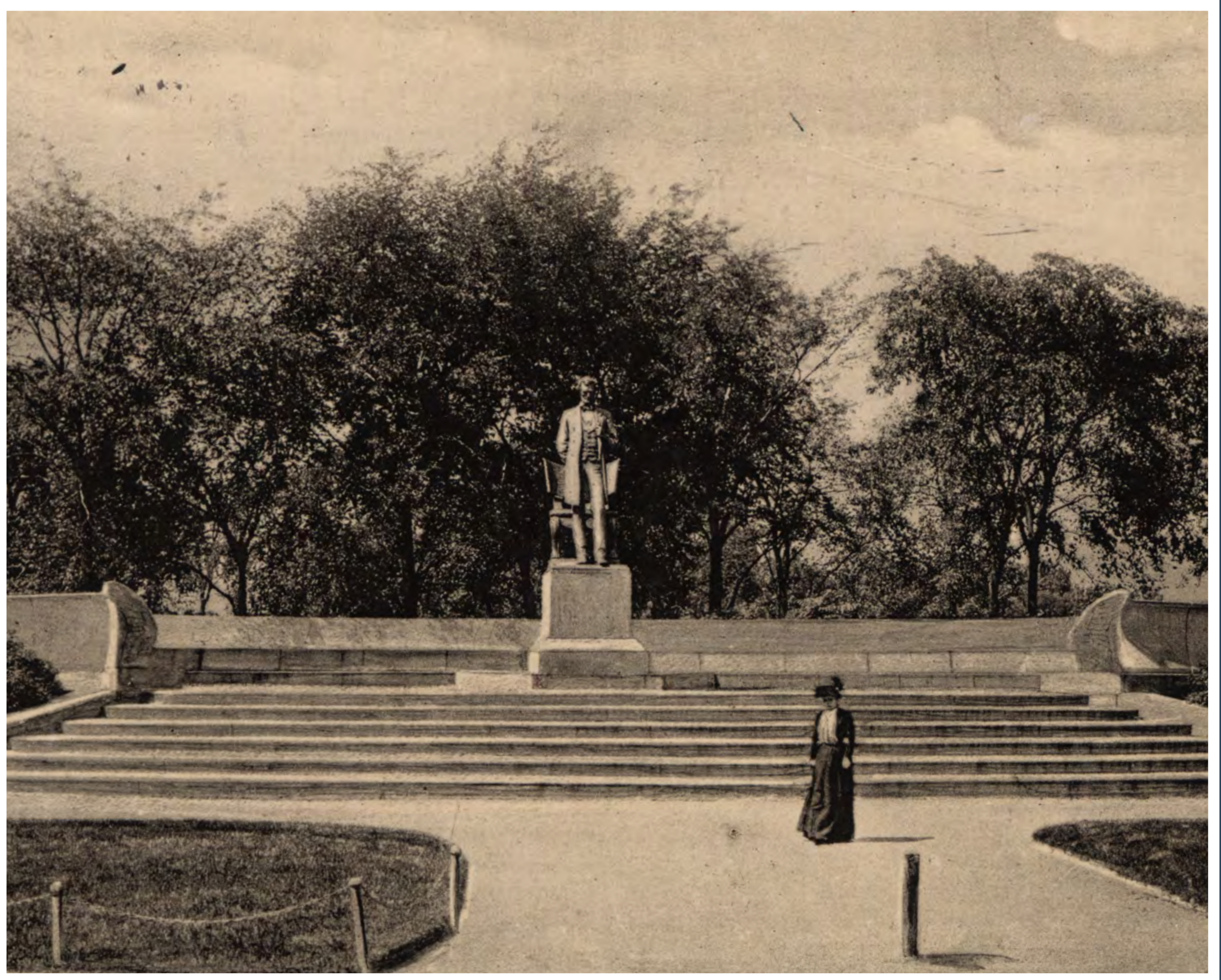
Lincoln LORE

NUMBER 1944 WINTER 2024



Lincoln Lore is a publication of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana

FRIENDS OF THE LINCOLN COLLECTION

Accessing Lincoln Lore's Archive

Visit **www.FriendsoftheLincolnCollection.org/lore-archive**

Select Years of Publication or Lincoln Lore Issue Number

Click **"PDF"** next to the specific Lincoln Lore and read, download, save, and share the PDF.

Want to Search Lincoln Lore?
Type your keywords into the Google Custom Search on the Lore Archive page to find specific topics.

Allen County Public Library
Jessie Cortesi, Senior Lincoln Librarian
Chris Viel, Lincoln Lore Layout and Graphic Designer
Lincoln@acpl.info

Friends of the Lincoln Collection
Jonathan W. White, Editor
jonathan.white@cnu.edu
P.O. Box 11083
Fort Wayne, IN 46855

www.acpl.info
www.LincolnCollection.org
www.FriendsoftheLincolnCollection.org

Lincoln Lore®
ISSN 0162-8615
Unless otherwise indicated, all images are held by the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection (LFFC)

Member Discount

Members of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana receive a discount for books published by Southern Illinois University Press. To order, contact Chicago Distribution Center at:

1.800.621.2736 Phone
1.800.621.8476 Fax
Order online at www.SIUPress.com

Use promotional code FLC25 to receive a 25% discount on your order.

Table of Contents

The Belle of New Salem
Glenn W. LaFantasie .... page 3

Ann Rutledge's Resting Places
Jonathan W. White .... page 10

Ann and Abe Forgeries
Glenn W. LaFantasie .... page 12

Polly Rogers and Her Husband's Lawyer
Stacy Lynn .... page 16

Little Sister: Emilie Todd Helm and the Lincolns
Angela Esco Elder .... page 20

From the Collection: Women at the White House
Jessie Cortesi & Abbie Meek .... page 28

Abraham Lincoln and Woman Suffrage
Charles Benfanti and Eden McMillan .... page 30

Editor's Note

This issue of *Lincoln Lore* explores the stories of several of the women in Lincoln's life. Glenn W. LaFantasie presents Ann Rutledge as a person on her own terms; Stacy Lynn takes us into Lincoln's law office to see how he handled a contentious divorce case early in his legal career; and Angela Esco Elder examines Lincoln's tense relationship with a Confederate sister-in-law during the Civil War. In a Collections piece, Jessie Cortesi and Abbie Meek highlight some of the many women who visited Lincoln at the White House. And Christopher Newport University students Charles Benfanti and Eden McMillan describe how early-twentieth-century women pointed to Lincoln as a supporter of their right to vote.

In the Fall issue I included a drawing by James G. Randall of Lincoln scholar Wayne C. Temple. Shortly after sending the issue to the printer, I realized that I'd neglected to mention that "Doc" Temple was one of Randall's students at the University of Illinois in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Doc still resides in Springfield where he keeps up with the Lincoln field at the age of 100.

The Friends of the Lincoln Collection is sad to report the passing of Al Zacher in October at the age of 96. As noted in his profile in the Winter 2023 issue, Al was a steadfast supporter of the Lincoln Collection and the Rolland Center. He will be sorely missed.

– Jonathan W. White

On The Cover: ***In this early twentieth-century postcard, an unidentified woman stands in front of the Lincoln statue by Augustus Saint-Gaudens in Lincoln Park, Chicago. (ZPC-329)***

This early twentieth-century postcard depicts Lincoln as a store clerk talking with Ann Rutledge. (ZPC-180)

THE BELLE OF NEW SALEM

by Glenn W. LaFantasie

The story of a romance between Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, once believed to be only a legend but now more widely accepted as fact by historians, almost always focuses on Lincoln and his emotional attachment to the almost spectral young woman, whom he grew to love in New Salem, Illinois. It is as though we see her only through his eyes, which, in one sense, is unavoidable, because most of the evidence for their romance comes down to us in an oral tradition kept conscientiously by Lincoln's law partner William H. Herndon. The romance came to light when, in the wake of Lincoln's assassination, Herndon planned to write a biography of his famous partner and interviewed numerous people who had lived in New Salem, a small, prairie village on the Sangamon River, during the mid-1830s, when Lincoln wooed Miss Rutledge and may have asked for her hand in marriage. But who was this young woman? What can we glean about her from Herndon's informants? What do we know about her, other than her role as Lincoln's first love?

One thing we know is that she loved to sing. Ann (sometimes called Annie or Anna) Mayes Rutledge, the darling teenage daughter of James Rutledge, one of the founders of New Salem, sang in church (her father was also a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher) and in her family's primitive log cabin, which her father operated as a tavern. Given her pronounced piety, her favorite song was a rather gloomy hymn written in the eighteenth century by Joseph Hart, an English libertine who, after falling under the charismatic power of the famous evangelist George Whitefield, converted with all his might to Christianity. Ann's beloved hymn, simply titled No. 42, began with this stanza:

Vain Man, thy fond Pursuit's forbear.
Repent. Thy End is nigh.
Death at the farthest can't be far.
Oh! think before thou die.

The lyrics, which seem excessively morbid and melancholic, suited pious evangelical Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic whose most fervent desire was to perfect their own godliness on earth so that upon the great day of reckoning they would be welcomed into the gates of heaven. Like other hymns written in iambic tetrameter, the song has a steady cadence and a somber, but catchy, melody.

In the small, intimate space of the Rutledge tavern, Lincoln came to know Ann Rutledge and her entire family—her parents and eight siblings—when he boarded there after his return to New Salem from the Black Hawk War in 1832. The tavern, which also served as the Rutledges' residence, was a two-story, hewed log house with four rooms on each floor. Two chimneys rose on each side of the structure of the large fireplaces inside, but there were no stoves. A millwright by trade, James Rutledge—who founded the village and established the mill on the Sangamon River with his wife's nephew, John M. Cameron—was a religiously devout and educated man who, despite an impulsive streak in business matters, earned the respect of his fellow settlers for his "hospitable" and "generous" ways and for his loyalty to friends. "No breath of slander follows him," said Herndon, who knew Rutledge through his own cousin, Rowan. On occasion, Rutledge could be very quiet, almost brooding—an effect, perhaps, of his deep religious convictions and New Salem's dwindling prospects as an entrepôt, a trend that began almost from the very moment he and Cameron got the mill up and running.

In the early 1830s, he also expanded his residence into a tavern, where he boarded Lincoln and other single laborers who worked in the vicinity of New Salem. Despite an addition that Rutledge built to convert his domicile into an inn, the space inside the structure remained cramped and bathed in darkness. The interior was only roughly finished with whitewashed walls, wide plank floors, and plain furniture. At any given time, there might have been as many as fourteen people or more occupying the incommodious interior. With little ventilation in the log structure, except when weather allowed one or more of the four doors and windows to be kept open, the inn must have reeked, as Shakespeare would have put it, with an "odouriferous stench."

James Rutledge stood high in the community as a founder, businessman, and leader. Fascinated by young Lincoln's physical and intellectual agility, Rutledge welcomed Lincoln into his tavern as a boarder and became as enamored of him as his whole family did. It didn't hurt any that Rutledge and Lincoln politically were both supporters of Henry Clay, the prominent U.S. senator from Kentucky.

The Rutledges enjoyed Lincoln's humorous stories and his willingness to help out with various chores inside the tavern and out. Many decades later, Sarah ("Sally") Rutledge, the youngest child, remembered that Lincoln "was just like a member of the family." Boarders in those days, she explained, "took their place as additional members of the family rather than as paying guests." Sally often sat on Lincoln's lap in front of the tavern fireplace on cold winter evenings. "He was always kindly and gentle," she said, and he kept "everyone in an uproar with his funny tales."

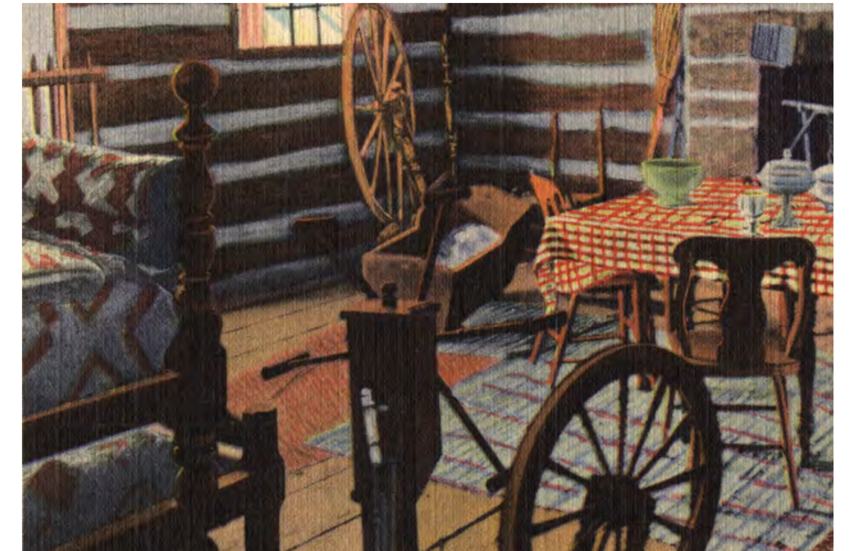
Ann Rutledge and Lincoln both studied grammar under the tutelage of Mentor Graham, often going through Samuel Kirkham's *Grammar* page by page. In time, Lincoln gave Ann his own copy of the textbook. The Rutledges heard him repeat passages of prose and lines of poetry around the tavern, either to entertain the family and other boarders or to carve the words indelibly into his memory. While he strolled the dirt streets of New Salem, reading to himself and kicking up dust as he walked, he once scooped up Robert Rutledge, Ann's younger brother, tucked him under his arm, and continued reading and walking with the youngster "yelling and kicking vigorously." Eventually Lincoln would conspicuously stop, pretending "that he had just discovered a boy under his arm," and walk off with him, still tucked in the crook of his arm.

