

Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN AND LEXINGTON

Townsend, William H. *Lincoln and His Wife's Home Town.* (1929) 8vo cloth, 402 pp. Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis. Price \$5.00.

"Lincoln and His Wife's Home Town" is a difficult item to classify in a subject index of Lincolniana. The publishers anticipate this uncertainty by suggesting that the reader may decide Cassius M. Clay or Robert J. Breckenridge are central figures. Possibly it might be called a sketch book of Lexington, Kentucky, or the history of the Todd family. The author states that, "It is the purpose of the book to show Lincoln's personal contacts with slavery, which gave him a first hand knowledge of the 'peculiar institution' that he could have acquired in no other way."

In a very interesting and fascinating manner, the author describes the activities of the pro-slavery and the anti-slavery factions in Lexington, leading up to and including the rebellion. It cannot be doubted, after reading this book, that Lincoln was greatly influenced by slavery conditions which he observed in Lexington upon his extended visits to that city.

Space will permit but brief reviews of three of the many phases of Lincoln's contacts, discussed by Mr. Townsend, who is a native Kentuckian and a resident of Lexington.

Lincoln's Visit to Lexington

1841—While a guest of Joshua Speed at Louisville, Lincoln made his first visit to Lexington.

1847—Enroute to Washington as a member of the thirtieth congress, Lincoln and his family spent a month with the Todds. At this time Lincoln heard Henry Clay deliver his famous speech on the Mexican situation; and on Thanksgiving morning listened to Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge the preacher-ordinator.

1849—Upon the death of Robert S. Todd, Lincoln's father-in-law, the settlement of the estate called for court proceedings. Lincoln was chosen by the children of Robert S. Todd's first wife to represent them, which necessitated a trip to Lexington in the fall of 1849. He took his family with him and spent about three weeks there.

1850—Mrs. Elizabeth Parker, grandmother of Mary Todd, passed away in 1850; and business in connection with the settlement of this estate brought the Lincolns to Lexington

again, in the spring of this year. Mr. Townsend feels that this visit greatly influenced Abraham Lincoln's religious thinking.

The Breckenridges and the Clays

Similarity of names has caused some confusion as to just what part the two famous Breckenridges and the two famous Clays contributed to the slavery agitation. Mr. Townsend's character sketches of these men and a detailed account of their activities does much to clarify the situation. The prominence given John C. Breckenridge, one of Lincoln's political opponents in the campaign of 1860, has overshadowed Robert J. Breckenridge, who was fully as brilliant as his illustrious kinsman and a tower of strength to the Union cause throughout the nation. The fame of Henry Clay has also had a tendency to minimize the important part which his cousin Cassius M. Clay played in the anti-slavery struggle in Kentucky.

The Todds' Attitude Towards Slavery

Robert S. Todd's first wife was Eliza Parker, and to this union seven children were born. Six of these reached maturity: Elizabeth, who married Ninian Edwards; Francis, the wife of Dr. Wallace; Levi, who remained in Lexington during his life; Mary Todd Lincoln; Ann Maria, who married a Mr. Smith; and George, the youngest son who was born at the time of his mother's death.

Mr. Todd chose Elizabeth Humphries as his second wife, and eight children were born to them. There were three sons, Samuel, David, and Alexander, and five daughters, Emilie, Elodi, Martha, Catherine, and Margaret.

While the first family, with the exception of the youngest son George, were loyal to the union cause, Robert Todd's second family were all sympathetic with the south, except the youngest daughter, Margaret. The three sons joined the southern army and three of the daughters' husbands were officers in the confederate forces.

Abraham Lincoln was very anxious to have Ben Hardin Helm, who married Emilie Todd, receive a commission in the Union Army and had a serious talk with him about it, but Helm chose to cast his lot with the south. His death on the field of battle was a great shock to Abraham and Mary Lincoln. It is not strange that Ben Hardin Helm felt as he did about the conflict when we realize he was a son of John L. Helm, one-time Governor of Kentucky.

JOHN L. HELM'S WILL

As a supplemental document to Mr. Townsend's source material, an excerpt from the will of John Helm seems to be timely. This document was dated November 15, 1865, and contained over 5,500 words. Two years

after this will was made John L. Helm became Governor of Kentucky, serving but five days, his death occurring on September 8, 1867. He had also served as governor from July, 1850, to September, 1851, succeeding John J. Crittenden, resigned.

"Assuming it is probable that the Government of the United States will by force and fraud against and in contempt of right and justice of law and the constitutions State and National, and all law civil or moral, deprive representatives of their labors, I place those who live and may remain on my place, at the disposal of my wife and my son John. I request that such as remain faithful and obedient shall remain in the service of the family on such terms as may be agreed upon. I regard the act of the government looking at it in all its bearing and consequences the greatest crime of this or any other age.

"In view of all the consequences which in my honest judgement would flow from it, I was fixed and unalterable in my opposition to the late unhappy and desolating war and now in the performance of this solemn act I thank God in the sincerity of my heart that he gave that direction to my mind. No man that lived and breathed was more attached to the United States as formed by the compact, the constitution as made by our fathers, than I was. I hold that it was formed by the wise and unconstrained will of the people and depended for its perpetuity on the virtue and intelligence of the people, the fraternal affections of the sections, and the formation of their mutual welfare. I was for peaceful adjustment and against war believing as I did, and now do, that war would be and practically now is desolation, unauthorized by the constitution and against the genius and spirit of our form of government. The south was conquered and in my firm conviction the north will sooner or later learn that they are the whipped party. The race of intellectual giants has passed off the stage. The moral tone of the people is gone. Competition and vice will rule the hour and the day. The mass of the whole people have lost confidence in the government and they place no reliance in its justice and honor. This is a melancholly picture but my mind is made up that the future of this government will have a downward tendency, and ultimately, and at a not very distant day will result in disintegration or a central despotism. This is an unusual place to introduce my political opinions. I do it to solemnly impress my family with my opinions with the firm hope that they will stand by the form of government as it came from the hands of our revolutionary fathers and oppose modern reform. I believe the abolitionists as a political party capable of any crime, possessing no redeeming quality."

John L. Helm,

Hardin Co. Court, Will Book F, p. 21.