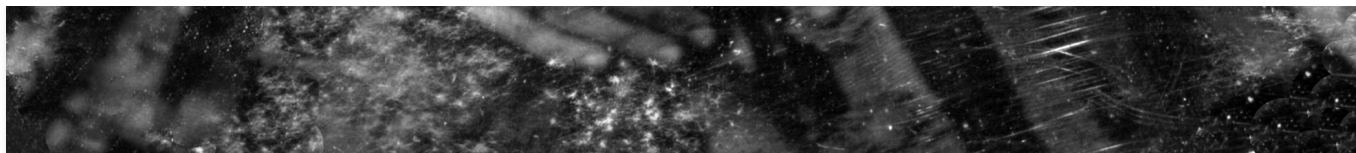


# {essays in history}

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“I wish I could forget myself...”: Mary Todd  
Lincoln and the Pursuit of True Womanhood,  
1818-1882





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There are few figures in American history as polarizing as Mary Todd Lincoln. Born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky as a child of privilege and wealth, she married the poor lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, on a rainy November evening in 1842. He would go on to be twice elected President of the United States. Unlike Mary, Lincoln was someone who had neither money nor family, but he arguably became one of the greatest men in history through the exigencies of politics and his management of the American Civil War. The last years of Mary's life were rather less distinguished. Left adrift emotionally for years after Lincoln's assassination, sick and frail and having only recently left a mental institution, she died a tragic figure in 1882.

The life of Mary Todd Lincoln is illustrative of the limits and confines of the nineteenth-century ideal of "True Womanhood." Born to a life of privilege, highly educated, and married to the President of the United States, she met many of the social requirements of the accepted model. But her emotional responses to the circumstances of a tragic life often violated many of the conventional tenets, and for this behavior she was severely criticized. At the end of her life, she was confined to a mental institution, perhaps precisely because she violated these established codes of behavior. Too often, the scholarly literature on Mary's life appears divided into two opposing viewpoints. She is either a much maligned and misunderstood figure, or she is notable mainly for being irrational, mentally ill, and an embarrassment to the Lincoln legacy. This article attempts to advance the scholarship beyond these two extremes, proposing a more holistic reexamination of Mrs. Lincoln through letters and life events.

Many share the opinion of Mary as a “wildcat” (William Herndon’s name for her), a shrew, or a “bitch,” in common parlance, a woman who harangued her husband and misbehaved in a manner not fit for a First Lady of the United States.<sup>[1]</sup> Certainly, well-documented, historical facts and stories depict her as sometimes making poor life choices and acting in a self-destructive fashion. There is no doubt that she had a sharp tongue and a famous temper. She often fell short of society’s expectations for her conduct and behavior, even within her own family.

Indeed, the nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood was a veritable minefield of social requirements, ones to which Mary Lincoln attempted to adhere but never quite succeeded. A review of her life experiences reveals that she constantly negotiated the boundaries of social acceptability. Impetuous, dramatic, and shrewd, she followed her instincts, and her impulses often flew in the face of the cult of “True Womanhood.” Historian Barbara Welter and others define nineteenth-century True Womanhood as delineated by four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Women’s magazines, religious literature, and other writings presented these attributes by which a woman should judge herself and be judged by her neighbors and society. Welter explains, “Without [these attributes], no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.”<sup>[2]</sup> The public scrutinized Mary on nearly all of these virtues and found her lacking. Indeed, she often found herself lacking. But from all accounts, she did seem to try. In her letters, she wrote often of her belief in God and her devotion to her family. Our sources show that she could be generous to a fault and certainly kindhearted. She attentively maintained her home, as seen in her efforts to decorate and improve the shabby White House during the Civil War years.

But she also failed spectacularly in meeting some of the requirements for True Womanhood. Perhaps she too readily sought fame and recognition. She was ambitious and intelligent, not afraid to express herself poignantly and eloquently. She lost her temper in public, and suffered from bouts of emotional instability and episodes of odd behavior that frightened and concerned those in her circle. In her later years, she frequently appeared mad and was eventually declared legally so. Her behavior was confusing even to herself, leaving her admirers puzzled



and her detractors gleeful. As a result, she only grew more infamous in her later years, and even after her death, she remains a polarizing figure.

Was Mary mad? Her son, Robert, seems to have thought so, and several historians have agreed with him.<sup>[3]</sup> Certainly, she often behaved as though she had a disordered mind, a result of an overwhelming number of life stressors. But her confinement may have been more about Robert's wish to control her strange behavior, rather than her meeting the test for dangerousness, the legal requirement for confinement.<sup>[4]</sup> Her insanity diagnosis came about, perhaps, because of her violation of feminine norms and may have had less to do with an actual need to confine her for her own safety or that of others. The controversy over Mrs. Lincoln's life underscores the need for a balanced assessment of the confines she encountered in living with nineteenth-century feminine social mores and values.

Much of the Lincoln scholarship from the earliest days until the present has sought to place Mary in a negative space, apart from the venerated view of her husband. Arguably, the most vituperative considerations came from William Herndon, Lincoln's former law partner. An examination of Herndon's opinions, notes, and interviews forms an essential part of any study on the Lincolns. Furthermore, as a man living in the nineteenth century, he knew well what society expected of women.

It did not take long after Lincoln's assassination for Herndon to criticize Mary; they had never approved of one another. While living in Springfield, the two often expressed their mutual dislike for each other, and Mary was famously said to have never invited him to dinner. She disapproved of his drinking habits and his lower social standing and did not consider him a sufficiently prominent partner for her husband. Herndon scorned her aristocratic upbringing and position in Springfield society, a group which had rejected him. He thus had few qualms about harnessing his dislike for her in his speeches in the years following Lincoln's assassination. In a December 1865 speech in Springfield on Lincoln's character and emotions, he stated, "I do not think he knew what joy was—nor happiness for more than 23 years," referring to the Lincoln marriage in 1842, twenty-three years earlier.<sup>[5]</sup> A year later, in November 1866, Herndon delivered another public lecture on Lincoln, and chose to reveal that Lincoln had had an intensely serious relationship with another woman, Ann Rutledge, prior to his marriage to