This ca. 1920s postcard features the 1918 reconstruction of the Rutledge Tavern and the Lincoln Museum at the Old Salem State Park near Petersburg, Illinois. (71.2009.083.1611)

More than once, Lincoln's loose joviality led to pandemonium in the Rutledge household. On one occasion, his roughhousing with one of Ann's brothers resulted in the snapping of cords in a rope bed. To the Rutledges, Lincoln was a "tall, lank, ungainly figure" with "big ears and mouth, but when he talked one never thought of that. He was so good-natured and full of life that no one ever thought about his looks." Years later, Nancy Rutledge, one of Ann's sisters, could picture him perfectly, "sitting by the big fireplace, absorbed in a book or chatting merrily with Annie or one of my brothers." But the boarder was becoming more than an adopted member of the family. It was soon evident to some of the Rutledges—particularly youngest sister Sally, if not Ann herself—that Lincoln "cared especially for Ann" more than he cared for anyone else in the family.

To judge from those who remembered her, Ann Rutledge was the belle of New Salem. Nancy Rutledge described her as "small, with dark blue eyes, light brown hair, and a very fair complexion. Everyone said she was pretty." Sally Rutledge agreed. "Ann was light-complexioned, her hair auburn . . . [with] blue eyes and was slender and not very robust. All of our memories and traditions of her are of a sweet and beautiful character." Although Sally considered her less than robust, she recalled, nevertheless, that her older sister was "vivacious." Only one relevant source, a New Salem woman who claimed to know Ann well, asserted that Ann was "heavy set," but the woman, Parthena Nance Hill, the wife of the merchant Samuel Hill, cannot be completely trusted because she disliked Ann for her red hair and refused to accept that she was beautiful.

Ann's family members are the best sources for getting to know her in our time. The Rutledges consistently remembered Ann's specific traits and attributes. They independently painted a vivid portrait of the same young woman. "She had light hair and blue eyes," wrote her brother, Robert, who was a very young boy at the time, but whose



Color drawing of the kitchen and dining area in the reconstructed Rutledge Tavern. (ZPC-176)

memory of her never faded. Ann's cousin, James McGrady Rutledge, declared that "she was a beautiful girl, and as bright as she was pretty." The very best overall picture of Ann, however, came from Mentor Graham, her schoolteacher: "She was about 20 ys—Eyes blue large, & Expressive—fair complexion—Sandy, or light auburn hair—dark flaxen hair—about 5-4 in—face rather round—outlines beautiful—nervous vital Element predominated—good teeth—Mouth well Made beautiful—medium Chin—weigh about 120-130—hearty & vigorous—Amiable—Kind. . . . She dressed plainly, but Exceedingly neat, was poor and Could not afford rich Clothing." Graham put a few more pounds on her than her relatives did, but in all other respects his description, for all its choppiness, fit Ann to a tee.

Born in Kentucky on January 7, 1813, Ann was regarded as the workhorse of the Rutledge family, often taking on the duties of housekeeper and helping in the tavern whenever necessary. She was a mother hen to the other children, or in the words of her sister, Nancy, "very housewifely and domestic." Her family fondly recalled Ann "washing in the old-fashioned way," probably with a washboard and wooden tub, and sweeping and baking. She was "a good cook and took pride in her housework." In her dotage, Sally Rutledge Saunders looked back in time and could plainly see "Sister Ann as she sat sewing from day to day, for she was the seamstress of the family." Ann taught Sally—and probably her other sisters as well—how to sew. "I remember her patience with me," said Sally, "as well as her industry and kindness."

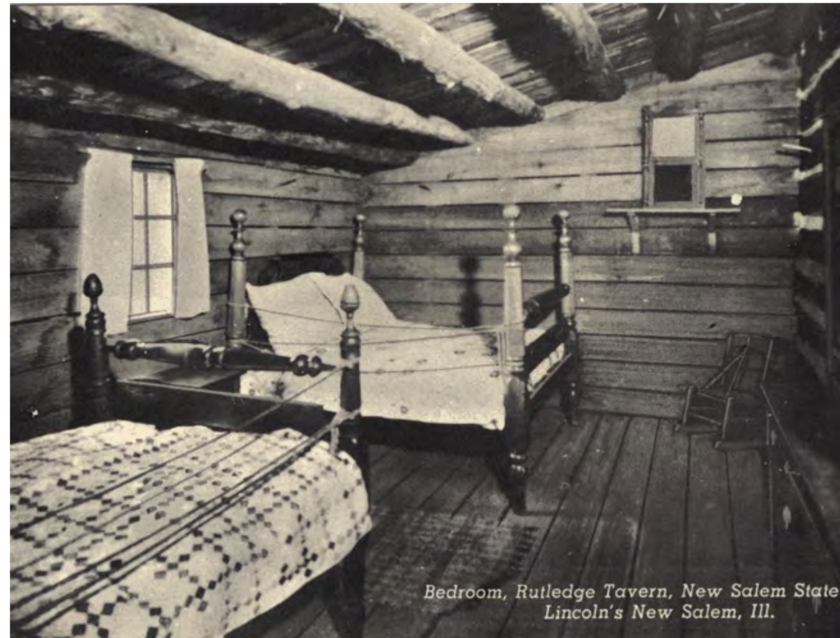
If Ann's workload appears heavy, especially when one considers that her sisters—who gazed into a distant, rosy past—never once mentioned their own chores around the house, it would be wrong to assume that Ann's burden was any heavier than what most prairie women (and, in fact, all American women of her time) confronted every day: hard work and more hard work. In nineteenth-century America, gender roles, while not strictly divided, tended to be defined as existing in separate spheres—in virtually every family, the husband concentrated on his work, which usually took him outside of the home, and the mother focused on domestic responsibilities, including housework, cooking, and the nurturing of children. As the moral

guardian of the household, it also fell to a mother to ensure that her children would be exposed to religious faith and principles and brought up with enough experience to undertake their prescribed roles as men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, once they became adults.

What came to be called the cult of domesticity shaped the daily activities of Ann and her siblings, customarily after they had passed from childhood into their teenage years. Women on the prairie had a particularly hard life, if only because conveniences made available to urban women in cities like Springfield and Chicago, where a new middle class was emerging in American life, could not be found on the frontier—thus, Ann Rutledge washed the family clothes in the old-fashioned way. She was, as her family and friends attested, extraordinarily good-natured and friendly. "She had a gentle & kind a heart as an ang[e]l," said William G. Greene, the storekeeper who had unsuccessfully sought her affections. Her neighbors marveled at her sterling qualities. She was "full of love—kindness—sympathy. She was beloved by evry body and evry body respected and lovd her—so sweet & angelic was she."

It could be said, with some degree of certainty, that her virtues became even more sparkling long after the fact because of her association with Lincoln, but nothing can detract from how well, generally speaking, she was remembered by her family and neighbors. Esther Summers Bale, the wife of the owner of a local carding mill, said what everybody else said about Ann: she was "slim—pretty—Kind—[a] tender good hearted woman . . . beloved by all who Knew her." Everyone in New Salem also agreed that Ann was intelligent (Greene, going overboard, called her positively "brilliant"). Sally Rutledge pronounced her sister "a student by nature" and "ambitious," by which she presumably meant that Ann sought as much knowledge as she could get. Her brother Robert affirmed that "my sister was esteemed the brightest mind in the family" and "studious." Remarked a cousin, "She was well educated for that early day, a good conversationalist, and always gentle and cheerful, a girl whose company people liked."

In Mentor Graham's estimation, Ann was a "tolerably good Schollar in all the Common branchs including grammar &c." Sometimes she stayed with Graham and his wife Nancy while pursuing her studies; in fact, her overnight visits occurred



Bedroom in the reconstructed Rutledge Tavern. (ZPC-178)

when Lincoln was residing and studying at the Graham house, which was located at the foot of the steep bluff on the banks of the Sangamon River. The young woman also acquired instruction from Arminda Rogers, a good friend about ten years Ann's senior who had taught school for several terms and lived four miles east of New Salem. Miss Rogers, according to her son Henry B. Rankin, tutored Ann "in Blair's *Rhetoric*, Kirkham's *Grammar* and the elementary studies she was reviewing, preparatory to entering an academy for young ladies that had been opened in Jacksonville, Illinois." Later, in a postscript to a letter addressed to his father, Ann's young brother David encouraged her to further her studies in Jacksonville, where he attended Illinois College: "Valued Sister. So far as I can understand Miss Graves will teach another school in the Diamond Grove. I am glad to hear that you have a notion of comeing to school, and I earnestly recommend to you that you would spare no time from improving your education and mind. Remember that Time is worth more than all Gold[;] therefore throw away none of your golden moments."

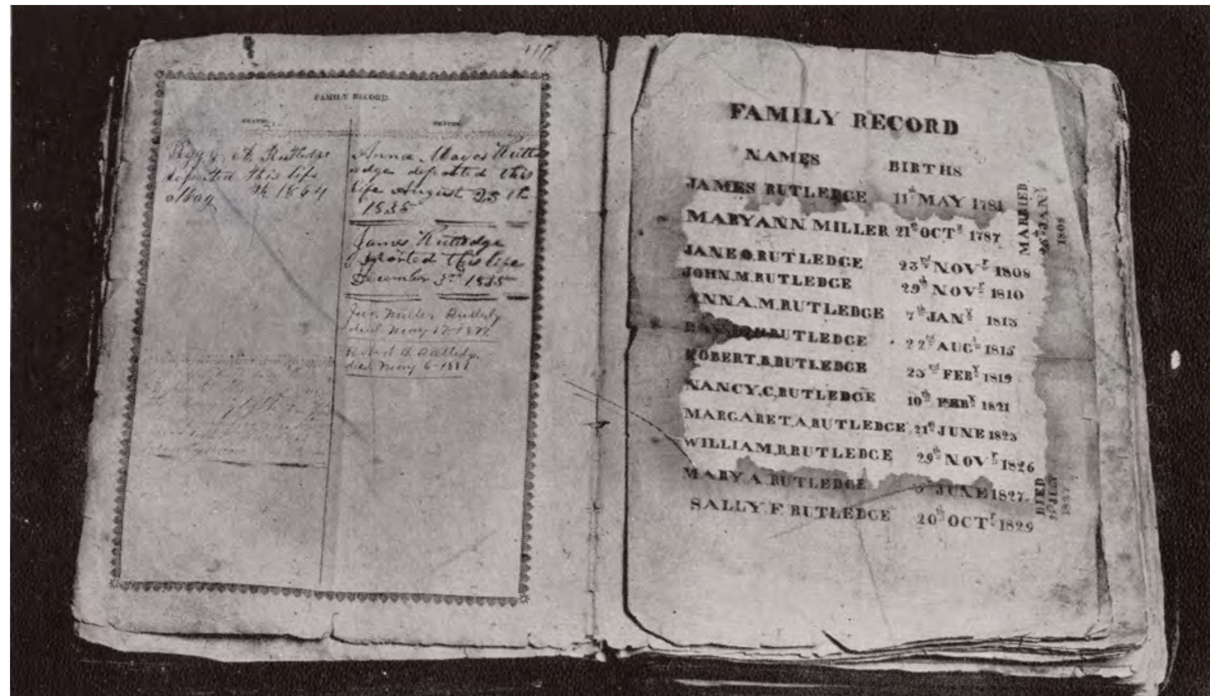
Only her devotion to God rivaled her craving for knowledge. Like so many other Americans of the time, Ann and her family fell under the spell of the evangelical enthusiasm that swept through the country in a series of revivals that came to be called the Second Great Awakening. These revivals, which upended established churches and remade American Protestantism over the course of several decades during the first half of the nineteenth century, emphasized the individual's personal relationship with God and heightened expectations of Christ's Second Coming. Evangelicals hoped to perfect themselves by casting sin out of their lives; by that means, they also hoped to perfect society and usher in the golden millennium, a thousand years of piety and peace, that would accelerate Christ's return. The success of evangelical revivalism depended on the conversion of all souls to a life without sin. Such a conversion could be achieved by perfecting one's personal union with God, but it could also come about by means of mass conversions at rural camp meetings, where charismatic preachers delivered sermons of fire and brimstone to large audiences gathered together for days and days of religious instruction and haranguing. People of all kinds, white and Black, traveled great distances to find God's immanence in themselves and among their fellow worshipers, seeking an answer to the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). In 1827, Timothy Flint reported that in the West "preaching is of a highly popular cast, and its first aim is to excite the feelings." Throughout the region, he wrote, "excitements" or "religious awakenings" were common. He described the enormous effect of these awakenings, which occurred "for the most part under the ministry of the Cumberland presbyterians," on communities throughout the West.

