he took his warm shawl with him on cold days, and his umbrella on wet ones. She knew the proper dress for a rising lawyer and a gentleman and she intended that her husband should make a good appearance.

Lincoln loved his family dearly and helped as best he could in the care of the children. On Sundays while Mrs. Lincoln went to church, the neighbors would see Lincoln pulling a little wagon with a baby in it up and down the street in front of his house. In one hand he would hold an open book and, deeply absorbed, read from it as he walked. Once the baby fell out and lay squalling upon the ground, while the father went on with complete unawareness of anything wrong. This was the scene which greeted Mary as she returned from her devotions at church, and many women will pardon her for shrieking at him.

That Mary had a difficult temperament is quite true. From an aged woman who once worked for the Lincolns came an understanding account of Mrs. Lincoln's quickly flaring

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4 Angle, The Lincoln Reader, p. 345.
temper. She said that these outbursts lasted only a few minutes and then Mrs. Lincoln was "all sorrow" and anxious to make amends. Mary's own numerous apologies in her letters and accounts from all sides bear this out. "She had an ungovernable temper, but after outbursts she was regretful and penitent", said Harriet Hanks, who lived in the Lincoln home for many months. Mrs. Keckly, the colored dressmaker in Washington said the same thing.

The years of marriage of Mary and Lincoln offer contrast as striking as those between bride and groom, who were opposite in almost every way. She was short and inclined to corpulence; he was tall and lean. He was slow moving, easy going; she was precipitate and volatile. He had the humblest of background; hers was aristocratic. He was a man of simple tastes; she liked fine clothes and jewelry. His personality and mind were the sort that grow continuously; hers remained essentially in a set mold. Both had ambitions, but her determination was so much more intense than his that it would be like a relentless prod, compelling him onward whenever he might be deposed to lag.

The upbringing of the children was left largely up to "Mother" (Mary), who was forbearing and over-strict by turns.

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5 Randall, op. cit., p. 92.
7 Thomas, op. cit., p. 90.
Her whole nature took on a sort of instability as times went on. Devoted, ever possessive toward her husband, she was eager to make him happy. But small matters upset her and brought on fits of temper. Servants found her difficult to please; she quarreled with tradesmen and neighbors. ⁸

Gossips have overstressed these unpleasant aspects of their life together; they were not always present by any means. For the most part Lincoln and Mary were happy with each other. It was unquestionably a factor in shaping Lincoln's character. For over the slow fires of misery that he learned to keep banked under heavy pressure deep within him, his innate qualities of patience, tolerance, forbearance, and forgiveness were tempered and refined. ⁹

The Lincoln family settled domestic routine like young married people of all generations. Their home knew drudgery, monotony, illness, disappointments, small disasters, all the elements that go into the daily exasperation of the average household. It was the home for a man who had been homeless, who had known loneliness, a home like others down the street. Mary would tell Lincoln unimportant news: how their little son had an adventure with a stray kitten, or how the baby had tried to say a new word.

⁸Ibid., pp. 90-91.
⁹Ibid.
"There was love in the house on Eighth Street, there was fun and playfulness, there was joy of children. 10

On April 5, 1843, Lincoln went on the judicial circuit and was apparently absent the rest of that month, coming back in May. His absence on the circuit was to be one of the greatest hardships of the marriage. He was away nearly half of the time, approximately three months in the spring and three months in the fall. The practice of law in those days was largely itinerant; usually two terms of court a year were held in each county. Mary came to resent these long absences.

There was color as well as discomfort in traveling on the circuit but there was less variety for the wives who stayed at home to tend the fires, cook and nurse and assume full responsibility without the help of a man around the house. It was hard for her for such long periods each year to give her husband up to his work. She did not have her husband's companionship in attending the usual Springfield gatherings; there were none of the quiet evenings when they could plan for the future and talk of the coming child.

Whatever may have been the circumstances of planning for the baby's arrival, we know that he was born at a second-rate hotel and that childbirth had no benefit of competent medical attentions, by modern standards, in 1843. The child

10 Randall, op. cit., p. 96.
was named Robert Todd Lincoln, for Mary's father. There was Mary's affection for a father who was good to her and her pride in the family name of Todd. Katherine Helm tells of Mary's father, who came from Lexington, Kentucky to see his new grandson: "May God bless and protect my little namesake", he said with feeling.

