LINCOLN AND LEXINGTON


"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 would 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 of the Todds 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 Mr. Townsend, Breckinridge the preacher-oration.

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 Clayes

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 question. Mr. Townsend gives 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 power 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 Todd's 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; Frances, the wife of Dr. Wallace; Levi, who remained in Lexington during the latter part of his life; Mary Todd Lincoln; Ann Maria, who married a Mr. Smith; and George, the youngest, 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, Emeline, Elda, 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 shared all the sympathies of the south with the southern victory. The three sons joined the southern army and five 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 was 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 work, material, an excerpt from the will of John Helm seems to be timely. This document was dated November 15, 1865, and contained over 5,560 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 31, 1858, to September, 1861, succeeding John J. Crittenden, resigned.

"Assuming it is probable that the Government of the United States will by force and fraud against and in contradiction of the wills of the people and the constituencies of the states, bring about a political despotism, and deprive the states of their rights and the people of their privileges, I consider the abolitionists as a political party capable of any crime, possessing no redeeming quality."

John L. Helm.