With its own deep Kentucky roots, the Rutledge family belonged to the Cumberland Presbyterians and attended regular meetings in New Salem led by John M. Cameron, who became a licentiate of the church in 1827. Cameron, who founded New Salem with James Rutledge in 1829, preached to small gatherings in the village, perhaps in Mentor Graham's schoolhouse or in Rutledge's tavern. As was the custom among the licentiates of the church, Cameron's preaching consisted of carefully written, structured sermons based on scriptural texts. Unfortunately none of Cameron's sermons survive. Around the time he resided in New Salem, Cameron became a candidate for the ministry, which meant that he could participate in camp meetings by exhorting extemporaneously and inspiring his audience with charisma and alluring entreaties, not necessarily based on any chapter and verse from scripture, but drawn entirely from his own experiential grasp of how sin might be cast out and light let into the soul. An admirer remarked in the late 1870s that Cameron's life had been spent "upon the frontier; and his occupation practically was to clear the way for those who would follow. . . . He died as he had lived, faithful to every obligation."

In late summers, the Rutledges regularly attended camp meetings at Concord (in close proximity to the Rutledge farm at Sand Ridge, about seven miles north of New Salem), or at Rock Creek, also close by. At these meetings, the Rutledge clan camped together, clustering family members into a kinship settlement of sorts, which enabled each member to share the same spiritual experiences of light and love and to feel the unity that these camp gatherings fostered among the faithful. The Rutledges—along with the Berry, Cameron, and Pantier families—outnumbered the other area families at these meetings. Usually families began to arrive on a Thursday; by Sunday, in the words of T. G. Onstot, who attended camp meetings in Sangamon County as a child, "the grounds would present the appearance of a small village." "There was good singing," Onstot remembered. "The preacher would read the hymn in a loud voice and then would 'line' it and everybody would sing." (In line singing, the preacher would chant the first line of a hymn and the congregation would then sing it, usually in harmony.) Several different ordained ministers and licentiates, including the Rev. John M. Berry and John Cameron, would exhort God's clear word through the filter of Cumberland Presbyterian doctrine, which, more than anything else, emphasized as canon the "experimental" (or experiential) nature of Christianity.

Presumably Ann Rutledge felt her faith as intensely as other Cumberland Presbyterians did at camp meetings, perhaps even by uncontrollably falling unconscious to the ground, getting the jerks, shouting, singing, or spinning round and round. "There was sound preaching in those days," observed Onstot. "The preachers preached hell and damnation. . . . They could hold a sinner over the pit of fire and brimstone till he could see himself hanging by a slender thread, and he would surrender and accept the gospel that was offered to him." While visiting the West in the late 1820s, Simon Ansley Ferrall, a Dubliner who later became a noteworthy barrister in London, described a typical evening camp meeting and, in particular, the role played by the assembled women: "A chosen leader commenced to harangue—he bellowed—he roared—he whined—he shouted until he became actually hoarse, and the perspiration rolled down his face." Then the faithful caught the emotion and would fling themselves onto the straw in "the penitents' pen—the old dames leading the way." In due course, about twenty women, young and old, "were lying in every direction and position, and profaning the name of Jesus." The preachers, who fell on their knees among them, exhorted the women "to call louder and louder on the Lord, until he came upon them." In the

Methodist camp meeting, c. 1819
(Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)



This ca. 1920s postcard of the Rutledge family Bible on display at New Salem State Park shows the Bible open to the "Family Record" page. Ann's death is recorded at the top right of the lefthand page. (71.2009.083.1536)

flickering illumination of torches and candles, Ferrall left the meeting at two o'clock in the morning while the worshipers, unaffected by fatigue, continued their frantic jerking, canting, and bold acclamations of God, Jesus, and glory.

By all accounts, Ann Rutledge was a true believer. According to her sister Sally, she was "sincerely religious." There was a hint, too, that she often did good works as an expression of her faith, but relatives and friends made plain that her gentleness and kindness were genuine traits of her character and not simply outward manifestations of her Christian piety. She was a committed Cumberland Presbyterian, and she was also a good person. Her brother Robert echoed the sentiments of nearly every New Salemite when he said that she "possessed a remarkably amiable and loveable disposition." When the Rutledge family attended church meetings or pitched their tents at the annual camp gatherings, their boarder Lincoln, in all likelihood, stayed home, went to work, or took a stroll down to the river or into the woods with a book in hand. There are no reports that Lincoln ever participated in a camp meeting, although his parents—hard-shelled Primitive Baptists—probably did in Kentucky and Indiana. When he knew Ann, he was a vociferous skeptic about Christianity, which leaves us wondering how Ann reconciled his unbelief with her own piety. It's a mystery about the couple that will never be solved.

Before any hint of a romance between Ann and Lincoln revealed itself, she was wooed by several men in New Salem, all of whom pursued her as a potential wife. One of them gained the most success—John McNeil, an ambitious merchant who always kept his eye on the main chance. Sometime in 1832, probably during the summer, McNeil set his sights on courting Ann Rutledge. Ann appeared to be in love with her new swain, whom family members regarded as "an excellent young man," except for her father who had little use for him. The size of McNeil's personal savings—estimated by neighbors at $10,000 or more, but probably considerably less than that—may have made him look like a very good match for any of the young women in Sangamon County. Certainly Ann Rutledge did not fall in love with him for his looks. Herndon described McNeil as "a spare tall bony man, somewhat angular . . . a plucky—brave—businessman." A brief courtship led to their formal engagement. If nothing else, McNeil, in Herndon's opinion, was "honest—fair and manly in all his dealings." That honesty prompted him to tell his fiancée in confidence that McNeil was not his real name.

Ann must have been thunderstruck by this news, although it had already begun to leak out in some circles, and she hoped that her betrothed had a good explanation. What he told her, in all its details, cannot be known, but variations of his story were passed on to Herndon and others. His name, he said, was actually John McNamar. He came to Illinois from upstate New York, where his father and family had suffered financial ruin and loss of status. Determined to be the sole agent by which he would remedy his family's financial losses, he left New York, spent some time in St. Louis, and eventually found his way to Illinois, settling in New Salem, where he smelled the sweet aroma of business opportunity. He changed his name, he said, because he did not want his family to find him, which seems odd and suspicious. More likely, he was trying to hide from creditors back East rather than his family. At first, Ann accepted McNamar's explanation of his circumstances and the reasons behind his alias. He soon learned, however, that his father and other family members in New York were seriously ill and required his assistance (how his family knew where to find him is a mystery). He informed Ann of his intentions to leave New Salem, take care of his family in New York, and eventually return with them, at which time he would marry her. How she took this news is not known. Presumably she did the only thing she could—persevere until McNamar came back to New Salem.

McNamar departed from Illinois in October 1832, and the year drifted slowly to an end. Alone with her thoughts, Ann waited and waited. She began to show signs of strain. McNamar's deceit "opened Ann[']s Eyes," said Jasper Rutledge, one of her first cousins. She grew more suspicious as to why he thought it necessary to hide who he really was. During the extent of his absence, she received "at least one letter" from him. He told her of his father's death and how he had been detained settling the estate and taking care of his ill family. But she heard no more from him after that. Two years had passed since McNamar's departure. From all reports, Ann seems to have given up hope of ever seeing him again. She and Lincoln began a relationship that involved more than friendship. Rumors spread in the village that the two had become engaged. Neighbors reported, however, that Ann became burdened with a sense of guilt and feelings of anxiety, for her betrothal to McNamar had not been dissolved. Eventually, Ann overcame her distress and validated the rumors, confessing to family and friends that she and Lincoln were indeed engaged to be married as soon as she could attend and graduate from the Female Academy in Jacksonville and he could establish a law practice. Then in the summer of 1835, a season of illness and death in the Sangamon Valley, Ann fell seriously ill.

At age twenty-two, Ann probably contracted typhoid, a deadly illness for which there was no known cure. Word was sent to Lincoln, who was away from the village at the time, that she wanted desperately to see him. He was found, and he returned to New Salem in time to have a last conversation with his beloved. No one knows what they privately said to each other. Soon after their final meeting, Ann succumbed to her disease and died on August 25, 1835. She was buried near the Rutledge farm at the Old Concord Burial Ground, close to where she and her family had attended camp meetings. In his grief, Lincoln fell into a deep depression—so deep, in fact, that his neighbors worried about his state of mind. He recovered after a few weeks, but there's a bit of evidence, offered by Isaac Cogdal to Herndon in 1865 or 1866, that suggests Lincoln remembered her fondly for the rest of his life. It was only after her death that McNamar returned to New Salem and learned that his fiancée was no more.

This ca. 1920s postcard features the 1918 reconstruction of the Rutledge Tavern and the Lincoln Museum at the Old Salem State Park near Petersburg, Illinois. (71.2009.083.1611)

The Rutledge family and their New Salem friends turned Ann Rutledge into a saint of sorts, which she was not. All the praise for her exquisite beauty and her angelic demeanor suggests that her beatification actually took place after her early death and, perhaps, because of it. While history has left more of her behind than anyone might reasonably expect, she still remains something of a shadow thrown across the landscape of Sangamon County. No letters or diaries written by her survive, if any ever existed at all, so there is nothing to reveal who she may have been privately, down where her secret self lived, except that we know she held dear her faith in God and that Abraham Lincoln loved her. Did she love Lincoln? There is surprisingly no direct evidence that she did, other than her willingness to become his fiancée. Nevertheless, her youngest sister, Sarah Rutledge Saunders, said this to William Barton, a Lincoln biographer: "Lincoln loved her sincerely, and she gave to him undivided affection."

Yet while all the enduring evidence comes from family and neighbors who tried to recall her very best qualities long after her fairly brief residence in New Salem, a glimpse of Ann Rutledge—something more than a wispy shadow—can be seen in the words people used to describe her and in the accounts they left of her romantic encounters during her late teens and early twenties. A full illumination of the young woman shines through in these reminiscences, despite the best attempts of nearly everyone to keep the memory of Ann one-dimensional. The often-piecemeal accounts of her response to forces outside her control were things she would have understood as God's will.

Glenn W. LaFantasie is the Richard Frockt Family Professor of Civil War History Emeritus at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green. He is the author of several books about Gettysburg and is presently writing a book about Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. He is also editor of the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association.*

ANN RUTLEDGE'S RESTING PLACES

by Jonathan W. White

When she died in 1835, Ann Rutledge was buried in New Concord, Illinois, about six miles north of New Salem. In 1890, one newspaper reported that the "remains of the emancipator's first love had lain neglected" for nearly fifty-five years until they were "discovered only after much difficulty having been beaten down and overgrown by the storm and decay of time." According to another report, "There was nothing to mark the grave except the fact that a brother who died in 1843, was buried beside her. From this scant source of information and from tradition, the grave in the Concord cemetery was found."