Those first years were lean ones financially for the Lincoln's. Being poor and doing without pretty clothes and other things she loved came hard to the young wife. Lincoln had doubtless warned her, as he had Mary Owens, that it would be the doom of the woman who married him. She had been trained to feel that social values were extremely important. Her awareness of the difference made by having ample funds became acute. She was more concerned, as it was soon evident, that her husband was not primarily concerned in money-making.

In *The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln* Harry Pratt estimates that between 1840 and 1850 Lincoln's annual income from the law was probably between $1500 and $2000. This was sufficient to provide a comfortable living a century ago, but those were days of heavy expenses.

The Globe Tavern had been a poor place for a honeymoon; it was less suited to a couple with a baby. Springfield

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12 Randall, op. cit., p. 85.
tradition has it that other guests complained of the baby's crying. At all events in the fall of 1843 the little family moved to a three-room frame cottage at 214 South Fourth Street. 13

In January, 1844 Lincoln drew up a contract for a deed with Dr. Charles Dresser, the Episcopal minister who married them, to buy his residence, but it was May 2 before the contract was completed and the Lincolns could move. For the house Lincoln paid $1200 plus $300 for a lot on Adams Street. The house was located at the corner of Eighth and Jackson Street, conveniently located, not far from Lincoln's law office, and was roomy enough for a family of three. The story-and-a-half dwelling meant much to Mary Lincoln; the Lincolns were establishing a home. 14

**Happiest Stages of Life**

The years 1845-1846 were happy ones for the Lincolns. On the Fourth of July, 1845, Mr. Lincoln announced his plans to run for Congress. In 1846 Mrs. Lincoln was planning for the arrival of her second child. A second son, Edward Baker Lincoln, was born March 10 in the home on Eighth Street. He was named for Edward D. Baker, who belonged to Lincoln's intimate circle of friends, a handsome and personable man.

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14 Randall, op. cit., p. 85.
and fellow Whig. In 1846 Mr. Lincoln was elected to Congress in November, an event toward which he had been shaping his plans for some years. He was emerging from state politics into national, and Mary's ambition for him was soaring.\textsuperscript{15}

On August 29, 1846, the \textit{Lexington Observer and Reporter} announced that Abraham Lincoln, son-in-law of State Senator Robert S. Todd, had been elected to Congress from Illinois. Lincoln had been opposed in his race for Congress by Peter Cartright, the man who defeated him in his first campaign for the Legislature, a militant, hard-hitting, Methodist circuit rider, the sworn enemy of slavery and whisky, twenty years older than the Whig candidate. The canvass had been rigorous and colorful. The supporters of Cartright called attention to the fact that Lincoln had married into an aristocratic family, and that he had stated in a temperance speech at Springfield that drunkards were often as honest, generous and kindly as Christians and church members, and sometimes more so.\textsuperscript{16}

By the middle of October he had completed plans for his journey to Washington. It was arranged that Mrs. Lincoln and the two children should accompany him, and that they would stop off at Lexington for a leisurely visit with the Todd relatives. This would be Mary's first visit back home since

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{15}Randall, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 97-102.
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\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{16}Townsend, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 137, quotes \textit{Lexington Observer and Reporter}, August 29, 1846.
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she left in 1839, and although Robert S. Todd had visited Springfield, her stepmother and small half-brothers and half-sisters had never seen her tall, raw-boned husband. So early Monday morning, October 25, Congressman Lincoln with his wife and two small boys, Bob, four, and Eddie, a year and a half old, climbed into the stage that carried them overland to St. Louis, where they boarded a steamboat for Louisville.17

Lexington

It was a raw, blustery day when the Lincolns arrived at their destination. Townsend in Lincoln and His Wife's Hometown gives the following description of the arrival:

Lincoln, wearing a close-fitting cap and heavy ear mufflers, got out of the barouche and assisted Mary and the children up the broad stone steps to the door of the wide hall thrown open to receive them.

"The white family stood near the front door with welcoming arms and, in true patriarchial style, our colored contingent filled the rear of the hall to shake hands with the long-absent one and 'make admiration' over the babies. Mary came in first with little Eddie, the baby, in her arms. To my mind she was lovely; clear, sparkling blue eyes, lovely smooth white skin with a faint, wild rose color in her cheeks, and glossy light-brown hair, which fell in soft short curls behind each ear. She was then about twenty-nine years of age.