Mary Todd. When Rutledge died, Herndon claimed that Lincoln was so devastated that he never loved another woman nor addressed anyone with “yours affectionately.”<sup>[6]</sup> Herndon also claimed that Lincoln had proposed marriage to Sarah Rickard, the sister-in-law of his friend, William Butler. By insisting that Lincoln had true loves other than Mary, he began a long-standing historiographical tradition of undermining her place as Lincoln’s life partner.<sup>[7]</sup>

Herndon also assailed Mary’s character in private letters. He worked on a book about Lincoln with Jesse Weik, a lawyer, journalist, and Lincoln aficionado from Greencastle, Indiana. During the course of their project, Herndon called Mary Todd the “she wolf of this section,” “soured ... gross ... material—avaricious—insolent,” “a tigress,” “like the tooth ake—kept one awake night and day,” “terribly aristocratic ... and haughty,” “as cold as a chunk of ice,” and “the female wild cat of the age.”<sup>[8]</sup> Historians David Herbert Donald and Ruth Painter Randall observed that the letters between Herndon and Weik contained more “unprintable” comments.<sup>[9]</sup> According to one scholar, Herndon believed “anything about Lincoln’s wife that was bad.”<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1872 Herndon and Weik published *Herndon’s Lincoln*, casting Mary in an extremely negative light.<sup>[11]</sup> Herndon wrote that Lincoln most decidedly did not want to wed Mary but only did so because he could never find a decent way to end their courtship. “To me it has always seemed plain that Mr. Lincoln married Mary Todd to save his honor, and in doing so he sacrificed his domestic peace ... he knew he did not love her, but had promised to marry her!”<sup>[12]</sup> Lincoln’s noble behavior stands here in strong contrast to Mary’s immodest and sordid motives. He accused Mary of mostly marrying Lincoln for his “position in society, prominence in the world, and the grandest social distinction. By that means her ambition would be satisfied.”<sup>[13]</sup>

Herndon judged Mary as his own contemporary, holding views of women that coincided with the prevailing attitudes of the nineteenth century. Because of what he viewed as her bad behavior, her general “unloveableness,” and her naked ambition, Herndon leaves the reader with the impression that Mary was not worthy of being part of the cult of womanhood that their generation so venerated.<sup>[14]</sup> Indeed, while Herndon may have had an unconventional approach to describing his

friend's life, he maintained a very orthodox method of judging his wife on the merits of her modesty and virtue.[15]

Recent condemnations of Mary come from current historians who draw heavily upon Herndon's biographical legacy. Michael Burlingame and C.A. Tripp have replaced Herndon as Mary Lincoln's most forceful critics. Burlingame's work, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (1994), unequivocally states that the Lincoln marriage was a failure, characterizing it as a "fountain of misery" that was entirely Mary's fault.

[16] He details her consistent humiliation of Lincoln's manhood, indicating that she was unfaithful and often made him share childcare duties while in Springfield.[17] He concludes that "Mary Lincoln was an impossibly difficult woman," emphasizing that Lincoln can only be commended for his great emotional strength in putting up with her.

[18] Tripp's *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* (2005) echoes many of Burlingame's assertions about Mary but is even more transparently critical. Tripp proposes that Lincoln was homosexual, thus repudiating the idea that Mary Todd Lincoln was an important partner. She shared neither his emotional nor sexual life and was therefore inconsequential to his greatness. Instead, she was merely Lincoln's "cross to bear." [19]

The subject of Mary Lincoln possibly having a mental illness figures largely in nearly every historian's work and provides another facet in the debate over her respectability and failure to meet the requirements of womanhood. Many of her contemporaries certainly thought that she was mentally ill. William Herndon postulated that her emotional troubles stemmed from "the Excessive use of morphine." [20] Clearly, her detractors viewed her mental issues as another strike against her, another reason why she failed at the role of "domestic and cheerful comforter." [21]

Both Tripp and Burlingame discuss, albeit in different ways, the alleged madness of Mary Lincoln as evidence that she failed as a member of the cult of True Womanhood. Burlingame speculates that she probably suffered from manic depression and possibly borderline personality disorder. Tripp, though, states that she was not insane whatsoever—rather, she was spiteful and cunning, almost evil.[22] For Tripp, she was not a true lady, as she met none of the requirements of purity, piety, submissiveness, or domesticity. Between his theories on Lincoln's sexuality, his scathing views of Mary Lincoln, and his derisive assessment

of her mental health, it is fair to say that Tripp is this generation's Herndon in terms of historiographical controversy.

Some modern biographers, however, have taken a different view. Scholars such as Daniel Mark Epstein, Jean Baker, Stephen Berry, and Catherine Clinton attempt to rescue both the reputation of Mary and the marriage.<sup>[23]</sup> These scholars emphasize that Mary and Lincoln saw themselves as life partners and shared domestic duties as well as decisions about his career. Rather than viewing Mary's insistence that he help with the children as part of the evidence that she constantly cuckolded him, Epstein and Jean Baker take a different view. Baker argues that they complemented each other and that their relationship represented the changing nature of marriage in the nineteenth century. The idea of romantic love, individualism, and other post-Enlightenment ideals recharacterizes the Lincoln marriage as a relationship of mutuality. Catherine Clinton describes it as one of "confident intimacy." This transformation, they argue, was not in conflict with the ideals of True Womanhood. Rather, these historians contend that Mary's embrace of the era's domestic ideals simply included incorporating her husband in her activities and decisions – merging her sphere with his.

In the present study, I attempt to expand the limits of current feminist scholarship, examining how both historiographical interpretations and scholarly theory surrounding the idea of True Womanhood can help us reinterpret Mary Lincoln's life. I reexamine a number of letters and accounts in order to provide a more specific interpretation of Mary Todd Lincoln: I argue that while she demonstrated devotion to her family, she also undoubtedly troubled contemporary expectations of women. Her challenge to the ideals of True Womanhood can also illuminate the outcome of her trial, presenting a different line of thinking regarding her confinement. Simply put, her behavior was so over-the-top that the men in her life agreed that she must have been mad. Thus, I differ from Baker and Clinton, who argue that Mary had been "bushwhacked" by her son and that she was by "no means crazy." Unlike these historians, I make no attempt to speculate on whether she suffered from a mental illness. I argue, rather, that her behavior and the expectations surrounding feminine norms precipitated her trial. Her letters and a reevaluation of her historic context provide a valuable way to reassess how Mary navigated the world of True Womanhood.

