

**An Intimate Sketch of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln**  
(Excerpted from, *The Rewriting of America's History* © 1991 by Catherine Millard)

...The following letter written by Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln to her pastor from the executive mansion on May 22, 1865, shows the deep gratitude for the friendship and sympathy demonstrated to her bereaved family.

Rev. Dr. Gurley

My Dear Sir:

Please accept as a memento, of the very kind regard entertained for you by my Beloved Husband, the hat worn by him, for the first and only time, at his Second Inauguration. While its intrinsic value is trifling, you will prize it, for the associations that cluster around it. If anything can cast a ray of light across my dreary and blighted pathway, the recollection of your Christian kindness, extended to myself and family in our heavy bereavements will ever be most gratefully cherished. With love to Mrs. Gurley, I remain,

Your heart broken friend,

Mary Lincoln.

(Mrs. Lincoln died July 16, 1882 at the home of her sister, Mrs. Edwards, in Springfield, Illinois.)

Let us now study Mary Todd Lincoln's own intimate letters to her confidante, friend and employee, Elizabeth Keckley, who published them in 1868 in her book entitled: *Behind the Scenes, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*. In the Introduction to a later edition of this book, we read:

...However, Robert Lincoln rebuked Mrs. Keckley for publishing his mother's letters. He refused to accept the author's explanation, and prevailed upon the publisher to suppress the book. *Behind the Scenes* was recalled from the market and all available copies were bought up by "friends of Mr. Lincoln." Elizabeth Keckley realized nothing from the sale of the book and suffered a decline of patronage in her dress-making business. Some of her best friends even felt that the book was harmful to other Negroes similarly employed...Mrs. Keckley's book reveals more clearly the intimate family life of the martyred president and offers a more credible portrait of Mrs. Todd, than perhaps any other book about the Lincolns.

The following are excerpts from Mary Todd Lincoln's published letters:

Chicago, December 27:

Dear Lizzie:

I wrote you a few lines on yesterday...I believe any more newspaper attacks would lay me low. As influence has passed away from me with my husband, my slightest act is misinterpreted. "Time makes all things right." I am positively suffering for a decent dress. I see Mr. A. and some recent visitors eyeing my clothing askance. Do send my black merino dress to me very soon; I must dress better in the future....

Write,  
Yours,  
Mary Lincoln....

Clifton House, January 12:

My dear Lizzie:

Your last letter was received a day or two since. I have moved my quarters to this house, so please direct all your letters here....Your letter announcing that my clothes were to be paraded in Europe – those I gave to you – has almost turned me wild. Robert would go raving distracted if such a thing was done. If you have the least regard for our reason, pray write to the Bishop that it must not be done. How little did I suppose you would do such a thing; you cannot imagine how much my overwhelming sorrows would be increased. May kind Heaven turn your heart, and have you write that this exhibition must not be attempted. Robert would blast us all if you were to have this project carried out. Do remember us in our unmitigated anguish, and have those clothes, worn on those fearful occasions, recalled. I am positively dying with a broken heart, and the probability is that I shall be living but a very short time. May we all meet in a better world, where such grief is unknown. Write me all about yourself....For the sake of humanity, if not me and my children, do not have those black clothes displayed in Europe. The thought has almost whitened every hair on my head. Write when you receive this.

Your friend,  
Mary Lincoln.

The above suppressed correspondence from Mary Todd Lincoln to her confidante and friend show overwhelming grief at the announcement that the intimate Lincoln family mourning clothes would be paraded throughout Europe as museum pieces. It also graphically exposes the derogatory newspaper attacks on the person and character of Mrs. Lincoln in the wake of her husband's death, the latter having had many enemies during his lifetime.

As far as Mary Lincoln's impeccable qualities as a supportive wife and mother, this is amply proven by Keckley's eyewitness account of President Abraham Lincoln and his wife's devoted husband-wife relationship, to which she was a firsthand observer for four years in the White House:

...The day after the levee I went to the White House and while fitting a dress to Mrs. Lincoln, she said:

“Lizabeth, I have a idea. These are war times and we must be as economical as possible. You know the President is expected to give a series of state dinners every winter, and these dinners are very costly...the state dinner can be scratched from the programme. What do you thing, Lizabeth?”

“I think you are right, Mrs. Lincoln.”

“I am glad to hear you say so. If I can make Mr. Lincoln take the same view of the case, I shall not fail to put the idea into practice.”

Before I left her room that day, Mr. Lincoln came in. She at once stated the case to him. He pondered the question a few moments before answering.

“Mother, I am afraid your plan will not work.”

“But it will work, if you will only determine that it shall work.”