"Mr. Lincoln followed her into the hall with his little son, Robert Todd, in his arms . . . After shaking hands with all the grown-ups, he turned and, lifting me in his arms, said, 'So this is little Sister'."18

18 Townsend, op. cit., p. 144, quotes Helm, p. 100.
For three weeks Abraham Lincoln enjoyed the first real vacation of his life; the days were full of visits to Mary's many relatives who lived in town and in the country. Grandmother Parker, to whom Mary had been deeply devoted since the death of her mother, still lived in the fine brick mansion on Shore Street, next door to the house where Mary was born, and here the Illinois Congressman and his wife were warmly received. 19

With much leisure on his hands Lincoln now had an opportunity to study the institution of slavery at close range. In the home of relatives and friends he saw contented servants, born and reared for generations in the families of their present masters. It was apparent that the servants of the Todd household were privileged characters, while the aged widow Parker was utterly dependent on her three old servants, Ann, Cyrus, and Prudence. Yet Lincoln could see enough to know that, even in Lexington, slavery had its darker side. Many of the able-bodied white men of the town and country were absent with the army in Mexico. Most of the slaves on the smaller plantations were now under little or no restraint. The pilfering and other lawlessness among the Negroes, resulting from these conditions, had produced a vague, covert unrest that alarmed the timid and disturbed

19Townsend, op. cit., p. 145.
even the more level-headed citizens of the community.  

November days were drawing to a close. Senator Crittenden and other members of the Kentucky delegation were starting to Washington for the opening of Congress. On Thanksgiving Day, the Lincolns said good-bye to Lexington and with their two little boys boarded the stage for Maysville, where they would take a steamboat up the Ohio on their journey to Washington.  

**Washington**

Congressman Lincoln and his family arrived in Washington late Thursday evening, December 2, and obtained temporary lodging at Brown's Hotel. In a few days they moved over to the boarding-house of Mrs. Ann G. Spriggs in Carroll Row on Capitol Hill. Little is known of the months the Lincolns spent on Capitol Hill. Living, however, in a boarding-house with two small children proved difficult. By April 1848 Mrs. Lincoln and the children returned to Lexington.

On October 10, 1848, Lincoln returned with his family in Springfield. Since the house was rented, according to old-timer's recollections, they stayed temporarily at the Globe Tavern. A lady who was boarding there at the time later recalled that Lincoln left his family at the Globe  

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23Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
Hotel when he returned to Washington. This was a sensible arrangement which relieved Mary of household drudgery and the terror of staying in a house alone at night. The deeper one gets into the story of their married life, the more apparent it is how Lincoln sought to protect his wife from the strain of overwork. He left for the East the latter part of November, 1848, and did not return until March 31, 1849.24

On July 16, 1849, Mary's father, for whom she had named her first child, died, apparently of the plague, cholera, which was then epidemic in Lexington.25 One of the Todd sons, George, objected to the probate of the will. Lincoln was selected to represent the interests of the four heirs in Springfield: Mrs. Ninian Edwards, Mrs. William Wallace, Mrs. Charles M. Scott, and Mary Lincoln.

In October the Lincoln family left for Lexington where there was the refreshening of family ties, with sound advice about litigation, visitings, and gossipings. Again Lincoln had the opportunity to look on that sight which was a "continual torment" to him, slavery. They stayed in Lexington until early November.

In January, 1850, Mary's Grandmother Parker died, Mary's mother's mother, whose stately house stood next door to the

24Randall, op. cit., p. 129.

house where Mary was born. The news about Grandmother Parker reached the Lincolns when they were torn with anxiety for their young child, Eddie, who had been struck down with illness in December, 1849. Mary was a tender and devoted nurse, but her nervousness and inability to control her emotions were against her. The long illness dragged out for fifty-two days; then on the morning of February 1, 1850, little Eddie died.