Women in Mary Lincoln's world were confined by a code of domesticity that emphasized moral motherhood and submissiveness.[24] The idea of "sentimental womanhood" in which women were emotional, weak, and dependent on men, created a world in which women were expected to embrace domestic duties and motherhood. The conveyors and creators of these ideas were the magazines and manuals—such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and Eliza Leslie's cookbook series—that exhorted women to cook, clean, sew, and take care of the children with cheerful and pious attitudes.[25] In general, female education during this period also reinforced these predominant definitions. Women learned fine sewing, dancing, singing, drawing, parlor French, and religious instruction. Literature, mathematics, history, and Greek and Latin studies were reserved for young men's schooling.

There were exceptions, such as Catharine Ward Beecher, whose school in Connecticut was one of the few female institutions where the curriculum equaled that of boys' schools.[26] Mary Todd attended a similar institution in Lexington, Kentucky, her birthplace. From the start, Mary's upbringing and education would mark her as one apart from the crowd and give her the tools to challenge unconsciously the prevailing notions of Victorian womanhood.[27] Born in 1818 to Robert and Eliza Todd, Mary's family had a long tradition of educating their daughters in good republican fashion. Her father, Robert, subscribed to the philosophies of the English theorist Mary Wollstonecraft who argued for the right of women to have a formal education. Accordingly, he sent Mary first to the Shelby Female Academy beginning at age nine in 1827. At the age of fourteen, she transferred to Madame Mentelle's Academy, a boarding school just down the road. Though she learned the traditional female arts, she also learned geography, history, poetry, and other subjects.[28]

By all accounts, she embraced schooling and was known for her quick mind. Her unhappy home life may have had something to do with her scholastic zeal. Her mother, Eliza, died when Mary was five. Her father had remarried Elizabeth Humphreys Todd, known as Betsey, when Mary was eight and the two never got along. Their stormy clashes and the stress of combining siblings and half-siblings into one large Todd family may literally have driven Mary out of the house and into her books. She often ran as fast as she could to school at an early hour of the morning, leading the Lexington night watchman to joke that she must have been



eloping. Other family members in their memories of her recalled her poring over her books by candlelight, and classmates described her as having a retentive memory that put her far ahead of the other students. While her curriculum did not offer her the chance to learn Latin, Greek, or much mathematics, she learned French (Madame Mentelle and her husband were refugees of the French Revolution) and gained a lifelong interest in reading and writing. Madame Mentelle's school also indulged Mary's flair for the dramatic. Her classmates and family remembered her as being the star actress in a number of school plays.[29] Mary later described her childhood as "desolate" but her education was a bright spot.[30]

Her father's prominent economic and political position in Lexington also influenced Mary's intellectual growth. Robert Todd was president of the Lexington branch of the Bank of Kentucky and counted the statesman Henry Clay among his closest friends. He and Betsey Todd entertained Clay and other prominent senators, governors, and party officials from all over the country at their home on Main Street. They often allowed their older children, including Mary, to listen in on the political talk in the parlor. She became "a fiery little Whig, who could not think of enough dreadful things to say about Andrew Jackson." [31] This early and prolonged exposure to politics and political talk may have later made her feel well-qualified to discuss politics and to advise her husband as his political star rose within the Whig Party. But her academic success and intellectual curiosity would also make Mary a target in the coming years of her life. As Jean Baker puts it, "This would not be the only time that Mary Todd did the wrong thing well." [32] Her rather unusual upbringing and natural instinct to thrust herself into the male and very public political world violated the codes of domesticity and virtue—pillars of True Womanhood. Mary understood this but seemed not to care overly much that she was in error. During the absorbing and highly participatory election of 1840, she wrote her cousin Mercy Levering that she had become "quite a politician, rather an unladylike profession, yet at such crisis whose heart could remain untouched." [33]

And yet Mary Lincoln was also quite conscious of embracing True Womanhood's requirements. After her marriage to Abraham Lincoln and the arrival of their sons, she threw herself into the role of wife and mother. This was a necessity in some ways—Lincoln was often gone for



weeks at a time, riding the circuit for his position as an attorney. It was Mary's job to keep the house and care for the children on her own. She later wrote fondly of this time to her daughter-in-law, saying "a nice home – loving husband and precious child are the happiest stages of life."[\[34\]](#)

When she and Lincoln were apart, she wrote him of the humorous doings of their children. One surviving letter shows the affection that both of them felt for their sons (whom Lincoln called "dear rascals") as well as the longstanding animosity between Mary and her stepmother, Betsey.[\[35\]](#) Mary wrote to Lincoln in May of 1848, while Lincoln was still in Washington, serving as a newly elected Congressman. She had taken the children back to Lexington to her father's house for a visit.

Our little Eddy, has recovered from his little spell of sickness – Dear boy, I must tell you a story about him – Boby in his wanderings to day, came across in a yard, a little kitten, *your hobby*, he says he asked a man for it, he brought it triumphantly to the house, so soon as Eddy, spied it – his *tenderness*, broke forth, he made them bring it *water*, fed it with bread himself, with his *own dear hands*, he was a delighted little creature over it, in the midst of his happiness Ma came in, she you must know dislikes the whole cat race, I thought in a very unfeeling manner, she ordered the servant near, to throw it out, which, of *course* was done, Ed – screaming & protesting loudly against the proceedings, *shenever* appeared to mind his screams, which were long & loud I assure you – Tis unusual for her *now a days* to do anything quite so striking, she is very obliging and accommodating, but if the thought any of us, were on her hands again, I believe she would be *worse* than ever. [\[36\]](#)

When young Eddy died at the age of three in February of 1850 after a fifty-two day battle with diphtheria, Mary wept for days. But the subsequent birth of William Wallace, always called Willie, in December of 1850, and then Thomas ("Tad") in April of 1853 helped ease the grief, and their family was complete. She took joy in her young sons, and the historical record shows that she was a caring and involved mother. She threw them birthday parties complete with elaborate invitations, allowed them to have a veritable menagerie of goats and ponies and even a turkey when they moved into the White House.[\[37\]](#) When later accused by a reporter of whipping Tad, she wrote "It is a new story—that in my life I have ever whipped a child—In the first place they, never required it,

a gentle, loving word, was all sufficient with them—and if I have erred, it has been, in being too indulgent.”[38] Clearly, her commitment and involvement in her sons’ lives were among Mary Todd Lincoln’s attributes, and she embraced this tenet of True Womanhood—motherhood and domestic duties—with enthusiasm. Though later historians have faulted her for her poor household management and accused her of being an unfit mother, her letters show a different story. Later, when some members of the press criticized her, others approvingly highlighted her role as a mother. The *Ohio Ripley* Beecommented “She has a good motherly look, a low soft voice, and appears to be just such a woman as one would rely on for sympathy and support.”[39]