In 1890, Ann's remains were moved to Oakland Cemetery near Petersburg, where she finally received a headstone. About that time, a Chicago newspaper reported, "No other grave is near it." Today, visitors can easily locate several of Lincoln's New Salem friends and neighbors nearby, including Bowling Green and Hannah Armstrong. (71.2009.083.1598)

In 1921, Ann received a large new headstone, which featured a poem by Edgar Lee Masters, who is buried a short walk away in Oakland Cemetery. Taken from **The Spoon River Anthology*****, the poem concludes, "Bloom forever, O Republic, / From the dust of my bosom!" (71.2009.083.1610)***

In 1995, descendants of one of Ann's cousins worked with the Menard County Historical Society to install a cenotaph for Ann next to her brother's headstone in the Old Concord Cemetery. Also buried in the cemetery are Jack Armstrong (of the famous wrestling match) and other New Salem acquaintances of Lincoln's. (Photographs by David B. Wiegers)

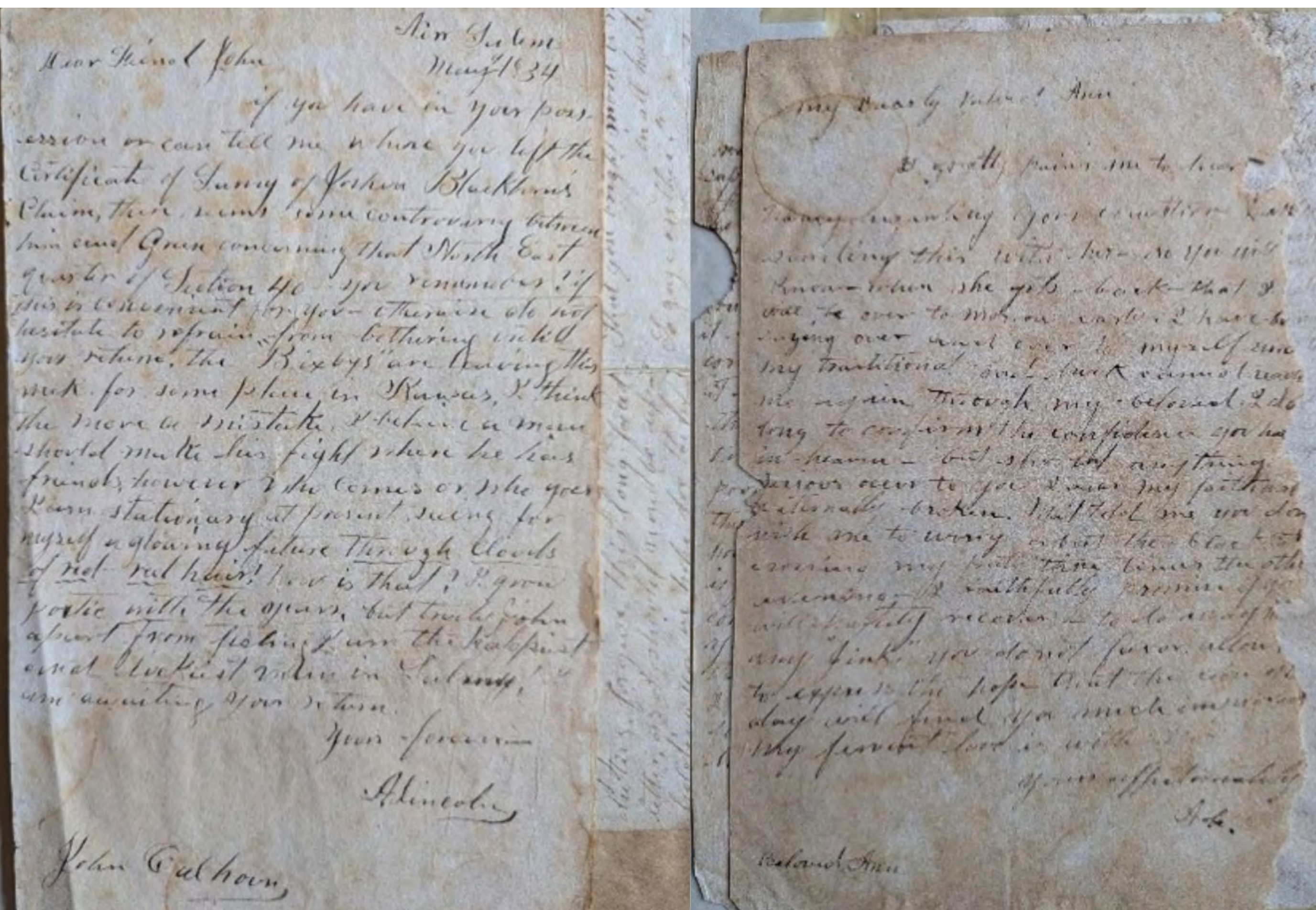
ANN & ABE FORGERIES

by Glenn W. LaFantasie

By the early twentieth century, the story of the romance between Ann and Abe rose in popularity. Newspapers published countless articles, fact and fiction, about the tragic story of young love, which served the swelling tide of public demand for details about Lincoln's life and times. In the mid-1920s, Carl Sandburg published the first two volumes of his epic Lincoln biography, *The Prairie Years*, which relied on florid prose and unauthenticated anecdotes about the rail-splitter's years in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois to a gullible readership. His focus on Lincoln as a westerner led Americans to concentrate more fully on how the young man grew into maturity, pulling himself up by the bootstraps. It is not surprising that hucksters hoped to profit from sparsely documented episodes like the mystique of Lincoln's first love.

The Lost Love Letters

In late June or early July 1928, a California woman, Wilma Frances Minor, approached *The Atlantic Monthly* claiming to have letters between Lincoln and Ann Rutledge that proved conclusively that the romance had taken place. Ellery Sedgwick, the magazine's owner and editor, despite some initial skepticism, pounced on this fortuitous development and sought to publish the letters in full. Eventually, Minor showed fourteen letters to Sedgwick, three from Abe to Ann, four to the county surveyor, and four from Ann Rutledge, two of which were addressed to Lincoln. There were also other historical documents relating to New Salem. Sedgwick sent these documents to Lincoln experts, including Sandburg and another Lincoln biographer, Ida Tarbell, who confirmed the authenticity of the documents, although William E. Barton kept wavering in his opinion. Nevertheless, Sedgwick paid Minor the considerable sum of $6,000 (about $110,000 in today's money) and divided her Lincoln material into three parts, which he published in *The Atlantic* between December 1928 and February 1929 under the title, "Lincoln the Lover." After a bevy of Lincoln experts, including Paul M. Angle and Oliver R. Barrett, an eminent Lincoln collector, denounced the Minor documents as forgeries (joined by Sandburg, who recanted his earlier authentication), Minor confessed that the letters were indeed forgeries written by her mother, a psychic, who had relied on "automatic writing" (also called psychography) to put down on paper what the spirits, including those of Abe and Ann, told her to write. In the end, Wilma Minor slipped into oblivion and Elliott Sedgwick, with egg on his face, refused to publish anything more about the nefarious incident.



New Salem
May 1834

Dear Friend John

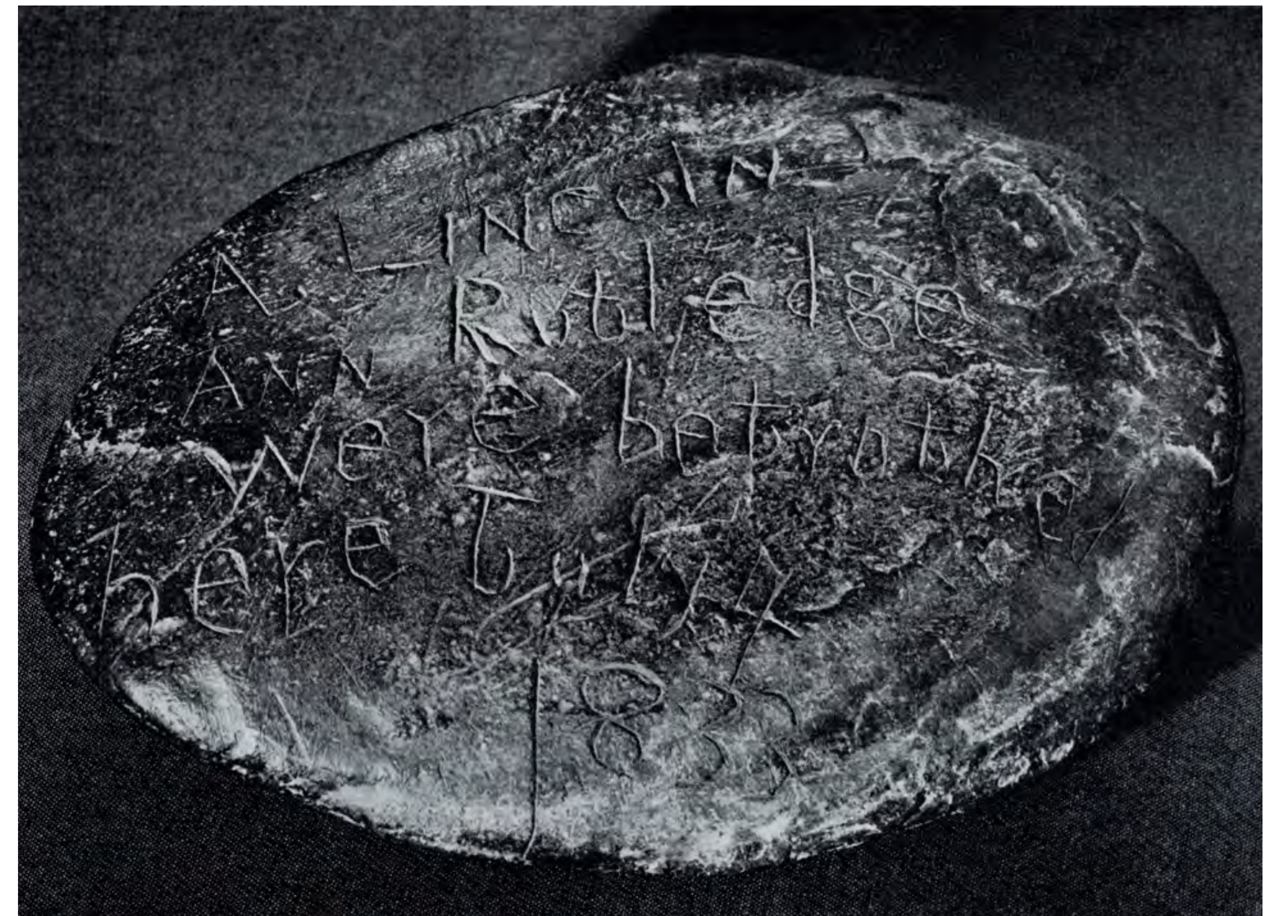
If you have in your possession or can tell me where you left the Certificate of Survey of Joshua Blackburns Claim, there seems some controversy between him and Green concerning that North East quarter of Section 40 you remember! if this is convenient for you — otherwise do not hesitate to refrain from bothering until your return. The "Bixbys" are leaving this week for some place in Kansas, I think the move a mistake. I believe a man should make his fight where he has friends, however the comes or the goes. I am stationary at present seeing for myself a glowing future through clouds of red red hair! How is that? I grow poetic with the years, but truly John apart from fishing I am the happiest and luckiest man in Salem, I am awaiting your return.

Yours forever —

A. Lincoln

John Calhoun

Ellery Sedgwick Papers, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.



The Oliver R. Barrett Lincoln Collection: Public Auction Sale *(New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1952).*

The Engagement Stone

At the same time, in the opportune year of 1928, another forgery surfaced about the New Salem romance. Angle, the executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Centennial Association, made public a forgery that reposed in the Lincoln collection of Oliver R. Barrett, an Illinois attorney. The item, a carved stone, had been inscribed "A. Lincoln / Ann Rutledge / were betrothed here / July 4, 1833." It had been found in July 1900 by William L. Greene, the grandson of Bowling Green, the village's justice of the peace. The discoverer said it had been found near the site of the Lincoln-Berry Store in New Salem. The rock, however, received very little public fanfare in the press. Brief news stories about the elliptical-shaped rock, measuring approximately twelve inches long and seven inches in diameter, were used as filler by several newspapers beginning in December 1900 and running into February 1901. Then the story vanished for a time, but Lincoln biographers, including Sandburg, Tarbell, and Lloyd Lewis, revived it in their publications, even though Angle had revealed it as a fake. Among the things wrong on the rock, the chiseler had reversed the letter *J*, trying to make it look crudely wrought, and had put the engagement date in 1833, a

time that was, by most accounts, too early by a year or more. In the late 1920s, though, the carved "betrothal stone," as it came to be known, was acquired by a well-known collector, Charles F. Gunther, who sold it to Oliver R. Barrett. After Barrett's death in 1950, the stone was sold two years later in an estate sale conducted by Parke-Bernet. A penciled note on the auction catalog in the collections of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign indicates that the rock sold for $75. Who purchased it, however, is not known. In 1990, historian John Y. Simon remarked that the rock "tricked nobody except the Lincoln collector who bought it." One imagines that the present owner of the stone is too embarrassed to admit it.

The Photograph

In early 1924, newspapers around the country published a photograph purported to be of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge that had recently been "discovered" in Bloomington, Illinois. Unfortunately for the perpetrators, daguerreotype photography would not be invented until 1839, four years after Ann's death. The woman in the photograph wears a distinctive 1920s hair style of ringlets and curls. The rather burly man sitting beside her does not look like Lincoln.

The Gift

Lincoln scholars have also expressed doubt about another possible forgery, the inscriptions found on the flyleaf and title page of an 1828 sixth edition of Samuel Kirkham's *English Grammar*. On the title page, Lincoln wrote: "Ann M. Rutledge is now learning her Grammar." While experts have quibbled about the note's chirography, most historians believe it to be genuine.