There were heard in the house sounds of Mary's weeping; she was never to learn to hold back the tears. The reminiscence of a neighbor tells how she lay prostrated, stunned, turning away food, completely unable to meet disaster. Her haggard husband, himself sunk into the deep melancholia which death always produced in him, bent over her pleading, "Eat, Mary, for we must live". 26

Mary had grown up a Presbyterian, but when she joined her sister's household in Springfield, she attended the Episcopal Church, to which Mrs. Edwards belonged. This she continued to do after her marriage. Dr. James Smith, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Springfield, spoke at Eddie's burial, and it was a message that brought some measure of comfort to the parents. In 1852 Mary became a member of Dr. Smith's congregation. Mr. Lincoln did not join

with her in formal membership, but paid rent on the pew and attended church with her. They occupied the pew for about ten years.27

William Wallace Lincoln, Mary's third son, arrived on December 21, 1850. The baby was named for Dr. William Wallace, Mary's brother-in-law, husband of her sister Frances. Little Willie proved to be a beautifully endowed child who inherited his father's qualities and personality. It was not strange that he was to become his mother's favorite.28 Coming as he did after the loss of Eddie, having this calm, lovable, thoughtful nature, he was soon an object of complete adoration to both his parents.

On April 4, 1853, the fourth and last child was born. Mary and Lincoln both left clues that lead one to guess they had hoped for a girl. Whether they wanted a girl or not, what arrived was a son. "Dear little Taddie, named for my husband's father, Thomas Lincoln . . . was nicknamed Taddie by his loving Father," wrote Mary many years later.29 The infant's head was larger than usual, so that his father, viewing the top-heavy baby figure called him a little tadpole and from this tiny incident, as so often, arose a nickname that lasted a lifetime.30

27Randall, op. cit., p. 144.
28Randall, op. cit., p. 147, quotes Keckley, Behind the Scenes, p. 96.
30Helm, op. cit., p. 115.
Friends and Neighbors

The Lincolns lived for almost seventeen years in the home on Eighth Street in Springfield which is now a national shrine. They were a typical American family in a small town in the middle 1800's.

From the recollections of old-timers who lived near them one caught intimate glimpses of the couple as they appeared to neighbors next door to them or down the street.

The raw little town of Springfield was not far removed from frontier circumstances under which neighborly help was a vital thing. People were more dependent on each other; they shared intimate troubles and joys in a way and under a need which is now lost. About the time that Tad, the fourth child was born, a baby arrived also at the Charles Dallman home near by. Mrs. Dallman was very ill and unable to nurse her child. Formulas were a thing of the future and babies in such cases often died. Mary Lincoln offered her help. She nursed the baby at her own breast, along with her own child.31

Both Abraham and Mary Lincoln had a gift for warm, enduring friendship. Mrs. Lincoln's deep affection for her neighbors appears in the letter she wrote back from the White House. To her former neighbor, Mrs. John Sprigg,

31Ruth Randle, "The Lincolns were Good Neighbors", The New York Times, February 8, 1953.
Mary Lincoln wrote from Washington in 1861: "You were always a good friend and dearly have I loved you; what would I give to see you and talk to you". 32

It was Mrs. Sprigg's little daughter, Julia, who once packed her tiny ruffled muslin nightgown for the adventure of spending a night away from home with Mrs. Lincoln, whose husband was out of town. Julia was delighted because she had a good time with Mrs. Lincoln . . . "she was the kind of a woman that children liked, and children would be attracted to her". 33

James Gourley, a neighbor of the Lincolns who lived so close that Mrs. Lincoln could call him when she became frightened in the night, reports that Reverend N. W. Miner, who moved to a house across the street in 1853, found Lincoln delightful and Mrs. Lincoln a devoted wife, a loving mother, a kind neighbor and a sincere and devoted friend. 34 When the preacher's house overflowed with visitors, the Lincolns would help out by letting some of the visitors "put up" with them. Lincoln would at times lend the Reverend Mr. Miner his horse and carriage for church work.

Neighbors sometimes took the form of looking after each other's children. One of the sons of Jesse Dubois remembered


33 Randall, op. cit., p. 147, quotes Carlos Goltz, Incidents in the Life of Mary Todd Lincoln, p. 52.

34 Randall, op. cit., p. 151, quotes N. W. Miner, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, manuscript, Illinois State Library.
how he and other boys would play at the Lincoln home and the
motherly sympathetic way Mrs. Lincoln would watch over them
and give them cookies. 35

Like Mrs. Lincoln Abraham Lincoln was a good neighbor
too. Lincoln seems to have assumed some of the duties of a
Scoutmaster. He lived in a neighborhood well provided with
boys, each family furnishing at least a couple of them, and
the children all flocked to Lincoln who took so much interest
in them . . . He would sometimes gather up the boys of the
neighborhood, put them in a carriage, and take them out to
the Sangamon for a day of fishing. Years later one remembered
that after lunch was eaten, he "told stories and entertained
us with his funny stories". 36

Politics and President

For several years after Lincoln's terms in Congress, he
quietly devoted himself to the practice of law. But by 1854
the political scene was changing. The country was being
divided by the question of slavery with focus on slavery in
the territories. Lincoln, with his inborn love of politics
and his deep feeling on the problems of the nation, could not
possibly have refrained from getting into the game.

