

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN LORE

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### LINCOLN'S PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

The possibility of combining the Lincoln and St. Valentine atmospheres, which overlap with but one day intervening, has made the romances of Lincoln popular discussions for the month of February.

The correspondence which passed between Abraham Lincoln, and his closest friend Joshua Speed, during the interval when Lincoln was estranged from Mary Todd, has been given comparatively little attention. Lincoln and Speed were very much disturbed about their love affairs and the letters which Lincoln wrote to his closest friend allow us to learn something about his own philosophy of love.

The following excerpts from his letters prompts one to ask these questions: Is there any evidence that the "fatal first of January, 1841" witnessed anything more than Lincoln calmly advising Mary Todd that he could not carry out his promise to marry her? Is there any evidence that there was a lovers quarrel or a broken wedding scene?

There are two magazine articles which should be read in connection with these exhibits: "The Fatal First of January, 1841" by Mary Leighton Miles published in the *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society* for May, 1927; and "Lincoln's Hesitancy to Marry," by John Gilmer Speed in the *Ladies Home Journal*, October, 1895.

Extracts from two letters which Lincoln wrote to John T. Stuart about a year before the Speed correspondence occurred are used to introduce the later exhibits.

#### *Lincoln Letters to Stuart*

Springfield, Illinois  
January 20, 1841

"... I have within the last few days been making an exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondriasm and thereby got an impression that Dr. Henry is necessary to my existence... Pardon me for not writing more; I have not sufficient composure to write a long letter."

Springfield, Illinois  
January 23, 1841

"Yours of the third instant is re-

ceived, and I proceed to answer it as well as I can, though from the deplorable state of my mind at this time, I fear that I shall give you but little satisfaction... I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better it appears to me."

#### *Lincoln Letters to Speed*

Springfield, Illinois  
February 3, 1842

"I even hope that ere this reaches you, she will have returned with improved and still improving health... Why, Speed, if you did not love her, although you might not wish her death, you would most certainly be resigned to it. Perhaps this point is no longer a question with you and my pertinacious dwelling upon it is a rude intrusion upon your feelings. If so, you must pardon me. You know the hell I have suffered on that point and how tender I am upon it. You know I do not mean wrong. I have been quite clear of 'Hypo' since you left; even better than I was along in the fall. I have seen — but once. She seems very cheerful and so I said nothing to her about what we spoke of."

Springfield, Illinois  
February 13, 1842

"When this shall reach you, you will have been Fanny's husband several days... I am now fully convinced that you love her as ardently as you are capable of loving. Your ever being happy in her presence and your intense anxiety about her health, if there were nothing else, would place this beyond all dispute in my mind."

Springfield, Illinois  
February 25, 1842

"I opened the letter with intense anxiety and trepidation, so much so that although it turned out better than I expected, I have hardly yet at a distance of ten hours become calm... I now have no doubt that it is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that anything earthly can realize. Far short of your dreams as you may be, no woman could do more to realize them than that same black-eyed Fanny."

Springfield, Illinois  
March 27, 1842

"It cannot be told how it thrills me with joy to hear you say that you are 'far happier than you ever expected to be.' That much I know is enough. I know you too well to suppose your

expectations were not at least sometimes extravagant, and if the reality exceeds them all I say—Enough, Dear Lord. I am not going beyond the truth when I tell you that the short space it took me to read your last letter gave me more pleasure than the total sum of all I have enjoyed since the fatal first of January 1841. Since then it seems to me I should have been entirely happy but for the never absent idea that there is one still unhappy whom I have contributed to make so. That still kills my soul. I cannot but reproach myself for even wishing to be happy while she is otherwise. She accompanied a large party on the railroad cars to Jacksonville last Monday and on her return spoke so that I heard of it, of having enjoyed the trip exceedingly. God be praised for that... One thing I can tell you which I know you will be glad to hear and that is that I have seen Mary and scrutinized her feelings as well as I could and am fully convinced she is far happier now than she has been for the last fifteen months past."

Springfield, Illinois  
July 4, 1842

"True, that subject is painful to me; but it is not your silence or the silence of all the world that can make me forget it. I acknowledge the correctness of your advice too; but before I resolve to do the one thing or the other, I must gain my confidence in my own ability to keep my resolves when they are made. In that ability you know I once prided myself as the only or chief gem of my character; that gem is lost—how and where you know too well. I have not yet regained it; and until I do, I cannot trust myself in any matter of much importance. I believe now that had you understand my case at the time as well as I understood yours afterwards by the aid you would have given me I should have sailed through clear, but that does not now afford me sufficient confidence to begin that or the like of that again."

Springfield, Illinois  
October, 1842

"... but I began this letter not for what I have been writing but to say something on the subject which you know to be of such infinite solicitude to me... that you are happier now than the day you married her I well know, for without, you could not be living... but I want to ask a close question—'Are you now in feeling as well as judgment glad that you are married as you are?' From anybody but me this would be an imprudent question not to be tolerated; but I know you will pardon it in me. Please answer it quickly as I am impatient to know."