

LINCOLN LORE

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ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF LINCOLN-TODD MARRIAGE

One hundred years ago on November 4, 1842 there occurred one of the most important events in the personal life of Abraham Lincoln—he married Mary Todd. The real significance of the epochal wedding has been completely overshadowed by a trivial piece of fiction involving Abraham Lincoln in a love affair with a girl named Ann Rutledge.

Ever since the day when William Herndon first publicized in Springfield, Illinois the Lincoln-Rutledge fable, a fictitious story created by his own imagination, biographers, authors of fiction, playwrights, poets, magazine contributors and feature writers have invariably ignored the facts about Lincoln's real romance with Mary Todd which culminated in his marriage. The emphasis placed on the alleged Rutledge affair has left the casual American reader feeling that Lincoln's real venture in matrimony was a catastrophe. One writer had the audacity to state in the opening sentence of an article in the *Reader's Digest* (January 1937): "The great tragedy of Lincoln's life was not his assassination, but his marriage."

Probably it is too late now to do very much about correcting the ridiculous and wholly undependable story about Lincoln's infatuation for Ann Rutledge, and his supposed mental collapse, approaching suicide, at the time of her death, in which there is not one word of truth. It may not be too late, however, to invite a more sympathetic attitude toward the facts relating to Lincoln's actual romance with Mary Todd and the wedding which made them husband and wife, although Herndon attempted to nullify the interest in the actual Lincoln-Todd nuptials by printing a foolish and untenable story about Lincoln having at a previous date run away from a wedding ceremony.

Up until Lincoln was twenty-eight years of age he had lived in the rural districts far withdrawn from cultural influences. In these words he tells of his first permanent residence in a town: "On April 15, 1837 removed to Springfield." His reaction to this new situation, socially at least, is noted in a letter he wrote on May 7, 1837 after he had been in Springfield twenty-one days, in which he said: "I am quite as lonesome here as I ever was anywhere in my life. I have been spoken to by but one woman since I've been here, and should not have been by her, if she could have avoided it."

That one woman who had spoken to him may have been Mary Todd, cousin of his law partner, John T. Stuart, whose office it is likely she visited as she was in Springfield at this time for a three months' visit. Whether or not Lincoln met Mary Todd during this first visit, or did not meet her until 1839 when she came there to make her home, we may feel assured that he was captivated by her intellectual attainments, her aristocratic bearing, her brilliant conversation and undoubtedly was impressed by the fact that she was a great admirer and personal acquaintance of the venerable, Henry Clay, Lincoln's own "beau ideal of a statesman."

That Lincoln became engaged to Mary Todd sometime in the year 1840 is well known, and that they anticipated being married sometime in 1841 is also admitted, but Herndon's story about a proposed wedding to have occurred on January 1, 1841, at which time guests were present, wedding breakfast prepared and Mary was left at the altar with no bridegroom on hand, is a gross fabrication.

Mrs. Wallace, a sister of Mary Lincoln, made this testimony with reference to Herndon's fake wedding:

"There is not a word of truth in it. I was never so amazed in my life as when I read that story. Mr. Lincoln never did such a thing."

That the engagement of Abraham and Mary was broken on January 1, 1841 is accepted, and while it is not known for a certainty which one of the young people was responsible for the misunderstanding, it is not evident that there was any demonstration on the part of either one of them that caused any expression of disrespect. Two factors which undoubtedly contributed to the temporary separation was Lincoln's fear that Mary might not be happy in having to share his humble station, and the influence of Mary's aristocratic relatives who looked with much disfavor on the match. Mrs. John T. Stuart, wife of Lincoln's first law partner claimed that "Mr. Edwards, her guardian, always was opposed to Mr. Lincoln, on the ground that he was a poor young man and had no prospects," and that, "he insisted upon Mary writing a letter to Mr. Lincoln, breaking off the engagement."

For many months after the parting Mary and Mr. Lincoln did not keep company, but it is evident from their correspondence with friends that they were still in love with each other. We will leave it to Mrs. B. S. Edwards, a sister-in-law of Ninian Edwards, who married Mary's sister, Elizabeth Todd Edwards with whom Mary lived, to tell the story of the wedding plans.

"Ninian Edwards came to our house rather early in the morning of a November day and without any preliminaries said: 'My wife wants you to come to our house this evening.' I asked what was going on. He replied: 'We are going to have a wedding. I met Mr. Lincoln a while ago and he told me that he and Mary were going to be married this evening (I think he said) at the parsonage, but I told him that must not be. Mary was my ward, and if she was going to be married it must be from my house.' He went on to say that he had left his wife greatly disturbed over the fact that she did not have time to prepare a suitable wedding feast . . . Some little misunderstanding had occurred which prevented Mr. Lincoln from visiting at the house, but Mrs. Simeon Francis, whose husband was editor of the *Sangamo Journal* (a mutual friend), had made arrangements that they should meet there, and it was there the wedding was planned. To her sister, Mrs. Edwards, Mary had been reticent and had not given the least intimation of her purpose."

There were but few guests at the wedding and the *Illinois State Journal*, for November 11, 1842 carried this announcement:

"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."

Sam Marshall, of Shawneetown, Illinois, sent Lincoln a check for legal services which reached him just an hour before the wedding. Days later Lincoln acknowledged the receipt of the money and commented: "Nothing new here except my marrying, which to me is a matter of profound wonder."

This is the inscription which Abraham Lincoln had placed in the ring that he slipped on the wedding finger of Mary Todd, one-hundred years ago: "A. L. to Mary November 4, 1842. Love is eternal."

Note—See *Lincoln Kinsman*, No. 36.