Early in 1855 a new senator was to be chosen by the
Illinois legislature and getting back into the swing of
politics, Lincoln ardently hoped he might be elected to

35 Randall, p. 152, quotes Rufus Wilson, Lincoln Among
His Friends, quoting Fred Dubois, p. 99.

36 Randall, op. cit., p. 156.
office. "I have really got it into my head to try to be United States Senator", he wrote his friend, Joseph Gillespie, on December 1, 1854. That fall he had been making speeches and conducting vigorous campaigns in what he afterwards described as "agony" of political maneuvering.\(^{37}\)

On February 8, 1855, the Legislature assembled to elect the senator. The first ballot had Lincoln in the lead with forty-five votes where fifty-one were necessary for election. Lincoln gave the story in a letter he wrote the next day: "The agony is over at last . . . I began with 44 votes, Shields 41, and Trumbull 5--yet Trumbull was elected".\(^{38}\)

Politics continued to absorb Lincoln. Parties were shifting. The Whig party which Lincoln and Mary had both loved with their young enthusiasm was crumbling. The new Republican party, opposing the extension in the territories, was being formed. It did not go so far as to advocate using national authority to abolish slavery in the Southern states. Lincoln finally joined the Republican party.

The country was being torn apart by the question of slavery. Lincoln in a letter to Joshua Speed in August of

\(^{37}\)Randall, op. cit., p. 161, quotes Lincoln to E. B. Washburn, Springfield, February 8, 1854.

\(^{38}\)Randall, op. cit., p. 164, quotes Journal of the House of Representatives, Illinois 19th General Assembly, 348-361, February 8, 1855. Later voting had changed the picture. Lincoln held on until he saw his case was hopeless, then threw his support to Trumbull.
1855 stated his position:

You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it... I also acknowledge our rights and obligations, under the constitution in regard your slaves. I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to their stripes, and unrewarded toils; but I bite my lip and keep quiet.

Scenes of slavery were a "continual torment" to him and made him "miserable". "I do oppose the extension of slavery."

On the subject of slavery Lincoln had the sympathy of his wife. Herndon said that Mrs. Lincoln was "decidedly pro-slavery in her views". He based this far-reaching pronouncement upon a casual remark which she was said to have made to friends (which he got from heresay): "If ever my husband dies, his spirit will never find me living outside the limits of a slave state".

Herndon's conclusions were false. She had grown up influenced by those who believed in gradual emancipation. She left an unbroken record of sympathy for the oppressed colored race. We are to find her during the Presidency working in their behalf, believing in emancipation, and in the end being called an "abolitionist". The evidence shows throughout that she shared her husband's attitude.

The summer of 1857 was a happy summer for Mary Todd Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln had to make a trip East in connection

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40 Ibid.
with his legal service for the Illinois Central Railroad and took his wife along. "We visited Niagara, Canada, New York and other points of interest", wrote Mary proudly to Emilie. "When I saw the large steamers at the New York landing, ready for their European voyage, . . . how I longed to go to Europe."

The year 1858 was a year of highlights for the Lincolns. Over fifteen years were now woven into the fabric of their married life. In April Lincoln gave a lecture to a full house in Bloomington on "Discoveries and Inventions", a lecture he would be called upon to give elsewhere. In May people were talking about his clever defense of a man charged with murder, Duff Armstrong, a son of an old friend of New Salem days. Introducing an almanac to prove there could not have been sufficient light from the moon to see the deed as described, Lincoln discredited the testimony of the state's star witness. On June 16 the state Republican convention selected Lincoln as their candidate for the United States Senate.41 He made a speech that evening using a sentence destined to become famous: "A House divided against itself cannot stand".42

Lincoln's Democratic opponent as senatorial candidate was Mary's old beau, Stephen A. Douglas, who had become a

42Ibid., p. 107.
national figure. He was a powerful speaker and new heights of excitement loomed ahead for Mary when her husband challenged him to a series of joint debates. The debates were held in seven Illinois towns between August 21 and October 15.

