

LINCOLN LORE

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TRAGIC WHITE HOUSE DAYS

Mary Todd Lincoln was the only woman who ever lived alone in the White House for a considerable time without occupying any official station. She was the victim of nervous prostration due to the assassination of the President and for five weeks remained in the Executive Mansion, although President Johnson, the legal tenant, had been sworn into office the day Mr. Lincoln expired.

President Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865. Mrs. Lincoln followed the stricken body of her husband borne across the street from Ford's Theatre to a dwelling house and remained there until the following morning when the President passed away. She was a pathetic figure indeed and her many outbursts of grief gave evidence of an extremely nervous condition. Such expressions as "Speak to me just once more," "Come back to life for just a moment," and "Bring in Tad for he will surely speak to him" were some of her pleadings.

This last request recalls the tragic scene in Glover's Theatre where "Tad" had gone with an attendant to see a comedy. During the play at Glover's the manager came forward and according to an eye witness he was as pale as a ghost, with "an indescribable light in his eyes and an expression of agony in his face." He said, "Ladies and gentlemen: I feel it my duty to say that Abraham Lincoln has been shot. . . ." At these words "Tad" Lincoln, who was in one of the boxes, is said to have "bounded away like a young deer shrieking in agony."

It was not long after the tragedy that both Robert, who had remained at the White House, and Tad were with their mother, but their own disturbed feelings would not allow them to be of much consolation to her.

It was Mrs. Welles who seemed to be the "friend in need" at this time and she was sent for to accompany Mrs. Lincoln to the White House from the place where Mr. Lincoln passed away. A press notice appearing two days later stated, "By special request Mrs. Welles, wife of the Secretary of the Navy has been in almost constant attendance at the White House since the tragedy took place."

Mrs. Lincoln was not able to attend the funeral services of her husband in the Green Room of the White House on Wednesday, April 19, and "Tad" could not be induced to visit the room. Robert was the only immediate member of the family present.

Some days after the funeral a news correspondent wrote: "As yet few visitors, and only those who are known to sympathize deeply in the family affliction, have been admitted to the mansion. In this hour of her deep affliction Mrs. Lincoln has been attended only by General J. B. S. Todd and her two sons, Robert and little Tad, until today. Mrs. Secretary Welles has been with her all day. Mrs. Lincoln has refused to receive any visits of condolence, and has consented to see only Secretary Stanton of the Cabinet, who had an interview with her this afternoon to ascertain her wishes in regard to the funeral ceremonies. Her sister, Mrs. Grimsley, who has been much with her, is expected to arrive here on Tuesday next. Mrs. Lincoln has been much prostrated by this deep and mournful tragedy, which, in the moment

of his greatest triumph, has bereft her of him whose greatness and goodness was her great pride. She has, however, borne the blow with heroic firmness, and while trying to comfort her sons for their great loss has, under the ministrations of Dr. R. K. Stone, the family physician, been enabled to bear the sad blow that has befallen her household."

On April 20, six days after the assassination occurred, one of the Washington papers printed this announcement: "Mrs. Lincoln is still suffering greatly from nervous prostration by the shock that has convulsed the nation. She has not yet left her bed and it is hardly probable that she will be able to return to Illinois for several days."

Ten days after the death of Lincoln this tribute appeared in the press: "While the heart of the nation throbs with grief at the death of the President it will surely turn with sympathy towards those who have been so bitterly afflicted and the American people will bear up in their hands as a sacred trust those who have been bereaved of a husband and father through his devotion to the best interests of the nation."

As late as May 9, three weeks after the tragedy, a notice appeared which stated, "Mrs. Lincoln is not so well today having rested badly last night. She is greatly depressed in spirit and at times gives vent to her feeling in tears."

In the meantime the body of Mr. Lincoln, which had been viewed by a million people, reached Springfield, and Mrs. Lincoln's son, Robert, on May 2 went on for the final funeral rites. He returned to Washington on May 8 and the papers stated he would accompany his mother back to Illinois as soon as she was able to travel.

A news correspondent who was in the White House on May 14 mentioned having seen "Tad" Lincoln and wrote, "his fob chain of gold is the only relief to his mourning garb."

On May 16, one month after the tragedy, the following notice appeared in the press: "Mrs. Lincoln having recovered sufficiently to be able to travel will leave for her home in Illinois Monday next accompanied by Captain Robert Lincoln and other members of the family." A confirmation of this removal appeared in the same paper on May 22 where the following notice appeared: "Mrs. Lincoln has decided upon leaving Washington this afternoon (Monday) at 6 o'clock for her home in Illinois. She will be accompanied by Captain Robert Lincoln, Master Tad Lincoln and others."

During this long period since Mr. Lincoln's death, very little had been done in the White House to remove the decorations used at the time of the funeral. On May 25 the White House was opened to visitors for the first time since the assassination, and the observers noted that the workmen were just then removing the catalque on which Mr. Lincoln's remains were laid in state. The mourning drapery in the East Room was also being taken down.

The *Pittsburgh Commercial* noted that Mrs. Lincoln had arrived in that city on Tuesday afternoon on the way to Illinois. There was a large crowd at the depot hoping to see her but she did not make her appearance as she had been tendered the use of the director's car by the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad and therefore did not find it necessary to change. The car was attached to the Chicago train which left about half past three.