“It is breaking in on the regular custom,” he mildly replied.

“But you forget, father, these are war times, and old customs can be done away with for the once. The idea is economical, you must admit.”

“Yes, mother, but we must think of something besides economy...I believe you are right, mother. You argue the point well. I think that we shall have to decide on the receptions.”

So the day was carried. The question was decided, and arrangements were made for the first reception. It now was January, and cards were issued for February.

The above husband/wife discussion shows that Mary Lincoln appealed to her husband, according to the biblical admonition, “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22), abiding by his final decision as her head. Throughout Keckley’s inside account of the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and his wife, the identical pattern occurs. Nowhere is there any evidence to the contrary, as the rewriters of America’s history would have the nation believe.

Another similar account is given below:

...Finding that Willie continued to grow worse, Mrs. Lincoln determined to withdraw her cards of invitation and postpone the reception. Mr. Lincoln thought that the cards had better not be withdrawn. At least he advised that the doctor be consulted before any steps were taken. Accordingly, Dr. Stone was called in. He pronounced Willie better, and said that there was every reason for an early recovery.

He thought, since the invitations had been issued, it would be best to go on with the reception. Willie, he insisted, was in no immediate danger. Mrs. Lincoln was guided by these counsels, and no postponement was announced. On the evening of the reception Willie was suddenly taken words. His mother sat by his bedside a long while, holding his feverish hand in her own, and watching his labored breathing. The doctor claimed there was no cause for alarm. I arranged Mrs. Lincoln’s hair, then assisted her to dress. Her dress was white satin, trimmed with black lace. The trail was very long, and as she swept through the room, Mr. Lincoln was standing with his back to the fire, his hands behind him, and his eyes on the carpet. His face wore a thoughtful, solemn look. The rustling of

the satin dress attracted his attention. He looked at it a few moments; then, in his quaint, quiet way remarked:

“Whew! Our cat has a long tail tonight.”

Mrs. Lincoln did not reply. The President asked: “Mother, it is my opinion, if some of that tail was nearer the head, it would be in a better style;” and he glanced at her bare arms and neck. She had a beautiful neck and arm, and low dresses were becoming to her. She turned away with a look for offended dignity, and presently took the President’s arm and both went down-stairs to their guests, leaving me alone with the sick boy....The brilliance of the scene could not dispel the sadness that rested upon the face of Mrs. Lincoln. During the evening she came up-stairs several times, and stood by the bedside of the suffering boy. She loved him with a mother’s heart, and her anxiety was great. The night passed slowly; morning came, and Willie was worse. He lingered a few days, and died. God called the beautiful spirit home, and the house of joy was turned into the house of mourning....Mr. Lincoln came in. I never saw a man so bowed down with grief. He came to the bed, lifted the cover from the face of his child, gazed at it long and earnestly, murmuring, “My poor boy, he was too good for this earth. God has called him home. I know that he is much better of in heaven, but then we loved him so. It is hard, hard to have him die!” Great sobs choked his utterance. He buried his head in his hands, and his tall frame was convulsed with emotion....His grief unnerved him, and made him a weak, passive child. I did not dream that his rugged nature could be so moved. I shall never forget those solemn moments – genius and greatness weeping over love’s idol lost....Mrs. Lincoln’s grief was inconsolable. The pale face of her dead boy threw her into convulsions....Willie, she often said, if spared by Providence, would be the hope and stay of her old age. But Providence had not spare him....Mr. Lincoln was so completely overwhelmed with sorrow that she did not attend the funeral.

Nathaniel Parker Willis left a touching account of the Lincoln family in the aftermath of their young son’s death. It is here excerpted:

...He was his father’s favorite. They were intimates – often seen hand-in-hand. And there sat the man, with a burden on his brain at which the world marvels – bent now with the load at both heart and brain – staggering under the blow like the taking from him of his child!

His men of power sat around him – McClellan, with a moist eye when he bowed in prayer, as I could see from where I stood; and Chase and Seward, with their austere features at work; and senators, and ambassadors, and soldiers, all struggling with their tears – great hearts sorrowing with the President as a stricken man and a brother. That God may give him strength for all his burdens is, I am sure, at present the prayer of a nation.”

Mrs. Lincoln’s seamstress continues:

This sketch was very much admired by Mrs. Lincoln. I copy it from the scrap-book in

which she pasted it, with many tears, with her own hands.

The above eyewitness accounts of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln as a husband-wife team, dispel the unfactual fairy tales circulated throughout the land that Mary Todd Lincoln was a disgrace and a blight to her husband. Such second or third-hand stories, without any evidence to validate them can only be discarded as false.

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