Whether Mary met the prevailing expectations of ladyhood in terms of her relationship with her husband and her management of their life in the White House is far less clear. There exist many anecdotes that illustrate the Lincoln marriage as undoubtedly based on mutual admiration and respect, and we have several letters from the time period that showcase their love. In May 1848 while he was in Congress, she wrote to him, “How much, I wish instead of writing, we were together this evening, I feel very sad away from you.”[40] In June he responded, “I shall be impatient til I see you ... Come as soon as you can.” They could even joke about each other. She wrote to her half-sister Emilie Todd Helm, “I often laugh & tell Mr. L—that I am determined my next Husband *shall be rich*.”[41] Their entire marriage was normal—full of problems but also full of love. Elizabeth Keckly, Mary’s White House dressmaker recalled that Lincoln remarked at a White House reception that “my wife is as handsome as when she was a girl and I a poor nobody then, fell in love with her then and what is more, have never fallen out.”[42]

Mary also derived an increased sense of self from the love of her husband and saw it as her role to civilize him (she was known to have admonished him for his “backwoods” manners) and encourage his political ambitions. In Springfield, they were part of the popular set, giving large parties where Mary could show off her pretty home and her finely honed social skills. Later at the White House, determined to have the society ladies of Washington approve of her, she organized beautiful receptions, replete with wonderful dancing and extravagant dishes.

Drawing upon her upbringing and vivacious, intelligent personality, Mary Lincoln tied her own ambitions to those of her husband. One of the great verbal testaments to their partnership was Lincoln's reaction when he learned he had won the Presidential nomination in 1860. "Mary, Mary, we are elected."<sup>[43]</sup>

Yet the Lincolns' marriage was also unbalanced in many ways. Lincoln could be brooding and melancholy, and Mary's famous temper caused problems even while they still lived in Springfield. She was reported to have thrown books at him, and once, a log.<sup>[44]</sup> She often played up her role as the child and he bought into it, writing "Will you be a *good girl*" and calling her "my child-wife."<sup>[45]</sup> William Herndon recalled that Lincoln often slept at the law office in order to avoid going home, and he appeared to dread Mary's rages. While at the White House, their marriage suffered a number of crises including the death of their son Willie in 1862. After his death, Mary grew so despondent that Lincoln reportedly took her to stand at a window and pointed to the sanitarium in the distance, telling her he would send her there if she did not get better. As the War seemed to drag on endlessly, Mary also had to endure the sectional break-up of the Todd family. Of her father's fourteen children, six sided with the Union and eight sided with the Confederacy. With the war acting as an "emotional amplifier," goodwill and family happiness was shattered between the two halves of the Todd family. Mary felt the betrayal keenly when Emilie Todd Helm wrote an angry letter to Abraham Lincoln, "blaming him for all her family's misery."<sup>[46]</sup>

Mary's increasingly erratic behavior in response to these tragic familial circumstances became the greatest source of contention between her and Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps the most troubling aspects were her jealousy and public rages. In one of the most infamous instances, she screamed at him as they visited the parade ground near Malvern Hill in March 1865. When Mary saw Lincoln riding alongside the strikingly beautiful wife of General Edward O.C. Ord, she lost her temper and began to berate both Mrs. Ord and Lincoln for their breaking of protocol, much to the mortification and chagrin of all present. Clearly, Mary broke many of the conduct codes of ladylike behavior in this instance, and she knew it, too. Afterwards, she retired to her stateroom on the government yacht where they were staying and refused to leave her room.<sup>[47]</sup> Lincoln, during this

episode, apparently said nothing publicly in response to her anger, but it created an icy silence between them for several days.

Indeed, the road to the White House and their years in Washington are the source of much of the most damning evidence about Mary Lincoln failing to live up to society's expectations for women. Her lifelong interest in politics and intense interest in her husband's career caused White House secretaries and the public to deride her. Because women's lives were to be led in private, she was criticized for her constant patronage seeking and meddling in political affairs. Yet, she could not understand why expressing herself on the subject was considered improper. This was a woman who had grown up at the knee of Henry Clay and been doted on by a father who had encouraged her intellect. As such, she had no qualms about writing letters to various Cabinet members warning about this decision or that one. In 1861 she wrote a letter to David Davis, Lincoln's campaign manager, asking him not to appoint another party member to a Cabinet post. She attributed her need to meddle in the situation as patriotic, writing, "If you consider me intrusive, please excuse me, our country, just now, is above all."<sup>[48]</sup> Of her influence, the *New York Times* commented, "Mrs. Lincoln is making and unmaking the political fortunes of men and is similar to Queen Elizabeth in her statesmanlike tastes."<sup>[49]</sup>

But Mary's political actions as First Lady also showcased her intellectual growth when it came to her feelings about abolitionism and the plight of African-Americans. One of her most unpopular commitments, but one that sets her apart in hindsight, was her interest in raising money for the free black population, the "contrabands," that had flooded Washington D.C. during the early years of the war. She appealed to Lincoln in a letter written from New York in November 1862, writing "these immense number of Contrabands are suffering intensely, many without bed covering and having to use any bits of carpeting to cover themselves—many dying of want." She asked for more money for the Contraband Relief Association saying "The cause of humanity requires it."<sup>[50]</sup> Mary was inspired to work on relieving the plight of slaves by Elizabeth Keckly, a mulatto woman who was her dressmaker, friend, and confidante. <sup>[51]</sup> While her anti-slavery attitudes were sometimes tinged with racism, she was similar to most nineteenth-century white Americans, including those who were abolitionists. Nevertheless, she and

Keckly developed a close friendship that lasted many years. Though historians question the friendship's equality, it is remarkable that Mary, who grew up in a slaveholding household, grew to regard a free black woman as one of the closest in her circle.