In 1829, the book was owned by Miller Arrowsmith, whose handwriting on a flap beneath the flyleaf looks childish. Several years later it was owned by John C. Vance, who, said Carl Sandburg, lived six miles from New Salem. Lincoln visited Vance, who either sold or gave him the book, and Lincoln used it for his lessons with Mentor Graham, New Salem's schoolmaster. One place he may have also scrutinized it was while working as a clerk in Denton Offut's store beside William G. Greene, who later claimed to have helped Lincoln learn

Purported Picture of Abe Lincoln With First Love Comes to Light

Picture found in Bloomington, Ill., believed to be one of Abraham Lincoln and his first love, Ann Rutledge.

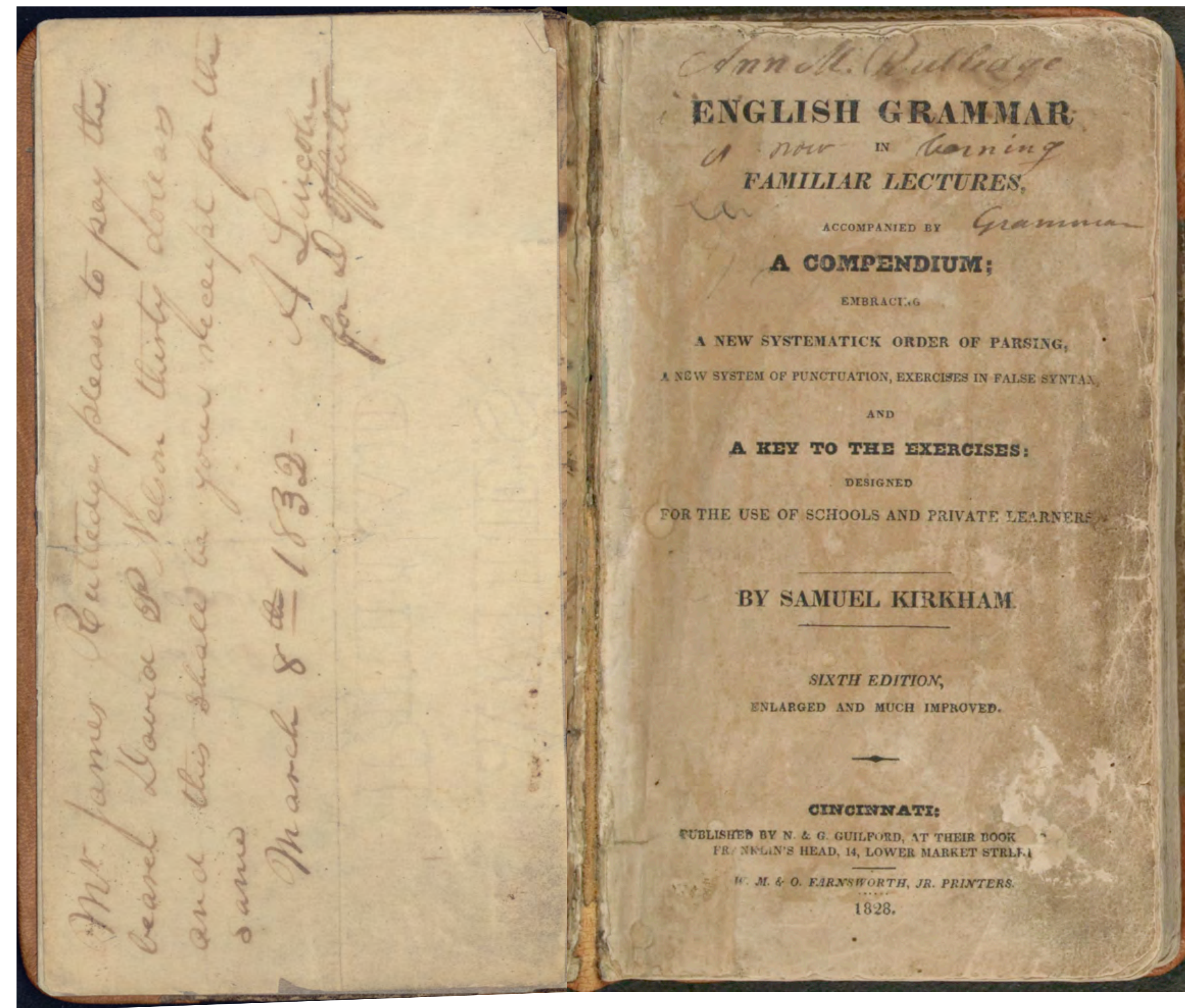
Eau Claire *(Wisconsin)* Leader, *February 13, 1924.*

grammar. By 1835, Lincoln shared the book with Ann Rutledge, who also attended Graham's school. Ann's sister Nancy remembered: "She was ambitious to learn and was often studying. She and Abe had a grammar in partnership. He kept it part of the time and she part of the time. I've often seen him walking on the streets of New Salem with that grammar open in his hand. After she died he gave it back to our folks and it's in existence yet." Next to use the book was Ann's brother Robert Brannon Rutledge and her younger sister Sarah (Sally), who inscribed her name on the flyleaf.

A connection between Lincoln and Kirkham's book was first made by William Dean Howells, who later became the dean of American letters, in a campaign biography published in 1860. Howells described how Lincoln obtained a copy of the book by walking the six miles to Vance's farm outside of New Salem. Public attention was again drawn to the book in early May 1865, when Captain Robert Brannon Rutledge, Ann's younger brother, showed it to the editors of the *Illinois State Journal* in Springfield, where he was attending Lincoln's burial. Rutledge said the flyleaf once contained Lincoln's autograph, but the vicissitudes of time had torn it away.

In January 1896, Ida M. Tarbell, in an article on Lincoln's early life published in *McClure's Magazine*, gave the public a look at the title page of the book in a photograph her research assistant had obtained from the Rutledge family. When Captain Rutledge died in 1881, he left the book to his widow, Samantha Jenkins Rutledge. By 1936, the Library of Congress owned the book, where it remains. It is now part of the Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana.

One doubter, however, does not believe that the inscription to Ann Rutledge was rendered by Lincoln. John Evangelist Walsh, the author of a book on the Lincoln-Rutledge romance, hypothesizes that Ann may have written the words on the title page. He also believes there is confusion among historians over two different copies of Kirkham's *English Grammar* that passed through Lincoln's hands in New Salem. As I see it, the words written on the title page look like Lincoln's longhand, although executed more formally—indeed, more carefully—than his usual style. In this, he was probably trying to impress young Ann. As for Walsh's other assertion, the likelihood of *two copies* of Kirkham's book existing in remote New Salem is too difficult to accept.


ENGLISH GRAMMAR
IN
FAMILIAR LECTURES,
ACCOMPANIED BY
A COMPENDIUM;
EMBRACING
A NEW SYSTEMATICK ORDER OF PARSING,
A NEW SYSTEM OF PUNCTUATION, EXERCISES IN FALSE SYNTAX,
AND
A KEY TO THE EXERCISES:
DESIGNED
FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE LEARNERS.
BY SAMUEL KIRKHAM.
SIXTH EDITION,
ENLARGED AND MUCH IMPROVED.
CINCINNATI:
PUBLISHED BY N. & G. GUILFORD, AT THEIR BOOK
FRANKLIN'S HEAD, 14, LOWER MARKET STREET.
W. M. & O. FARNSWORTH, JR. PRINTERS.
1828.

Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana, Rare Book and Special Collections, Library of Congress.

This 1929 image by George E. Knapp features attorney Abraham Lincoln meeting with a client and her two children. (71.2009.081.1794)

POLLY ROGERS AND HER HUSBAND'S LAWYER

by Stacy Lynn

"The allegation of adultery against the said defendant was muted in the complainant's bill, for no other cause, than through tenderness to the said defendant's character."

—Abraham Lincoln, affidavit for his divorce-case client Samuel Rogers, October 20, 1838

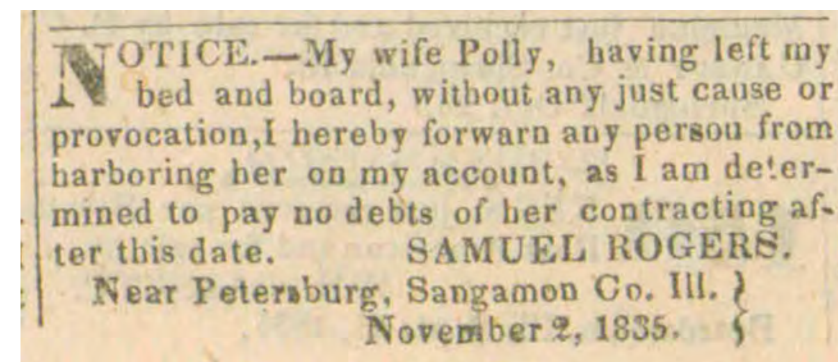
On October 4, 1835, in Sangamon County, Illinois, Polly Offill married Samuel Rogers, a Petersburg farmer. She left him a week later. She must have had her reasons, because separation and divorce from husbands was not an easy choice in antebellum America, even in Illinois where divorce law was progressive. While single women in America could own property and make contracts, married women's legal standing became one with their husbands. As well, women in antebellum America had limited economic opportunities outside the family home, and divorce often meant harsh religious and social stigma. Legal and economic context and nineteenth-century expectations for women's obedience to their husbands be damned, Polly walked away from her new husband. Her desertion was, regardless of the circumstances, a brave assertation of independence.

On November 7, 1835, Samuel Rogers published a public notice about his wife's desertion in the Springfield *Sangamo Journal.* The text, which was typical of such legal notices, revealed much about women's status in 1835: "My wife Polly, having left my bed and board, without any just cause or provocation, I hereby forewarn any person from harboring her on my account, as I am determined to pay no debts of her contracting after this date." In publishing the notice, Samuel Rogers was protecting himself from any debts his wife might incur in his name. For the next two years, the couple lived apart.

In the summer of 1838, Samuel Rogers walked into Abraham Lincoln's second-story law office on Hoffman's Row, across from the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield. He explained to Lincoln that his wife had run off with another man and that he wanted a divorce. Lincoln listened while Rogers shared all the details of his failed marriage, discussing his loneliness and her alleged adulterous relationship with a man named William Short. While Lincoln heard his client's tale of marital woe, he also envisioned the circumstances of the woman at the center of the tale. Even though she was not in the office telling her side of the story. Even as she might have been to blame for the breakup of the marriage. Even though Polly Rogers was not his client who would pay his fees.

"The First Law Office Rented in 1837 by Abraham Lincoln, President Elect, in Hoffman's Row, Third Division, Up-stairs, Springfield, Ill.," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, *December 22, 1860. (71200908409500)*

When Samuel Rogers finished explaining the details of his marriage to his lawyer, Lincoln explained that a divorce was possible on the grounds of his wife's desertion alone. Polly had been gone from his home for the two years Illinois law required for desertion as grounds for divorce. Lincoln urged his client to omit the adultery allegation. Lincoln would obtain the divorce so Samuel would be free to remarry, but there was no reason to drag his wife's reputation through public mud. Samuel Rogers trusted Lincoln's legal advice. Lincoln then drafted the one-page bill for divorce, which cited the grounds of desertion, and he filed the case in the Sangamon County Circuit Court.



NOTICE.—My wife Polly, having left my bed and board, without any just cause or provocation, I hereby forwarn any person from harboring her on my account, as I am determined to pay no debts of her contracting after this date. SAMUEL ROGERS.
Near Petersburg, Sangamon Co. Ill. }
November 2, 1835. }

Public notice published by Samuel Rogers in the Sangamo Journal *on November 7, 1835. (University of Illinois)*

Polly Rogers defaulted in the case. Like Samuel Rogers, she wanted the divorce, and she saw no need to fight it. On October 20, 1838, the court granted the divorce based on desertion and ordered Samuel Rogers to pay his wife $1,000 in alimony. The award was a dear sum in 1838, and Samuel Rogers was shocked and annoyed with his lawyer. Abraham Lincoln, with help from his experienced law partner John Stuart, asked the court for leave to amend the bill for divorce. To reduce the alimony, he needed to introduce the adultery charge. In the affidavit Lincoln wrote and signed for himself, he admitted to the court he knew about the adultery charge but counseled his client against citing it. In the affidavit he prepared for Samuel Rogers to sign, Lincoln admitted he had muted the charge of adultery out of concern for the reputation of Polly Rogers. For no other cause than tenderness, Lincoln had made a legal blunder. His extraordinary admission of that blunder is striking.

