

LINCOLN LORE

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ORIGIN OF THE SECOND LINCOLN - TODD ROMANCE

Ninety-five years ago on November 4, 1842, Abraham Lincoln married Mary Todd. The following very brief notice of the wedding appeared in the *Illinois State Journal* published at Springfield:

Married—In this city on the 4th instant, at the residence of W. N. Edwards, Esq., by Rev. C. Dresser, Abraham Lincoln, Esq., to Miss Mary Todd, daughter of Robert Todd, Esq., of Lexington, Ky.

This announcement so brief and formal must have recalled to the people of Springfield, events of a rather sensational nature which had happened less than two months before. The episode very likely was responsible for the renewal of the Lincoln-Todd romance, which culminated in the marriage of the poor prairie lawyer and a member of the aristocracy.

The incident which likely was most responsible for the resuming of friendly relationships between the two was a veritable bombshell with the life or death of Lincoln, the erstwhile suitor, apparently at stake. He was about to fight a duel to save the name of Mary Todd from being brought into a political embroil, accentuated by an anonymous poem she had written about an office holder by the name of Shields. The poem was published in a Springfield newspaper.

Shields became enraged and demanded from the editor of the paper, Mr. Francis, the name of the individual who had ridiculed him. Lincoln had some weeks before written an article or two referring to Shields but of a less objective nature. Upon hearing of Shields' demands upon the editor and having been advised that Miss Todd was the author of the poem in question, Lincoln assumed the responsibility for all the anonymous writings including the poem written by Mary.

Mary Todd's version of the story is told in a letter she wrote on December 8, 1865 to Mr. Francis B. Carpenter, a portrait painter, who had made the famous painting of the Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. In one part of her letter, she commented on the Shields duel and gave a brief summary of it and an account of how Mr. Lincoln came to her rescue. She wrote:

"Shields was always a subject of mirth, his impulsiveness and drolleries were irresistible. On one occasion, he made himself so conspicuous, that I committed his follies to rhyme and some person, looking over the silly verses carried them off and had them published in the daily paper of the place. The sarcastic allusions irritated Shields and he demanded the author of the editor. The latter, requesting a few days for reflection, repaired to Mr. Lincoln, who, having heard of it, through me, immediately told the Editor that, he would be responsible."

Mrs. Francis, the editor's wife, is known to have been the person who was primarily responsible for bringing

Lincoln and Mary together after their long separation. It is not known when this first meeting occurred but it was arranged by Mrs. Francis in her home, unknown to either Mr. Lincoln or Miss Todd. It appears as if it may have been in connection with the difficulty in which her husband, Lincoln, and Mary were drawn together over the Shields matter. It is certain that Lincoln had no thought of resuming his attention to Miss Todd as late as July, 1842 as he clearly stipulates in a letter to Speed. On August 10, 1842, the first of the anonymous contributions that brought on the Shields difficulty was written.

It cannot be questioned but what the willingness of Lincoln to protect Mary had much to do with the renewal of their courtship. As the time of the anticipated duel approached and the possibility of a tragic ending presented itself, it is not difficult to conclude that Mary would look upon Lincoln as a sort of a gallant knight going out in her defense. In the letter to Carpenter already mentioned she wrote:

"This affair, always annoyed my husband's peaceful nerves, and as it occurred six months, (weeks) before we were married, he said he felt he could no less than be my champion. However, if the same cause had transpired a year & half before, it would doubtless have been the same result, as our mutual relations were then, the same."

Mary Todd also stated in the same letter that it was General Hardin, her cousin, who stepped in just at the time the duel was to be fought and stopped the proceedings. The incidents leading up to the anticipated duel had served to make both of them forget the differences of their former companionship and within a month and a half they were married.

We may conclude that Lincoln's behavior during the Shields episode was largely controlled by the instinct of approbation, during which period his one thought was to gain the approval of Mary Todd. As time passed he disliked to have the Shields affair mentioned. His wife relates an incident which reveals how keenly he felt about it:

"Last February, an officer of our army, presented himself in the drawing room of the W. H. on one of those fortunate & especial occasions, when the President, was able to respond to my urgent invitation, to accompany me to the drawing room, if 'only for an hour.' This Genl in the course of conversation, said, playfully, to my husband 'Mr. President, is it true, as I have heard that you, once went out, to fight a duel & all for the sake of the lady by your side.' Mr. Lincoln, with a flushed face, replied, 'I do not deny it, but if you desire my friendship, you will never mention it again.' Immediately after the occurrence, months before we were married, we mutually agreed, on no occasion to allude to it & gradually it ceased to be mentioned."