Less nobly regarded was her insistence on redecorating the White House and her love of lavish parties, and pretty clothing, which caused issues both within the Lincoln marriage, and in the press. When they moved to the White House, Mary saw its redecoration and maintenance as an extension of the domestic duties she had held in Springfield; certainly this commitment betrayed values of womanly virtue, but Mary did not take into account the differences between her new public home and her former private one. She felt that the White House needed a restoration in order for it to be a physical statement of the power of the Union. She used her influence on Lincoln to hire William S. Wood as the acting commissioner of public buildings, supervising all White House purchases.<sup>[52]</sup> With Wood in tow, Mary went to New York on several occasions to buy furnishings, china, and other accoutrements, proceeding to spend the allotted \$20,000 four-year allowance in a few short months. She spent \$3,195 on china and \$6,800 on French wallpaper alone. Lincoln was furious when he found out about her expenditures, but Mary ultimately had her way, and Congress eventually appropriated more money for the project. When it came to not spending any of the President's salary, she was far more economical. Under her direction, between 1861 and 1865, they saved \$70,000 of the \$100,000 he was paid.<sup>[53]</sup>

This frugality was not accomplished without major problems. Mary actually owed thousands of dollars for dresses and other items that she claimed had been gifts but were in reality were things for which merchants expected payment. She wrote many letters to hold off her creditors, while creating alliances with other White House staff members, who padded their expense accounts and gave her the extra money to pay her bills. Certainly, her actions showed poor judgment. But as the wife of the President, she saw herself as a public figure of importance, and she wanted to impress Washington society; many politicians' wives had shunned her since her arrival in Washington in 1861. She was insulted that they regarded her as a country bumpkin from the West, and her lavish parties and beautiful dresses were part of her armor she could use



to conquer them. She wrote to Elizabeth Keckly that "I must dress in costly materials. The people scrutinize every article that I wear with critical curiosity. The very fact of having grown up in the West, subjects me to more searching observation."<sup>[54]</sup> In her mind's eye, she was a high-born lady and deserved to be treated as such. For this, the press wrote disparagingly of her; the New York *Herald* said of one trip to New York, "From the early hours ... until late in the evening, Mrs. Lincoln ransacked the treasures of the Broadway ... stores."<sup>[55]</sup> Certainly, some of her shopping choices bordered on mania—she was known to purchase hundreds of gloves at one time.

Mary may have thought she was only doing what was expected of her. But her behavior during the White House years was also often imperious and demanding, and she did not always exhibit the perceptiveness, compassion, or empathy expected of her. The time she spent on her own raising her sons in Springfield had left her with an independent streak that later caused her to do exactly what she wanted, when she wanted. Often, she did not behave very much like the wife of a public official.<sup>[56]</sup> It was no wonder that the people saw her conduct as unladylike and a violation of the code of womanhood. A Georgia paper called her "a mercenary prostitute ... repugnantly individual ... If Mrs. Lincoln had studied her true mission as mother and wife she could not have discredited her sex and injured the name and fame of her country and husband."<sup>[57]</sup> Her sister Elizabeth Todd Edwards, and her half-sister Emilie Todd Helm often expressed worry at Mary's social transgressions. Elizabeth wrote, "Mary has had much to bear though she don't bear it well; She has acted foolishly—unwisely and made the world hate her"<sup>[58]</sup>

What's more, Mary herself "suffered a wrenching opposition between what she had to do as Mary Todd Lincoln and what she believed nineteenth-century ladies should do ... her frequent flashes of anger emerged ... from a profound ambivalence about herself."<sup>[59]</sup> She had conventional if inflated expectations of how others should treat her, and held her behavior to those same standards but did not always do as she said she should do. She wrote once, "I wish I could forget myself..." but whether she meant that she wanted to avoid society's expectations or stop behaving badly and fit into them is hard to say.<sup>[60]</sup>

Though they were not excuses, causes for her behavior did exist. Stressed by her debts, and feeling lonely due to Lincoln's preoccupations, she had



then become nearly unhinged following Willie's death. When it came to mourning her children's passing, she also violated the other pillars of True Womanhood—submissiveness and piety. She never grieved for them in the way she was instructed by popular magazines and manuals of the day. She told Emilie Helm, "What is to be is to be and nothing we can say, or do, or be can divert an inexorable fate, but in spite of knowing this, one feels better even after losing, if one has had a brave, whole-hearted fight to get the better of destiny." These words in favor of struggling against destiny betrayed a markedly unfeminine and controversial stance for the time. In a similar vein, she wrote to another friend, "I grieve to say that even at this day I do not feel sufficiently submissive to our loss."<sup>[61]</sup> During the White House years, she sought out séances and means to connect to her dead children, steps that would not have sat well with any mainstream Christian denomination.<sup>[62]</sup> Yet reaching out to the dead represented her way of "reconstituting the family that was her first priority."<sup>[63]</sup> In many ways, her dedication to her family represents the difficulty that Mary had navigating the requirements of her world. Family meant everything to her, and she was well-deserving of the title of "moral mother," and yet, when she wanted something, whether it was a dress or to see her dead child, she threw propriety to the wind and did whatever she felt was necessary to secure her desire.

It seems logical that Mary had internalized feelings of abandonment and fear as a young girl which later was the root cause of much of this behavior. After her mother's death when she was only five, her father had married someone whom Mary did not like. Trying to fit in and carve a spot for herself in a large, mixed family, Mary struggled to stand out. She craved recognition during her whole life, and in some ways, she found fulfillment in her attraction to politics and the notoriety she gained. By acting childishly with her husband, she could force Lincoln to stand in for a father whom she had felt rejected her. By lavishing love and attention on her sons, who by most accounts were unbearably spoiled, she could protect them from the hurt and the rejection she herself had felt as a young girl. Her shopping and love of acquiring things was another way for her to replace the love that she craved with objects. As she was forced to bear each new tragedy, including the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, these predispositions became the dominant feature of her personality.