Abraham Lincoln wrote out this original bill for divorce on August 14, 1838, without mentioning any charge of adultery against Polly Rogers. (Herndon-Weik Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress). Special thanks to Michelle A. Krowl for providing scans of the images on pages 18–19.

With the adultery charge now in play, Polly Rogers hired an attorney, denied the accusation of adultery, and averred she left her husband to escape his abuse and adultery against her. The judge continued the case to the next court term. It was a he-said-she-said story, but two things were clear. First, the marriage was irreconcilable. Second, while Lincoln's advice to his client was a legal blunder, it is also a window into his character. It illustrates his concern for women, even a woman who was not his own client.

On March 15, 1839, a jury heard the *Rogers* case. Female litigants, particularly those in divorce actions, were at the mercy of all-male juries to hear and to judge the most intimate details of their lives. These male jurors had the power to determine alimony and to make decisions about child custody. Polly Rogers had no children to worry about losing, and there is no indication that she was in dire economic circumstances. The jury in her divorce case considered the evidence, which included a detailed accounting of Samuel Rogers's wealth and, typical of the era's trials, rendered a decision on the same

In this affidavit, written by Abraham Lincoln and signed by Samuel Rogers on October 20, 1839, Rogers stated that he only omitted the adultery charge in his original bill for divorce because of his lawyer's advice. (Herndon-Weik Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

In this October 20, 1839, affidavit, Lincoln admitted that he had advised his client not to include the adultery allegation in the original bill for divorce. (Herndon-Weik Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

day. The jury ruled that Polly Rogers had abandoned her husband but was innocent of adultery. The court ordered the marriage dissolution and Samuel Rogers to pay Polly Rogers an initial payment of $126 and subsequent $39 semi-annual payments—a much more manageable settlement for Lincoln's client. Polly Rogers would remarry or move away before Samuel Rogers would have to pay her anywhere near $1,000. Both parties were now free to remarry, which Samuel Rogers did just three months later. The jury had muted the charge of adultery to spare Polly Rogers the stigma, but it had lowered the alimony because of it.

Polly Rogers was one of 220 women who were litigants in divorce cases in Sangamon County from 1837 to 1860, during Lincoln's law career. While many lawyers of his era eschewed divorce cases, Lincoln handled 147 divorces during his twenty-five-year legal career. He was the attorney of record in 40 percent of all the divorce cases appearing on the docket in his home county. More than half of the divorce litigants Lincoln represented were women. The *Rogers* case was typical of divorce cases of the era, involving the most common ground of desertion. However, the rehearing on alimony and Lincoln's bad lawyer-good human mistake makes a messy, remarkable story out of a simple, good one.

The rest of Polly Rogers' extraordinary story is lost to history, but one of the momentous events of her life tied her to Abraham Lincoln. I often wonder about the women who knew the lawyer Lincoln in quiet county seats in antebellum Illinois and what they thought about his rise to the presidency. I would have been telling all my friends and anyone who would listen: "Lincoln was my lawyer," or "He was my rotten ex-husband's divorce lawyer," or "I knew him before he was famous." Polly Rogers might have told her daughters, who told their daughters, who told their daughters, and the story is still alive in family memories somewhere out there in the world today. I hope so.

As for Abraham Lincoln, the *Rogers* case was instructive. Like any good novice learning on the job, Lincoln learned from his mistakes and moved on from them. The *Rogers* case was one of the first divorce cases he handled, acquainting him not only with the Illinois divorce statute but making clear to him that the law could be a dangerous place for women. Lincoln would never repeat the blunder that jeopardized the legal outcome for his client Samuel Rogers, but I suspect, in his heart, he was not sorry he had first proceeded in tender consideration for his client's wife.

Stacy Lynn edited the papers of Abraham Lincoln for twenty years and is currently associate editor of the Jane Addams Papers. She is the author or editor of five books, including* Mary Lincoln: Southern Girl, Northern Woman. *This article is excerpted from her forthcoming book,* Loving Lincoln: A Personal History of the Women Who Shaped Lincoln's Life and Legacy. *Printed with permission.

Copyright © 2025 by the Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University.

"Emilie Todd—when she visited her sister Mary Todd Lincoln in Springfield."
(Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House and the University of Kentucky Special Collections)

LITTLE SISTER

Emilie Todd Helm and the Lincolns

by Angela Esco Elder

She expected to hear "Fee, fi, fo, fum!" He was tall, a stranger, walking in her home, shaking hands with adults in the wide hall. As her eyes tracked his every move, ten-year-old Emilie (sometimes spelled "Emily") Todd became convinced he was the hungry giant of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. "I shrank closer to my mother and tried to hide behind her voluminous skirts," Emilie later explained, but he found her. Abraham Lincoln, the newly elected congressman from the Prairie State, lifted her from her hiding place and exclaimed with a smile, "So this is little sister." After his death, Emilie reflected, "I was always after that called by him 'little sister.'"

The Civil War shattered many American families, but for the Todds and Lincolns, it was particularly ruinous. Of the fourteen Todd children, six sided with the Union, eight with the Confederacy. The war killed two of Emilie's brothers, then her husband. Lincoln lost his son Willie in 1862, then his own life three years later. These two families were not alone in their grief—the war claimed an estimated 750,000 souls—nor unique in the way it haunted them. But looking at Emilie's life as a Confederate wife and widow sheds new light on the Lincolns' familial ties. The shared grief of a divided family reminds us not just of the pain war brought into households, but also that the home stretched across political lines. Yet for all the grief, it is also perhaps comforting to know that some familial love survived political division in a war so sad, so bloody, and so devastating. As messy as love within extended families often is, it nevertheless endured such traumas. Tracing the life of "little sister" through childhood, marriage, and widowhood reveals a familial relationship at its highs and its lows. The kinship of Emilie, Mary, and "Brother Lincoln," as complicated as it became, reminds us that the bonds of family, even when stretched from White House to Confederate battlefield, were not easily severed.

This story begins in the 1830s, in a grand brick house in Lexington, Kentucky. More hive than home, this was a place buzzing with Todd children, from toddlers to teens. On November 11, 1836, the birth of Emilie brought the number of children living within the Todd household to nine. She was an exceptionally beautiful child. "I think you were too young to remember it," one family friend began, recalling the time when Emilie was kidnapped by a childless couple. The event "turned the City of Lexington upside down" as the minutes ticked by "with untold agony." Emilie would be discovered hours later, safely in the childless couple's home. "The man and his wife were considered good people," Emilie was told, "but your uncommon beauty overcame his sense of right." As Emilie grew, she became more beautiful. But in a tornado of Todd siblings, that wasn't enough; Emilie also developed a sharp wit. The Todds, as children and adults, were renowned and notorious, for better or worse. As Abraham Lincoln would chuckle one day in the future, "the child has a tongue like the rest of the Todds."

Just before Emilie's seventh birthday, her older sister married Abraham Lincoln. Mary, who once described herself as a "ruddy pine knot," may not have been as beautiful as Emilie, but neither was her betrothed. Abraham's face and frame were the subject of constant comment; even Emilie's sister Frances called him "the plainest man" in Springfield, Illinois. Mary and Abraham had met at the home of her eldest sister Elizabeth, and after a tumultuous two-year courtship, said their vows in Elizabeth's parlor. The cake turned out poorly, and the rain fell heavily, but on November 4, 1842, Abraham slipped onto Mary's finger a ring engraved with the words "Love is Eternal." Together, they immersed themselves in Abraham's political career.

Benjamin Hardin Helm in uniform.
(Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House and the University of Kentucky Special Collections)

Over the following decade, Emilie too would blossom into adulthood and, like her sister Mary, marry. Her selection would be a West Point graduate and rising Kentucky lawyer-politician, Benjamin Hardin Helm. He was from a wealthy and well-connected family, he was handsome, and he was in love with nineteen-year-old Emilie, a woman "absolutely essential to my very being." A friend, when hearing about the upcoming wedding ceremony, hoped Emilie "may possess a disposition as genial and pleasant as his [Helm's] own." This friend also compared marriage to losing one's freedom and running "his neck into a noose." Luckily for Emilie, Helm would not agree with the sentiment. After their wedding on March 26, 1856, Helm would write, "what a wonderful change we undergo in this world." Together, they made a home in Kentucky. Like Mary, Emilie then spent her days devoted to motherhood, housekeeping, and her husband's career.

As the nation fell apart in 1861, President Lincoln called his brother-in-law Helm to the White House and offered him a high-ranking position in the U.S. army. It was all Helm had ever wanted. Mary added an incentive, assuring him that "Emilie will be a belle at the White House receptions and we will be so proud of her." The protection of his young wife and children was no small thing for Helm. "I never had such a struggle," he told a friend, "and it almost killed me to decline." When explaining her husband's decision, Emilie would later say, "for weal or woe he felt he must side with his own people." The problem was, no matter which side he selected, he would conflict with those he loved. Helm may not have wanted to "strike against his own people," but ultimately, he could not avoid it. Helm aligned himself with the Confederacy, and the Todd family publicly tore in two.

The division within her family was hard for Mary, made harder by its public nature. "I see from today's paper Mrs. Lincoln is indignant at my Bro. David's being in the Confederate service," wrote Elodie, another Todd sister. She recorded that Mary had declared "that by no word or act of hers should he escape punishment for his treason against her husband's government should he fall into their hands," but she then reflected, "I do not believe she ever said it." In truth, Mary was quite upset by the betrayal of her siblings. "It is true," Emilie would tell a reporter after the war, "that Mrs. Lincoln's family ties were with the South." Because of this, Emilie felt her sister was misunderstood during the war, accused of being sympathetic to the Confederacy, even though Mary "was the soul of loyalty to her husband, and to the cause which he represented." In 1861, both sisters had much to worry about, as they supported their husbands. Emilie feared for the future of her family, extended and immediate, and about her husband's Confederate service. "This separation I sincerely hope will not continue long," Helm assured Emilie, but "I have gone in for the war and if God spares my life I expect to battle to the end of it."

He would not be spared. On September 20, 1863, Emilie's husband found himself at the Battle of Chickamauga in a "perfect tornado of bullets." He had prepared for this, drafting a will in May 1861, to

Kurz & Allison lithograph of the Battle of Chickamauga, ca. 1890. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)

"bequeath to my beloved wife" his property "to be used by her in rearing and educating our children." They had three now, born in 1857, 1859, and 1862. Though prepared, Helm still did not wish to die. A young captain from Kentucky celebrated when he learned of the Confederate victory, writing, "It is glorious news. It makes a fellow feel taller, stouter, fatter, better, lighter, heartier, saucier, braver, kinder, richer, and everything good & great. Hurra for hurra!!" But then he reflected on the price paid for that victory: "Gen Helm of Ky is killed. So the wail comes up with the shout of victory."

According to Supreme Court Justice David Davis, an Illinois friend of Lincoln, some of that wailing came from the White House. "I called to see him about 3 o'clock on the 22d of September. I found him in the greatest grief. 'Davis,' said he, 'I feel as David of old did when he was told of the death of Absalom. Would to God I had died for thee, oh Absalom, my son, my son?'" Lincoln, ever the deep reader, resonated with this biblical story of war and divided family. Davis had never seen Lincoln so moved, and upon witnessing this pronounced sadness, Davis decided to leave. "I closed the door and left him alone."

Emilie would not be left alone, as a stream of condolence letters arrived in the wake of her husband's death. These letters did many things, including reveal the expectations that southern society placed upon its widows. Prescriptive letters encouraged Emilie to accept empathy graciously, find solace in religion, allow physical assistance, and recognize that her loss was not her loss alone. A widow, in the ideal form, did all this and more. For example, Emilie's community prayed for her to seek God, believing that "every tendril of your anguished heart that reached unto Him, will be greatly bound and healed." Letters also encouraged Emilie to seek support, reminding her that "any thing or all I have would I most cheerfully yield for the relief of yourself or Hardin's children."

Condolence letters from family, friends, and neighbors sympathized with the new widow, but also reminded her that the death also affected Kentucky—and the Confederacy. "A great nation will bear on you its struggling heart," wrote one, "and millions of hearts will vibrate with your sorrow. Your loss has been theirs." As the wife of a Confederate officer, Emilie's heartbreak would not belong solely to her. "While my heart bleeds for you," wrote a Mr. Halderman, "I also feel the deepest anguish at the severe loss sustained by the service and the Confederacy in the death of your husband." Condolence letters, with their complex catalog of directives and comfort, provided Emilie with her script. And in the decades to come, Emilie would prove to be "as good a wife as any man on earth could desire," both "pure and lovely," even without her husband present. Widowhood was a role she would play well.

