

# LINCOLN LORE

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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

### NINETIETH ANNIVERSARY OF LINCOLN-TODD NUPTIALS

The fourth day of last month was the ninetieth anniversary of the wedding of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd. Whether or not this anniversary year has been responsible for a revival of interest in Mrs. Lincoln we do not know, but there has come from the press during this period two authoritative works which throw much new light on the tragic life of Mary Todd Lincoln.

Just recently Dr. William A. Evans submitted to the public a study of Mrs. Lincoln's personality and now there is ready an interesting story of Mrs. Lincoln and her family by Carl Sandburg, supplemented with a compilation of documents bearing on the subject by Paul Angle.

From the viewpoint of human interest, one of the high points in the dramatic story of Lincoln's relation to Mary Todd is reached with the occurrence of the wedding on November 4, 1842. While the situations leading up to this event have suffered much from exaggeration and misrepresentation, yet there is enough actual romance left in the story to satisfy the curiosity of most any one.

The recalling of several episodes from the "fatal first of January 1841" to the fourth of November, 1842, will suggest how significant were the incidents which contributed to the strange romance of the couple.

#### *Estrangement*

Lincoln himself is responsible for the expression "the fatal first of January 1841," as he uses it in a letter written to Joshua Speed on March 27, 1842. How long previous to this time he had looked upon it as a fatal day is not known.

There are several theories as to what occurred on that day. It is assumed that the romance of Lincoln and Mary Todd had progressed to a point where they had become engaged. Herndon claims that the wedding day had been set for January 1, 1841, that the guests had arrived, and the bride was "bedecked in veil and silken gown," but that Abraham Lincoln ran away from his wedding. Lamson claims that the cause of his strange behavior was that he loved another

woman, Matilda Edwards. Neither one of these viewpoints are now held by careful students of Lincoln.

The people of Springfield were under the impression that Mary Todd had jilted Lincoln and he, rather than she, had been humiliated. Katherine Helm, a niece of Mary, holds that Abraham Lincoln was jealous of Mary for her flirtations with Stephen A. Douglas and that on the evening of New Year's Day, 1841, Lincoln told Mary "without preamble that he intended to release her from her engagement." It is very doubtful if either of these viewpoints are now acceptable.

More and more there is a growing belief that Abraham Lincoln approached Mary Todd in about the same apologetic attitude that he did Mary Owen in the New Salem days; but in this instance the reaction of this other Mary was much different from his previous experience, and Lincoln was led to feel he had greatly wronged her. The "fatal first of January" evidently marked the consummation of their first courtship.

#### *Reconciliation*

Whatever the atmosphere of that fatal New Year's Day, the resolutions they made were regretted. Mary Todd wrote to a friend, "I have not met him in the gay world for months. With the usual comfort and misery I imagine that others were as seldom gladdened by his presence as my humble self, yet I would that the case were different, that he would once more resume his station in society, that 'Richard should be himself again.' Much, much happiness would it afford me."

At the same time Lincoln was writing to Speed, "It seems to me I should have been entirely happy but for the never-absent idea that there is still one unhappy whom I have contributed to make so. That kills my soul. I cannot but reproach myself for even wishing to be happy while she is otherwise."

Reconciliation between the couple is said to have been brought about by Mrs. Simeon Francis, wife of the editor of the Sangamon Journal, who arranged a surprise meeting between the two in her home. This must have been later than July 4, as he wrote Speed on that day that he did not intend to launch out on any more such amorous affairs as he had experienced, but by October 5 he was "impatient to know" if Speed was glad that he was married.

#### *Chivalry*

While Mrs. Francis may have been responsible for bringing Lincoln and Miss Todd together again, her husband offered the medium for Lincoln to show his chivalry which without doubt hastened the wedding day.

Mary Todd and her friend, Julia Jayne, prepared some copy for the Sangamon Journal satirizing James T. Shields, state auditor. Later on Lincoln was taken into the secret by the girls and made a partner in these anonymous contributions. Lincoln, in assuming the responsibility for all of the writing, was challenged to a duel by Shields.

If Lincoln so deeply regretted making Mary Todd unhappy as he implies in his letter to Speed, it is to be expected that this second courtship would cause Lincoln to pay more attention to little favors that might please her. His part in the Shields case if viewed sympathetically must be looked upon entirely from the viewpoint of a chivalrous lover rather than that of a scheming politician trying to injure a leader of the opposite party.

On the other hand, the initiative taken by Mary Todd which was responsible for this affair must also have developed from a desire on her part to cultivate the instinct of approbation, with Abraham Lincoln especially in mind as the observer, instead of allowing any political incentive to motivate the proceedings. If the minds of the participants could be analyzed it would be discovered that neither one chose to injure Shields but both were very anxious to gain the favor of each other.

#### *Marriage*

We expect Mary Todd would have preferred a colorful wedding with all the "pomp and circumstance" incident to such an occasion rather than the very simple services that were conducted.

Lincoln met Ninian Edwards, Mary's brother-in-law, on the street one morning and told him that Mary and he had decided to be married that evening at the Episcopal parsonage. They were finally persuaded, however, to have the wedding ceremony performed in the Edwards' home.

Mary's close relatives and a few of the most intimate friends of the young couple were extended informal invitations to witness the nuptials, not more than thirty people being in attendance.

Although Lincoln is said to have been superstitious he was willing to risk Friday as a wedding day. He was not received with open arms by the members of Mrs. Lincoln's family, in fact both feared the opposition of the family to their marriage.

When Reverend Charles Dresser pronounced Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd husband and wife on Friday evening, November 4, 1842, he consummated one of the strangest romances which has been recorded by history.