Her life after Lincoln's death was a sad loop of self-pity and seemingly incomprehensible decisions, even as the press and enemies continued to attack her. The *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier* described her as a "course, vulgar and selfish woman who [has] cast a shadow over the life of her lamented husband and caused such intense mortification to the people of the country by her career at the White House during his life."<sup>[64]</sup> At around the same time, William Herndon was also making his speeches that included the Ann Rutledge story. In the face of the continued criticism and the painful blows of Herndon's disclosures, she clung to her two living sons, Tad and Robert. She also lived in constant fear that she was going to become destitute once the meager pension that Congress initially granted her ran out. She also had to attend to her outstanding bills. She wrote to one acquaintance, "I am humiliated when I think that we are destined to be homeless."<sup>[65]</sup> She began writing numerous letters begging acquaintances and friends to press her case for a better pension in Congress, while concocting elaborate schemes in which she returned items that she had purchased while at the White House and anonymously solicited donors for money. She would end her letters to her accomplices with "say nothing ... do not part, with these papers—for your life" or "show my letters to no one & be quiet about contents, I pray you."<sup>[66]</sup>

Yet the settling of Lincoln's estate in 1867 netted her \$36,000, which made her a wealthy woman. Despite the fact that this sum could keep her in relative comfort for the rest of her life, she continued to write frantic letters complaining of imminent poverty. One of the more wretched attempts at raising money was her decision to sell her dresses at an auction in New York in 1867. Known as "The Old Clothes Scandal," the rich silks and costly accessories shocked the public and only made the attacks in the press worse. Moreover, Mary was humiliated by the low prices netted by some of the items – she felt that it was symbolic of the way the public valued her.

The 1870s were a tragic coda for the wife of the former President. Embarrassed by everything that had been said about her, and seeking refuge and solace, she and Tad went to Chicago and then Europe. Tragedy struck her yet again when Tad caught sick with "dropsy" in his chest. They returned to the United States where she nursed him for weeks but to no avail. He died in July of 1871 at the age of eighteen. She

once again fled, travelling all over the country seeking spa cures and ways to reconnect with her dead children and her husband. Friends described her as having hallucinations and as being “peculiar and eccentric.”<sup>[67]</sup> A return trip to Florida in 1875 finally precipitated her commitment to a mental institution.

Her son Robert met her at the train and installed her at a local Chicago hotel, but her behavior settled the decision for him to have her confined to an asylum. She knocked on his door only in her nightdress and went out to the elevator in nothing but her undergarments. When he tried to gently lead her back to her room, she screamed that he was trying to murder her. She complained that she was being watched and followed and that someone was trying to poison her. She had sewed thousands of dollars into her clothing, and during her travels had bought numbers of things she would never need, worth hundreds of dollars. Finally, they coerced her into a courtroom, and a group of judges decided to enter her name in the “Lunatic Record” of Illinois. A group of doctors testified to her profligate spending, her emotional outbursts, and supposed hallucinations; the jurors handed down their decision in ten minutes. Robert took control of her finances, and she was forced to enter Bellevue asylum in Batavia, Illinois, forty miles outside Chicago. There is no doubt that the stress and strain had broken her mind in some ways, but at the same time she was quite lucid about her commitment to the asylum. She protested, “You mean to say I am crazy—I am much obliged to you but I am abundantly able to take care of myself.”<sup>[68]</sup> She later wrote to Robert, “You have injured yourself, not me, by your wicked conduct.”<sup>[69]</sup> They never reconciled.

Though Mary undoubtedly behaved in odd ways, her trial and insanity diagnosis may have resulted from Robert’s desire to prevent his mother from shaming the family with her strange behavior.<sup>[70]</sup> Her letters, while certainly full of anger, worry, and depression, do not indicate violence or hallucination. She wrote to her sister Elizabeth, “My former friends will never cease to regard me as a lunatic. I feel it in their soothing manner. If I should say the moon is made of green cheese, they would heartily and smilingly agree with me.”<sup>[71]</sup> During her trial, however, the physicians and witnesses constructed a story in which the violation of feminine norms took center stage. It was not so much that they judged her on crossing patriarchal boundaries. Rather, they could enlarge the context

of True Womanhood in order to prove that she had too far transgressed the norms of the female sex. She was too concerned about her children's welfare, too obsessed with shopping and material acquisition, too grief-stricken over her husband and sons' deaths. She had manipulated all the appropriate markers of femininity and made a mockery of them.[72]

The judges' decision illustrates the limited space that the cult of True Womanhood provided Mary Lincoln. By all accounts, she was born to be a shining member of the club, growing up in a wealthy family that ensured that she was educated. She then made a powerful political match in a marriage with an upwardly mobile man who more than provided for her and their children. The life she made in the 1850s with her family exemplified all the tenets of ladyhood to which she was expected to adhere, particularly domesticity. Yet, the ensuing years in the White House tempted her with power, fed her greed, and brought out the worst elements in her temperament. Later, her mind exhausted and afraid with the constant spectre of death in her life, she seemed to break and lose control of her impulses, even while remaining aware of what she was doing. She knew the trial detracted from her appearance as a true lady.

Mary knew that her greatest shortcoming lay in her failure to live as the graceful, composed lady that was the symbol of True Womanhood. Clearly the men in her life were so bewildered and upset by her seeming unwillingness to imitate that role that they declared her insane, took control of her money, and confined her for a year in a sanitarium where she was closely watched and monitored.[73] For too long, she had "trampled on the canons of womanhood,"[74] and her punishment was finally meted out by a group of men who idolized her husband and had little sympathy for the woman that had embarrassed his legacy for so long.

After a yearlong stay at the sanitarium, Elizabeth invited her to stay in Springfield, but Mary, chastened and embarrassed by her confinement, declined. She once again fled to Europe, this time to France, seeking refuge from everyone she felt was out to get her. She still wrote letters to government officials complaining of imminent poverty, while simultaneously writing to her financial advisors instructing them to make various investments with her healthy bank account. After another three peripatetic years, she finally returned to her family due to extremely ill health. In 1882 she collapsed at the age of sixty-four at her

sister's home, most likely from a stroke and complications from diabetes. Her funeral was a lavish affair and would have pleased her. The Springfield mayor declared a holiday. It made her out to be somebody important in her own right.

Mary Todd Lincoln's messy humanity encompassed much of life's paradoxes, her deep sadness tempered by the fulfilling happiness of family and friends, work and fun, grief and joy. Her sometimes desperate desire to be a lady never quite fit her often impetuous actions. In the measurement of nineteenth century society, she perhaps never fit the bill, and she felt this failure keenly. When she did pursue True Womanhood, it eluded her. So she went her own way, which often failed her, too. She wanted to be noticed as an individual valued for her intelligence and powerful influence. Yet she also cared deeply about her family and drew her strength from them, perhaps in the end to her own ruin. Stephen Berry writes that "the entirety of her life had unfolded like the final scene of a Shakespearean tragedy. Mother dead early, father dead early, extended family shattered, nuclear family eradicated, she was left alone on the stage, alone on the planet."<sup>[75]</sup>

Mary's historiographical and popular legacy is illuminated by reemphasizing her in a new context of nineteenth-century social norms and with an understanding of her family life and personal circumstances. Rather than rely on inconclusive claims about her mental health, this study has sought to examine her life as a response to contemporary expectations of women. As the popular and academic interest in Lincoln scholarship remains strong, it is time that Mary Todd Lincoln step out of her husband's overwhelming shadow.