But before beginning this formal work of mourning, Emilie wanted to return home to Kentucky. She had been traveling with her husband's regiment and was in Georgia at the time of his death. Emilie turned to her brother-in-law in the White House. "At the instance of Mrs. E T Helm it becomes my painful duty to announce to you the death of General Ben. Hardin Helm—your Brother-in-law," began Confederate financier E. M. Bruce to Lincoln, on October 3. Although fighting on opposite sides of the war, he felt that Lincoln would be satisfied to learn that Helm fell while leading his brigade, "honorably battling for the cause he thought Just, and righteous. . . . I know you can but admire him for his deeds." Bruce then turned to Emilie's situation. "Mrs Helm is crushed by the blow" and desired a return to her mother. "She asks that you order the war department to send her a pass to enter the Federal truce Boat at City Point." Bruce concluded with a message for Mary—that "Mrs Helm desires to be affectionately remembered to her sister."

Lincoln issued a pass for Emilie and her children, but unfortunately it was not enough. Emilie made it safely to Richmond, then boarded a boat to Baltimore. There, Union officials informed her that she would have to sign an oath of allegiance to the United States, or she would not proceed. Emilie refused. Her husband had just sacrificed his life in opposition to the United States, so how could she promise to uphold it? As Emilie's daughter would later explain, "it was treason to her dead husband [and] to her beloved Southland." Unable to persuade her, the officers telegraphed the White House for instructions. Lincoln supposedly responded with one line: "Send her to me."

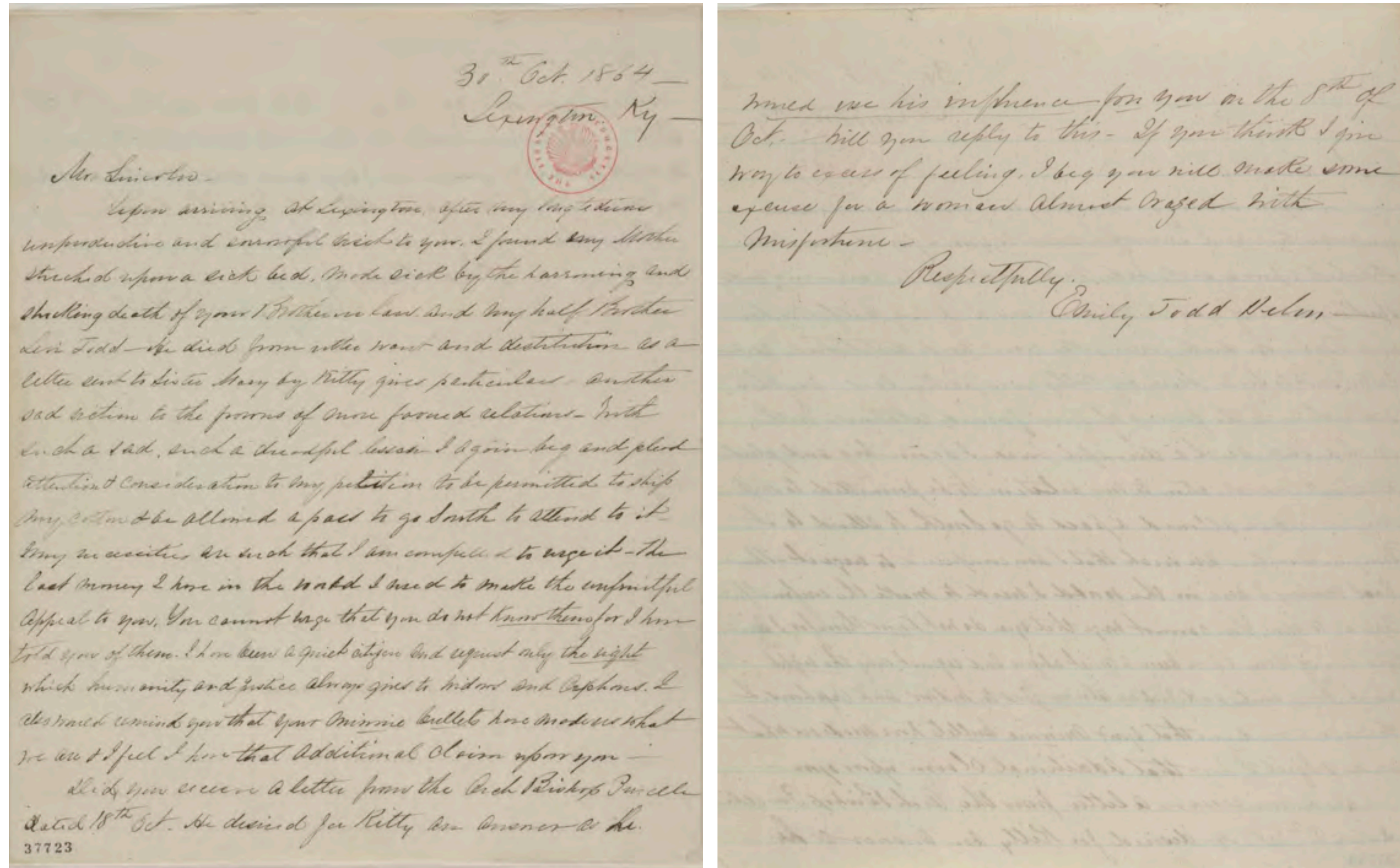
When Emilie arrived at the White House in early December 1863, and embraced her sister and brother-in-law, it was a tear-filled scene in which "we were all too grief-stricken at first for speech." Emilie wore black, "a pathetic little figure in her trailing black crepe." So did Mary, mourning the death of her son, Willie, who had died more than a year and a half earlier. Emilie and Mary dined together, steering the conversation to the past. The present was too painful, "like tearing open a fresh and bleeding wound." Even with this strategy, Emilie felt the pressure of politics. "Sister and I cannot open our hearts to each other as freely as we would like," Emilie wrote later in the week. "This frightful war comes between us like a barrier of granite closing our lips but not our hearts, for though our tongues are tied, we weep over our dead together and express through our clasped hands the sympathy we feel for each other in our mutual grief." Though an awkward silence sometimes settled over the sisters, mutual misery and mutual sympathy became the tether that tied them.

Emilie Todd Helm. (LFA-0604)

Fondness, too, remained. Emilie wrote that her sister Mary "and Brother Lincoln pet me as if I were a child, and, without words, try to comfort me." Abraham hoped she would take another trip to see them. "Little Sister," he said, "I hope you can come up and spend the summer with us." He believed it would be good for Mary, and good for her. Meanwhile, Mary shared her fears about Abraham's health. He had lost weight, the strain of the war making him appear almost gaunt, ghoul-like to some. Emilie thought he looked "very ill," but when Mary pressed her for her opinion, she only answered, "He seems thinner than I ever saw him." This prompted Mary to reply, "Oh Emilie, will we ever awake from this hideous nightmare?" Emilie did not respond. She did not want to discourage her sister further. Even with their disharmonious political beliefs, conversations like this reveal how their affection endured.

In some conversations, Emilie and the Lincolns did address politics straightforwardly. "You know, Little Sister," Lincoln began one of their many talks that week, "I tried to have Ben come with me. I hope you do not feel any bitterness or that I am in any way to blame for all this sorrow." Emilie knew that her late husband not only respected but cared for Abraham Lincoln. She assured him as much. She even explained that her husband had felt "deeply grateful to him for his generous offer to make him an officer in the Federal Army." The moment rested heavily between them. Eventually, Lincoln "put his arms around me and we both wept."

Soon after arriving, Emilie would leave. Certainly, she was ready to return home. But also, her presence in the White House, even for a week, was an embarrassment for the Lincolns. Lincoln told his friend Orville Hickman Browning that he "did not wish it known" that she was in the house. Though they were willing to create a retreat for her, others felt the White House was no sanctuary for a Confederate widow, no matter who her brother-in-law may be. "Well, we whipped the rebels at Chattanooga and I hear, madam, that the scoundrels ran like scared rabbits," jabbed Sen. Ira Harris of New York while on a visit to the president's home. Answering "with a choking throat," Emilie retorted, "It was an example, Senator Harris, that you set them at Bull Run and Manassas." After a failed attempt to get a rise from Mary, Harris returned to prodding Emilie and informed her "if I had twenty sons they should all be fighting the rebels." Forgetting where she was but not her Confederate loyalties, Emilie responded, "And if I had twenty sons, Senator Harris, they should all be opposing yours." When the incident was relayed to Lincoln, he chuckled. He had spent enough time with the Todds to know that these were exactly the turns of phrase they were famous for. "You should not have a rebel in your house," concluded Gen. Daniel Sickles, who had accompanied Harris and overheard the conversation. Drawing himself to his full height, the president replied in a quiet voice, "Excuse me, General Sickles, my wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests. We do not need from our friends either advice or



30th Oct. 1864—
Lexington Ky—

Mr. Lincoln—

Upon arriving at Lexington after my long tedious unproductive and sorrowful visit to you. I found my Mother stretched upon a sick bed, made sick by the harrowing and shocking death of your Brother in law and my half Brother Levi Todd—He died from utter want and destitution as a letter sent to Sister Mary by Kitty gives particulars—another sad victim to the frowns of more favored relations—With such a sad, such a dreadful lesson I again beg and plead attention & consideration to my petition to be permitted to ship my cotton & be allowed a pass to go South to attend to it. My necessities are such that I am compelled to urge it—the last money I have in the world I used to make the unfruitful appeal to you. You cannot urge that you do not know them for I have told you of them. I have been a quiet citizen and request only the right which humanity and justice always gives to widows and orphans. I also would remind you that your minnie bullets have made us what we are & I feel I have that additional claim upon you—

Did you receive a letter from the Arch Bishop Purcell dated 18th Oct. He desired for Kitty an answer as he

37723

named use his influence for you on the 8th of Oct. Will you reply to this—If you think I give way to excess of feeling, I beg you will make some excuse for a woman almost crazed with misfortune—

Respectfully,
Emily Todd Helm

Emilie Todd Helm to Abraham Lincoln, October 30, 1864. (Abraham Lincoln Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

assistance in the matter." Even with this defense in place, Emilie decided to leave.

On December 14, 1863, Lincoln wrote out an amnesty document for Emilie which stated that she had taken an oath of loyalty. Emilie, perhaps falsely, later claimed that she had never signed such an oath. "Mr. Lincoln handed me the safeguard" she admitted later, but "nothing was said to me then or afterwards about taking the oath of allegiance" because "Brother Lincoln knew . . . this for me would be impossible." Before leaving the White House, Emilie also requested "an order for the protection of some Cotton she had," but this made Lincoln uncomfortable. As he shared with his friend Browning, "he was afraid he would be censured if he did so." (This would not be the last Lincoln heard of the cotton.)

Emilie safely returned to Kentucky where, among other things, she visited Confederate prisoners of war. By August 1864, Lincoln's frustration regarding the actions of his sister-in-law had grown. "I hear rumor to-day that you recently sought to arrest her, but was prevented by her presenting the paper from me," Lincoln wrote in a telegram to Maj. Gen. Stephen G. Burbridge, in Lexington, Kentucky. That document from her December visit, as Lincoln recalled, was to protect Emilie's travels as a Confederate widow. "I do not intend to protect her against the consequences of disloyal words or acts, spoken or done by her since her return to Kentucky," Lincoln wrote. Lincoln then instructed the general: "deal with her for her current conduct, just as you would with *any other*."

Lincoln's frustration and weariness are evident in this telegram. The presidential election was looming—a contest he feared he would lose. The press was relentless in its attacks on his presidency, his decisions, his policies. He continued to lose weight. He wasn't sleeping well. And much of Mary's family continued to support the Confederacy, in word and deed. It had been a hard year for Emilie, too. She had not been arrested, but she had just passed the one-year anniversary of her husband's death. Her bitterness and desperation had grown. As a widow, and a woman in the nineteenth century, her options for financial support were limited. In early October 1864, she made a quick visit to the Lincolns, a trip she would describe as "my long tedious unproductive and sorrowful visit to you." She pleaded for a pass to travel south to collect her cotton, but she did not receive it. On October 30, home again in Kentucky, her mother sick, her brother dead from "utter want and destitution," Emilie sat down to write a letter to Lincoln, to make the request again. Emilie knew Lincoln well, knew of his love for her, and aimed at his heart. "The last money I have in the world I used to make the unfruitful appeal to you," she wrote, adding, "I also would remind you that your minnie bullets have made us what we are and I feel I have that additional claim upon you." She knew that would upset him, but concluded, "I beg you will make some excuse for a woman almost crazed with misfortune."

The optics of Lincoln providing a special permit to his sister-in-law—the widow of a Confederate officer who remained loyal to him and his cause—would not be received positively. They all knew this. Even if Emilie had not been arrested as rumored two months prior, she had already gained a reputation. Lincoln would not provide her the pass, at least not directly, though there is some speculation that he might have allowed another woman to pass through in her place. Either way, Emilie and Lincoln never saw each other again. She felt pain, and so did he, a pain reflected in his second inaugural address. "Let us strive on to finish the work we are in," he famously said, "to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." Notably, he did not specify Union widow.