The last debate was held at Alton on October 15. Mary heard her husband that afternoon say things which have come down in history. He repeated what he had first said in June: "A House divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently, half Slave and half Free".43

Lincoln lost the contest in the sense that Douglas was elected. But the country through all the fanfare and through following the clear, logic speeches of a prairie lawyer, had become aware there was an Abraham Lincoln. There were even optimistic souls who were beginning to think of this man as a possible Presidential possibility.44

Mary had a number of trips in 1859. Tad, the youngest child was now six years old and she had a reliable maid, so she was free to go. On July 14 the Lincolns with a group of friends started on a long journey over the lines of the Illinois Central Railroad, the business of the men being the assessment of the road's property.

February 27, 1860, was a memorable date for the Lincolns. On that date Lincoln delivered in New York at the Cooper

44Ibid., p. 109.
Union his notable address which made the East acutely aware of this Republican from Illinois. His plans for his trip included going to Phillip Exeter to see Robert who was in school there. He was somewhat dismayed at the invitations to speak crowded upon him. Always mindful to keep Mary in close contact with what he was doing and feeling, he wrote her on March 4, "I have been unable to escape toil. If I had foreseen it, I think I would not have come East at all".  

After the Cooper Union speech Lincoln, who had achieved national recognition by his debates with Douglas, was not only prominently mentioned for the Presidency; he was one of a small number of leading contenders. On May 18 he was nominated on the third ballot as the Republican candidate for President of the United States.

Mary was one of the first to receive the news of her husband's nomination. The news reached Springfield about noon and at once the firing of a hundred guns commenced. Mr. Lincoln waited in the Journal Office for the news. When it came, people danced and sang, shouted and cheered. He said to his friends who were rejoicing over the news: "There is a little woman down at our house would like to hear this. I'll go down and tell her".  

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45 Randall, op. cit., p. 179, quotes George Haven Putnam, Abraham Lincoln, p. 49.

Springfield continued to celebrate. The exciting weeks that followed were punctuated with great rallies; the Republican cannon was fired, as often as if a war was on. An unknown photographer deserves gratitude for a picture of the Lincoln home during one of the great celebrations with Lincoln standing at the door surrounded with friends.

Mary Lincoln was confident her husband would be elected. On November 6, election day, Mr. Lincoln spent most of the day in his room at the State House. About three in the afternoon he went to the court house to vote, where he cut off the Presidential electors from the ballot so as not to vote for himself, and voted for the state officers.47

Lincoln spent the evening with a group of friends in the telegraph office getting returns. Mary was not there; it was not customary for women to be a part of such a gathering. As soon as the news that Lincoln was elected came through, there was a moment of wild confused rejoicing. Mr. Lincoln did not join the crowd of 10,000 crazy people who were shouting, throwing up their hats, stomping and kicking one another. He said to Mr. Trumbull, "I guess I'll go down and tell Mary about it".48


The Lincolns Leave Springfield

From the time of the election both the Lincolns suffered from the circulation of stories and rumors which prominence and politics always bring. With all her triumphant elation Mary in the later months of 1860 had her dark moments. Early in January, 1861, Mary received from South Carolina a painting on canvas showing Lincoln "with a rope around his neck, his feet chained and his body adorned with tar and feathers".49

Mary Lincoln felt that the President's wife should have the most exquisite of apparel. She went to New York early in January, 1861, to do her shopping and had her first glorious and foolish spree of shopping. New York's best stores filled with luxuries opened up a new world for her. She had to save and scrimp so long; now it seemed she could spend as much as she pleased. She lost her head and bought extravagantly. Dr. Evans, who made a valuable study of Mrs. Lincoln's impaired personality, says: "At this point is recorded her first evidence of poor judgment in money matters; the peculiar direction and bent of error were later to become a quality of her insanity".50

On January 27 Mr. Lincoln let it be known that he would leave Springfield for Washington on February 11. In January the furniture of the Eighth Street house was advertised for


50Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, p. 169.
private sale: "Parlor and Chamber Sets, Carpets, Sofas, Chairs, Wardrobes, Bureaus, etc."51

When the Lincolns moved to the Chenery House, there was no longer a place which they could call "home". The last arrangements were checked off one by one. With his own hands President-elect Lincoln roped his own trunks, took some of the hotel cards and wrote on the back of them: "A. Lincoln, White House, Washington, D.C." 52

The morning of February 11 was depressing with gray skies, rain and black mud. But they were all there at the Great Western Railroad depot to see him off, the faithful old neighbors and friends of office (except Herndon). 53

As he passed through the crowd to the train platform, hands reached out to touch him again for the last time. Over all there hung the threat of a civil war.