<sup>[1]</sup> William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, January 16, 1886, Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress, in Douglas L. Wilson, "William H. Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 22:2 (2001): 1.

<sup>[2]</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18:2 (1966): 152. Welter's article was one of the first analyses of True Womanhood and its relationship to the concept of divided spheres. In the article, Welter argues that assigning women qualities such as piety and purity assuaged male anxiety about the complexities of living and working in a capitalist society. Women staying



at home could maintain the moral standards required for a self-governing republic. Along with Welter's identification of the "cult" of womanhood, historian Aileen S. Kraditor identified a "cult of domesticity" in her 1970 work, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970). Similarly, Nancy F. Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977) also addressed the notion of separate spheres. More recent scholarship has focused on expanding the meanings of and implications of these "cults," exploring their relationship with American imperialism and colonialism, ideologies of race, manliness and maternalism, and the legal and political implications of female citizenship. See Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium – The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Macmillan, 1999), and Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[3] See both Jason Emerson, *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007) and Mark E. Neely, Jr., and R. Gerald McMurtry, *The Insanity File – The Case of Mary Todd Lincoln* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) for detailed accounts of her trial and the factors that led to her commitment.

[4] Some historians argue that she did meet the dangerousness test, as some contemporary accounts asserted that Mary tried to commit suicide after her diagnosis, but historical evidence to back this claim does not exist.

[5] William H. Herndon, "Analysis of the Character and Mind of Abraham Lincoln" (Herndon's first lecture on Lincoln, December 12, 1865), Huntington Library, San Marino, California; cited in Wilson, "William H. Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln," 12.



[6] Wilson, "William H. Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln," 11. Wilson points out that Herndon "recklessly overstepped his own knowledge" in this case and that "Although very few letters from Abraham Lincoln to his wife are known, some are signed 'Affectionately.'" Ruth Painter Randall makes this same point in her biography of Mary Todd Lincoln. Mary herself responded to the charges in private letters to another friend of Lincoln, Judge David Davis. She wrote, "W H may consider himself a ruined man, in attempting to disgrace others, the vials of wrath will be poured upon his on head. My love for my husband was so sacred and the knowledge it was fully returned so well assured, that if W. H—utters another word ... *his* life is not worth, living for ... He is a dirty dog." Quoted in Mary Todd Lincoln to David Davis, March 6, 1867, in *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, ed. Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner (New York: Knopf, 1972), 416. To be sure, many of the Lincoln's friends and acquaintances shared her low opinions of Herndon and excoriated him for his violation of taste and decorum. Even if they did not like Mary Lincoln, they viewed Herndon's indictments as crossing the line.

[7] Baker, *The Lincoln Marriage: Beyond the Battle of Quotations* (Gettysburg, PA: Civil War Institute of Gettysburg College, 1999), 9. Baker humorously addresses the idea that Lincoln had multiple girlfriends and historians' obsession with making Mary a secondary choice, calling them part of the "anyone-but-Mary school." She notes that "with the addition of Sarah to his list of girlfriends, Lincoln, a man universally viewed as uncomfortable with women, is transformed into a veritable Don Juan."

[8] William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, December 1, 1885, January 8, 12, 15, 16, 1886, in Wilson, "William H. Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln," 21.

[9] David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York: Knopf, 1948); Ruth Painter Randall, *Mary Lincoln – Biography of a Marriage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953).

[10] Randall, *Mary Lincoln*, 404.

[11] Detailed in William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press and Knox College Lincoln Studies Center, 2006).

Herndon's apparent bias against Mary Lincoln was not as criticized by contemporary reviewers as was his exposure of Lincoln's private life. Upon its publication, a contemporary review in the *Chicago Journal* regarded the biography's candor with contempt: "It vilely distorts the image of an ideal statesman ... It brings out all that should have been hidden." (xxxii). Yet by all accounts Herndon's attempts to write and speak about Lincoln were cast in his desire to expose "necessary truths." He had concluded that nearly every element of Lincoln's life contributed to the shaping of his character, and whatever the truth was, it would not diminish his achievements or importance.

[12] Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 145.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Because of the apparent malicious bent to his account, some scholars in the twentieth century began to question the validity of the text. In particular, David Herbert Donald's biography of Lincoln focused on Herndon's shortcomings, questioning the reliability of his judgment, and Ruth Randall's biography of Mary Todd Lincoln accused Herndon of maliciousness. It should be noted, though, that some Herndon contemporaries did find the biography an excellent monograph. Horace White, editor of *the New York Post*, who had known Lincoln in the 1850s when he covered the Lincoln-Douglas debates, approved of the book's realistic approach. He wrote to Herndon, "It is because you have put in all his warts that I consider yours the best biography" (*Ibid.*, xxxiii).

[15] A closer reading of Herndon's book reveals that he did not say only malicious things about Mrs. Lincoln. He describes Lincoln falling in love with Mary because "He was charmed with her wit and beauty, no less than by her excellent social qualities and profound knowledge of the strong and weak points in individual character" (134). He also asserted multiple times that Lincoln was just as much to blame as Mary for their unhappy marriage, which he called "a domestic hell on earth." He also admitted that "In her domestic troubles, I have always sympathized with Mrs. Lincoln. The world does not know what she bore, or how ill-adapted she was to bear it" (263). Today, scholars remain divided over Herndon's approach to writing about the Lincolns. Civil War historian John Y. Simon reviewed Herndon's notes and sources, finding that the story about Lincoln and Ann Rutledge was fundamentally true. See John

Y. Simon, "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 11 (1990): 28. Other researchers also reviewed his records and began to acknowledge the essential truthfulness of his evidence. Most modern historians agree that one cannot research either of the Lincolns without considering Herndon.

[16] Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 326.

[17] *Ibid.*, 279, 292, and 324.

[18] *Ibid.*, 358.

[19] C.A. Tripp, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 181.