Mrs. Lincoln did not accompany her husband on the trip to Washington that morning; she followed that evening and overtook him at Indianapolis. Lincoln was fifty-two that day, so Mary rejoined him on his birthday February 12, 1861. The Lincolns were on their way to Washington where Abraham Lincoln later became the sixteenth president of the


52 Randall, op. cit., p. 198.

53 Ibid., quotes Weik, The Real Lincoln; p. 314.
United States and Mary Todd Lincoln the first lady of the land. The married life of the Lincolns was four-fifths over and probably the "happiest stage" had come to an end.
CONCLUSION

The story of Mary Todd is a story of a woman who has been misunderstood and cruelly persecuted. While she sometimes made her husband unhappy, and he frequently vexed her, she was an affectionate wife and mother, a good neighbor, loved her husband with an affectionate devotion and never failed in her faith in his character, ability and success. He loved her; she was the only woman to whom he gave a ring, and in that ring were the words, "Love is Eternal". 54

Of Lincoln's love story with Ann Rutledge we know very little. We have not a letter or script of contemporary evidence bearing directly on the case; that which comes to us is on the testimony of William Herndon. Large sections of the story of Ann Rutledge have been created.

Mrs. Lincoln has been called the "most tragic woman character in American history, the most maligned, and pilloried". As to the quality of her hospitality, hers was the genuine friendliness of a motherly woman who liked people and welcomed them heartily.

CHRONOLOGY

Incidents Affecting Mrs. Mary Lincoln
1806-1861

1806 June 12, Thomas Lincoln married Nancy Hanks.

1807 Feb. 10, Sarah Lincoln born.

1808 Thomas Lincoln and family moved from Elizabeth to near Hodgenville, Kentucky.

1809 Feb. 12, Abraham Lincoln born.

1812 Nov. 26, Robert S. Todd married Eliza Parker, Lexington, Kentucky.

1815 Frances Todd (Mrs. William Wallace) born.

1816 Thomas Lincoln and family, including Abraham, moved from Kentucky to Indiana.

1817 June 25, Levi O. Todd born.

1818 October 5, Nancy Hanks Lincoln died.

December 13, Mary Todd (Mrs. Abraham Lincoln) born.

1819 December 2, Thomas Lincoln married Sarah Bush Johnston.

1820 Robert Parker Todd born.

1824 Ann Todd (Mrs. C. M. Smith) born.

1825 July 4, George Rogers Clark Todd born.

July 5, Eliza Parker Todd died.

Lafayette, in America, visited Lexington; was visited by Porters in Pennsylvania and Todds in Lexington.

1826 August 2, Sarah, Abraham Lincoln's sister, married Aaron Grisby.

November 1, Robert S. Todd, Mary's father, married Betsey Humphreys, Frankfort, Kentucky.
1827 Robert S. Todd born; died in infancy.
1828 January 28, Sarah Lincoln Grisby died.
   December 14, Margaret Todd (Mrs. Charles H. Kellogg) was born.
1830 March, Abraham Lincoln moved from Indiana to Illinois.
   Samuel B. Todd born.
1831 Lincoln, living in New Salem, cast his first vote.
1832 February 29, marriage of Elizabeth Todd to Ninian W. Edwards.
   March 9, Lincoln announced his candidacy for Illinois Legislature.
   March 20, David H. Todd born.
   April to July, Lincoln in Black Hawk War.
   July 10, Lincoln mustered out at Whitewater, Wisconsin.
   August 7, Lincoln defeated for legislature.
   Lincoln piloted steamboat to Springfield.
   Mary Todd entered Mentelle's.
1833 Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards moved to Illinois.
   June 9, Martha Todd (Mrs. Clement White) born.
1836 Frances Todd (Mrs. William Wallace) went to Springfield to live.
   November 11, Emilie Todd (Mrs. B. H. Helm) born.
1837 March, Lincoln moved to Springfield and studied law.
   April, Lincoln became partner of Judge John T. Stewart.
   Abraham broke with Mary Owen.
   Mary Todd visited Springfield for three months.
   Autumn, Mary Todd in Ward's school again.
1839  February 18, Alexander H. Todd born.

Mary Todd finished at Ward's school and went to Springfield.

Autumn, Mary Todd, living with Mrs. Ninian Edwards in Springfield, met Abraham Lincoln.

1840  Abraham Lincoln in Illinois Legislature; defeated for Whig elector.

April 1, Elodie Todd (Mrs. N. H. R. Dawson) born.

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd engaged to marry.

1841  January 1, Engagement of Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln broken.

April 14, Stuart and Lincoln dissolved partnership. Logan and Lincoln in partnership.

September, Lincoln and Joshua Speed visited Lexington and Louisville.

October 7, Katherine Bodley Todd (Mrs. W. W. Herr) born.

1842  November 4, Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd married at the Edwards home. The Lincolns lived at Globe Tavern.

1843  August 1, Robert Todd Lincoln born.

Visit from Robert S. Todd (Mary Lincoln's father).

Lincoln defeated for Congress.

September 20, Logan and Lincoln partnership dissolved; Lincoln and Herndon partnership begun.

1844  Lincoln defeated for elector for Henry Clay.

The Lincolns bought the "Lincoln Home".

1845  Abraham Lincoln laying plans for race for Congress; practicing law actively.
1846 March 10, Edward Baker Lincoln born.

Lincoln elected to Congress.

1847 Lincoln attended River and Harbor Convention, Chicago; his first considerable political contact with northern Illinois.

October, the Lincolns visited Lexington enroute to Washington.

1848 Spring, Mrs. Lincoln in Lexington; Lincoln in Washington.

Lincoln attended Whig National Convention, Philadelphia.

Lincoln spoke in New England and other places, a member of Whig National Committee.

1849 July 16, Robert S. Todd died.

October, the Lincolns in Lexington, in connection with a law suit.

1850 January, Mrs. Eliza Parker, grandmother of Mrs. Lincoln, died.

February 1, Edward Baker Lincoln, died.

Spring, the Lincolns in Lexington.

December 21, William Wallace Lincoln born.

1851 January 17, Thomas Lincoln (Abraham's father) died.

Lincoln practicing law.

1852 Henry Clay and Daniel Webster died.

Pierce elected President.

Lincoln, candidate for Whig elector, defeated.

Lincoln practicing law.

1853 April 4, Thomas Lincoln (Tad) born.

Lincoln practicing law.

December, Emilie Todd visited in Springfield.
1854 Todd estate settled.

February 10, the suit of Oldham, Todd, and Company vs. A. Lincoln dismissed.

Whig party dying.

October 4, Speech on Nebraska question.

1855 Abraham Lincoln in Cincinnati on McCormick Reaper case.

February, Abraham Lincoln candidate for Senate; beaten by Lyman Trumbull.

Republican party organizing.

1856 February, the Lincolns gave large party.

May 29, "Lost Speech" delivered in Bloomington.

Lincoln joined Republican party.

Lincoln defeated for nomination for Vice-president.

Lincoln began to have faint hopes for being a presidential possibility.

November 23, Lincoln went to Chicago for three weeks.

November, Buchanan elected; Fremont defeated.

1857 Summer, Mrs. Lincoln traveled to Niagara Falls and New York.

September 8, Abraham Lincoln in Chicago on Rock Island Bridge case.

September 5-30, Second story added to Lincoln house.

B. H. Helm visited Springfield.

Lincoln began to take politics more seriously and to dress better.

1858 Lincoln candidate for Senate; beaten by Douglas.

June 16, "House Divided" speech.

August to October, Lincoln-Douglas debates.
1859 Lincoln wrote autobiographical sketch for Jesse Fell. Fell wrote the first Lincoln biography.

1860 February 27, Cooper Union speech.

May 18, Lincoln nominated for president.

November 7, Lincoln elected president.


December 20, South Carolina seceded.

1861 January 10, Mrs. Lincoln in New York shopping.

January 24, Mrs. Lincoln back in Springfield.

February 11, Lincoln and his family left for Washington.

March 2, Mrs. Lincoln arrived in Washington.

March 4, Abraham Lincoln inaugurated as President of the United States.55

55W. A. Evans, M.D., Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.
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