[20] William H. Herndon to Joseph S. Fowler, November 3, 1888, in Wilson, "William H. Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln," 23. Jean Baker refutes Herndon's assertions, saying she was no "morphia-crazed opium eater." See Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln – A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1987), 324.

[21] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 163.

[22] Tripp, *Intimate World*, 170-171..

[23] In the early twentieth century, biographers Ruth Painter Randall and Carl Sandburg acknowledged Mary's immaturity and volatile temper, while arguing that she retained the womanly qualities of virtue and principle, important both to her and her contemporaries. Both historians acknowledged the specter of mental illness, finding that her histrionics and grief were not particularly abnormal because Mary herself may have been buying into the accepted views of the period that said that women were of naturally weaker minds, not equipped to deal with the vagaries of everyday life. Sandburg and Randall's work, however, also must be considered in context, for they published their books in the earlier part of the twentieth century, prior to the modern-day women's movement.

[24] Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies* 4:2 (1978): 100.

[25] Jean H. Baker, "Mary Todd Lincoln: Managing Home, Husband, and Children," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 11 (1990): 3.

[26] Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 35. See also Phillida Bunkle, "Sentimental Womanhood and Domestic Education, 1830-1870," *History of Education Quarterly* 14:1 (1974), 21. Bunkle says rather, that Beecher made domestic service central to her school and that it helped to professionalize the women's sphere.

[27] For an extended discussion of the relationship between nineteenth-century female education and the development of individual and social identities, see Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Kelley examines women's experiences in the female seminaries and academies during the Early National and antebellum periods. She argues that through schooling, women "redefined themselves and their relationship to civil society" (2). It is interesting to compare Mary Lincoln's education with that of Harriet Beecher Stowe, which Kelley details extensively. Stowe's parents sent her to one of the nation's most prominent academies. She took her education seriously and used it to propel her literary career forward and enter into America's rapidly expanding print culture. With her publication of the famous and widely-read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe entered the maelstrom of public life, crediting her education with giving her the tools to negotiate the public sphere. Her schooling had taught her to think critically and have a life outside her family—even as she continued to balance the demands of writing with taking care of her husband and children.

[28] Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln – A Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 17.

[29] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 44.

[30] Mary Todd Lincoln to Eliza Stuart Steele, May 23, 1871, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 588.

[31] Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 7.

[32] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 40.

[33] Mary Todd Lincoln to Mercy Ann Levering, December, 15, 1840, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 21.

[34] Mary Todd Lincoln to Mary Harlan Lincoln, March 22, 1869, in *Ibid.*, 504.

[35] Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, July 2, 1848, in *Ibid.*, 39.

[36] Mary Todd Lincoln to Abraham Lincoln, May 1848, in *Ibid.*, 36.

[37] Baker, "Mary Todd Lincoln: Managing Home, Husband, and Children," 9.

[38] Mary Todd Lincoln to Alexander Williamson, June 15, 1865, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 251.

[39] *The Ripley Bee*, January 3, 1861.

[40] Mary Todd Lincoln to Abraham Lincoln, May 1848, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 38.

[41] Mary Todd Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, September 20, 1857, in *Ibid.*, 49.

[42] Elizabeth Keckly, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty years a slave and four years in the White House* (1868; repr., New York: Oxford, 1988), 101-2.

[43] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 162.

[44] *Ibid.*, 134.

[45] Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, June 12, 1848, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 39.

[46] Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham—Lincoln and the Todds, A Family Divided by War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), xiv.

[47] Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln – A Life*, 239.

[48] Mary Todd Lincoln to David Davis, January 17, 1861, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 71.

[49] *New York Times*, February 23, 1861.

[50] Mary Todd Lincoln to Abraham Lincoln, November 3, 1862, in Turner and Turner, 140.

[51] Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 6.

[52] Later rumors abounded that she was having an affair with Wood, a rumor emphasized by Michael Burlingame and C.A. Tripp in their works on Abraham Lincoln.

[53] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 192.

[54] Keckly, *Behind the Scenes*, 149.

[55] *New York Herald*, May 2, 1864.

[56] Baker, "Mary Todd Lincoln: Managing Home, Husband and Children," 12.

[57] *The Columbus Sun*, October 8, 1867.

[58] Berry, *House of Abraham*, 185.

[59] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 181.

[60] *Ibid.*, xiii.

[61] *Ibid.*, 128.

[62] Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln – A Life*, 89. Mary Lincoln did meet the requirements of True Womanhood when it came to her church attendance and reading of religious texts. She had been confirmed in the Episcopal Church at the age of 12 and was born into a family that had numerous ministers. Though "her strong temperament resisted any passive acceptance required by Christian doctrine," she relied on her faith throughout her life. In Springfield, after Eddie's death, Lincoln had Mary meet with Dr. James Smith, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church. Mary found solace in his tutelage and joined his church in 1852. Lincoln was more of a skeptic (a trait that would haunt his legacy later when William Herndon would perform his gadfly routine and declare that Lincoln had never been a Christian), but various sources document



that he at least found Dr. Smith a worthy intellectual adversary when they discussed the nature of Christianity.

[63] *Ibid.*, 221.

[64] *The Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, July 28, 1868.

[65] Mary Todd Lincoln to Benjamin B. Sherman, December 26, 1865, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 313.

[66] Mary Todd Lincoln to Alexander Williamson, January 26, 1866, in *Ibid.*, 330.

[67] Mary Todd Lincoln to Benjamin B. Sherman, December 26, 1865, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 608.

[68] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 317.

[69] Mary Todd Lincoln to Robert Todd Lincoln, June 19, 1876, in Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 616.

[70] Jason Emerson (*The Madness of Mary Lincoln*) speculates that she probably suffered from bi-polar disorder. The revisionist historians share C.A. Tripp's views that she was not crazy, but from the opposite side of the coin. Jean Baker asserts that Mary "was by no means insane" but posits instead that she only suffered from the personality disorder of narcissism (*Mary Todd Lincoln*, 278). Stephen Berry also argues that she may have had narcissistic personality disorder.

[71] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 350.

[72] Cheree A. Carlson, *The Crimes of Womanhood: Defining Femininity in a Court of Law* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 80.

[73] Regarding her insanity trial, Catherine Clinton argues that from Mary's perspective, "she was bushwhacked by her son" and was given no "time or opportunity to defend herself" (*Mrs. Lincoln – A Life*, 303).

[74] Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 325.

[75] Berry, *House of Abraham*, 185.



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