All too soon, it was Mary's turn to face widowhood.

On April 15, 1865, Abraham Lincoln's death sent Mary into a mental spiral that ended only with her own death seventeen years later. In the hours following the murder, Mary filled the White House with what Elizabeth Keckly remembered as "the wails of a broken heart, the unearthly shrieks, the terrible convulsions." Mary stayed in bed, refused visitors, and seemed "more dead than alive—broken by the horrors of that dreadful night as well as worn down by bodily sickness." The loss of her husband was one from which Mary would never fully recover. In the months and years to come, Mary's overwhelming grief, shopping sprees, and demands for attention made life challenging for those who loved her most. Emilie would never be as close with Mary as she once was. "In her later years I saw little of her," Emilie admitted, calling Mary "highly sensitive" while acknowledging that the many tragedies of Mary's life were "more than any one could bear up under, and her last years were very sad." Their older sister Elizabeth explained that Mary "had much to bear though she don't bear it well; She has acted foolishly—unwisely and made the world hate her." And hate her many did, without sympathy for her loss or her immense grief. Mary seemed unable to bear her suffering as a widow should.

By contrast, Emilie played the part of widow well. She may have lost her husband, but she eventually prospered as the widow of Benjamin Hardin Helm. She joined bustling crowds in 1883 for a gubernatorial inauguration, continuously crisscrossed Kentucky visiting friends and family, joined the Filson Club in Louisville, and served as a postmistress in Elizabethtown for twelve years, appointed with the aid of her nephew, Secretary of War Robert T. Lincoln.

The veterans of her late husband's Orphan Brigade practically worshipped Emilie. When the Elizabethtown Volunteers changed its name to the Helm Guards, they did so not in honor of her husband, but "in honor of Mrs. E. T. Helm, the widow of the late General Hardin Helm." She attended nearly every reunion of her late husband's regiment, and at the 1920 reunion outside of Paris, Kentucky, her portrait "appeared on the badges of red, white and blue, worn by the veterans of the Brigade," and "beautiful tributes were paid to her." She never remarried, and in many ways, her devotion to Helm reminded all those who met her that a Confederate soldier was irreplaceable.

Emily Helm Todd in her later years. (Courtesy of the Mary Todd Lincoln House and the University of Kentucky Special Collections)

Emilie also became obsessed with compiling a genealogy of the Todd family, and she penned hundreds of letters to strangers and relatives across the nation to gather information. "You must not be discouraged in your undertaking," wrote one relative, "it is not characteristic of the Todds, to give up any thing fairly began." As Emilie became increasingly consumed with her project, her older sister Elizabeth teased her in a letter of April 30, 1880, "Do not exhaust yourself in your research, it will be impossible to trace beyond Adam and Eve." Emilie continued her work for decades. Perhaps, in documenting the more honorable deeds of her ancestors, Emilie hoped to repair the present reputation of the Todd family. After all, of the fourteen Todd siblings, Emilie lived longest. She survived her three younger siblings by over forty years, a lonely fact not lost on the public. "Mrs. Helm is the only member of her family living to-day," wrote the *Adair County News* when announcing Emilie's visit to the county in February 1905.

Emilie became a living relic of the Todds, not only representing them but shaping how they would be remembered. Better yet, Emilie's notorious siblings could not undermine her efforts

from their graves. She used the social capital she gained as a devoted widow in her attempts to salvage the image of Mary, who had passed away in 1882. In 1898, the *Saint Paul Globe* reported that Emilie denied that there had ever been two marriage ceremonies arranged for Mary and Abraham and rejected "the existence of that inharmony to which so many allusions have been made." The paper concluded, "It would be better for the world to accept these statements, bury rank gossip in the dark pit in which it belongs and henceforth regard Mrs. Lincoln only as the honorable and honored helpmeet of the greatest American of the century." Of course, as Emilie knew, Abraham and Mary had multiple engagements and marital discord, but this was not the image that she wanted remembered. And as the last one of the Todd siblings alive, she could have the final word.

Unveiling of the statue of Lincoln at Hodgenville, Kentucky. (Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park Museum Collection) Special thanks to Stacy Humphreys for providing scans of these images.

In 1909, "while ten thousand people stood in reverence with bared heads . . . a veiling of the stars and stripes fell gracefully away" to reveal a statue of Abraham Lincoln at his birthplace in Hodgenville, Kentucky. Papers reported "the canopy that hid the statue from view was drawn away by the hand of Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm, a sister to the wife of Lincoln, and cheer after cheer went up." Even with the disagreements over politics and the loss of a war, Emilie found it within herself to honor Abraham Lincoln, pulling a string to drop the drape "showing the martyred president sitting in a chair" before a crowd of ten thousand Americans. Instead of rehashing the political divisions of the Todd and Lincoln families, reporters emphasized their familial ties. It was as Emilie had written, "we should revive no memories that may embitter the future." To the nation, the reunification of Emilie and Abraham represented the reunification of white America. If a Confederate woman could honor the brother-in-law responsible for the death of her husband and two brothers, at least as she saw it, could not the nation also become one again?

Emilie also formed a close relationship with Robert Todd Lincoln, Mary and Abraham's eldest (and only surviving) son. Though Emilie was his aunt, in many ways, she is better understood as a sort of sibling, as they were just seven years apart in age. Both Robert and Emilie loved Mary, although both gained the reputation of being her enemy at various points in their lives. Both spent decades battling rumors—true and untrue—about their family. Robert assisted Emilie's daughter, Katherine Helm, in her publication of *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln* (1928). The result is a biography that is part record, containing selections of Emilie's letters and diary, but also part myth. When it was time to gift a portrait of his mother to the White House Collection, Robert and his wife selected a portrait painted by Emilie's daughter in 1925.

Painting of Mary Lincoln by Katherine Helm. Other paintings of Mary Lincoln by Katherine Helm are held in the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection at the Indiana State Museum and at the Lincoln Museum at Lincoln Memorial University. (Courtesy of the White House Historical Association/ White House Collection)

Through Emilie, we see how the emotional, human experience of losing a husband could be channeled and reinvested. In her mourning, she earned social capital, which she spent wisely. Certainly, death was nothing new for either the Lincolns or the Todds. When Abraham walked into the White House as president, he had the emotional baggage of a dead mother, father, sister, sweetheart, and son, who had passed just after his fourth birthday. The coming years would bring the death of another son, then a beloved brother-in-law, atop the killings of dozens of friends, and thousands of Americans. Life was sad, tragic, and broken. The family was broken. And yet, when disaster of the worst sort hit, Emilie and Mary mourned together. It was messy, it wasn't always conciliatory, but in the end, decades of healing later, Emilie stood before a cheering crowd with the statue of her brother-in-law, a man tangentially responsible for her own widowhood. Family endured.

Emilie did not pass away until February 20, 1930, sixty-six years after her husband. Though she had devoted a lifetime to the work of mourning, she did not want anyone to mourn her. "We ought not to grieve over anyone who has to live until they are feeble and unable to enjoy life," wrote Emilie years before, adding, "I hope every one will feel this if I live to be old."

Angela Esco Elder is associate professor of history at Converse University. Her publications include* Love and Duty: Confederate Widows and the Emotional Politics of Loss *(2022) and a co-edited collection,* Practical Strangers: The Courtship Correspondence of Nathaniel Dawson and Elodie Todd, Sister of Mary Todd Lincoln *(2017).

From the Collection
WOMEN AT THE WHITE HOUSE

by Jessie Cortesi & Abbie Meek
Senior Lincoln Librarians at the Rolland Center for Lincoln Research

President Abraham Lincoln hosted many notable women at the White House during his administration. From advocating on behalf of the U.S. Sanitary Commission to urging him to expedite emancipation measures, these women left their marks on history and the political landscape of the nation.

(LN-1324)

Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883) lectured on abolition, racial equality, and women's rights. During the Civil War, she helped recruit Black troops for the Union and worked for the National Freedman's Relief Association in Washington, D.C., where she met President Lincoln at the White House in 1864. Truth reported that Lincoln "showed as much kindness and consideration to the colored persons [visiting him] as to the white."

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896) wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), sending a shockwave through the nation. President Lincoln read it along with her nonfiction rebuttal to critics' response to the book. Stowe met with the president at the White House in 1862. Although she had previously criticized him, she came out of the meeting with a newfound admiration for his "religious faith."

(LN-1263)

(LN-0569)

Jessie Benton Frémont (1824–1902) was a writer and antislavery activist. With Jessie's urging, her husband, Major General John C. Frémont, issued a military order in 1861 freeing enslaved people in Missouri. Upon President Lincoln's objection to the order, the general sent his wife to the nation's capital to appeal for Lincoln's approval. Refusing, Lincoln revoked the order himself. Jessie sensed a "sneering tone" in the president's voice, and she reported that he called her "quite a female politician."

Anna Elizabeth Dickinson's (1842–1932) reputation as a public lecturer earned her an invitation to speak before Congress in 1864, the first woman to do so. President Lincoln attended her speech. She also met with Lincoln at the White House that spring and criticized his administration of the war. Dickinson reported that she told him, "I didn't come here to hear stories. I can read better ones in the papers any day." However, she reversed her position later in the year and advocated for Lincoln's reelection.

(OC-0537)

(71200908405900)

Mary Livermore (1820–1905) was an abolitionist and women's rights advocate. She was the only female reporter at the Chicago convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln for president in 1860. At a White House meeting in 1862, she found Lincoln "haggard" and "ghastly . . . as he lay in his coffin." Having gone there as a representative of the Sanitary Commission seeking "some word of encouragement," she and her companion found none.

Lavinia "Vinnie" Ream (1847–1914) was an artist and sculptor whose supporters convinced President Lincoln to pose for her to sculpt a bust. For five months, Vinnie, then only a teenager, met with Lincoln every morning so she could complete the task. Later, in 1866, when Congress commissioned a full-size marble statue of Lincoln for the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, 18-year-old Ream became the youngest person and the first woman to receive an art commission from the federal government.

(LFFC-0008)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN & WOMAN SUFFRAGE

by Charles Benfanti and Eden McMillan

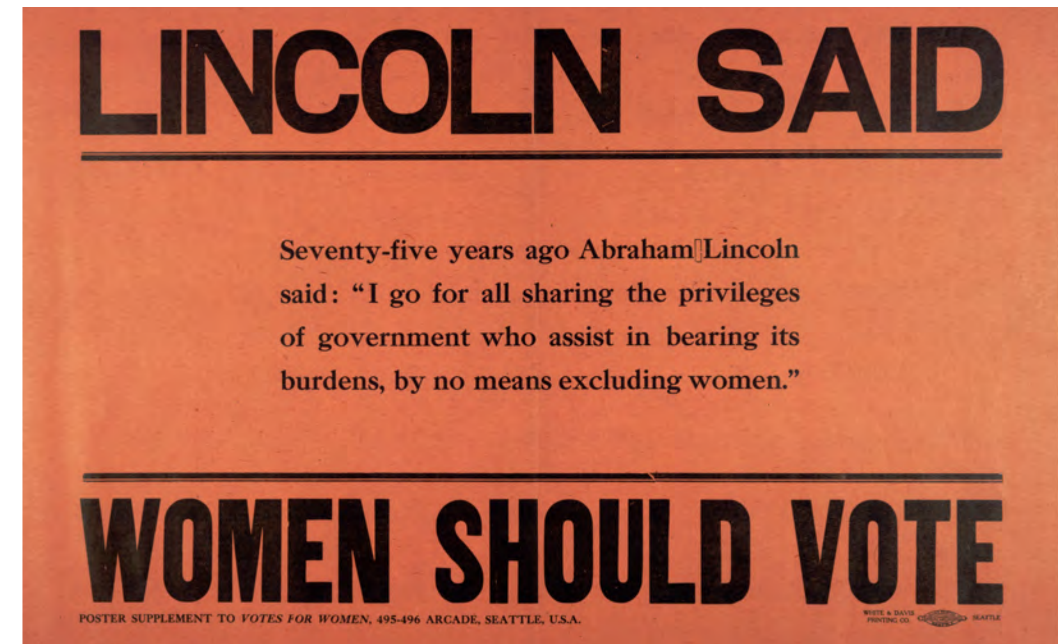
In a public letter announcing his candidacy for the Illinois state legislature in 1836, twenty-seven-year-old Abraham Lincoln declared his support for his constituents' right to vote, saying, "I go for all sharing the privileges of the government, who assist in bearing its burthens. Consequently, I go for admitting all whites to the right of suffrage, who pay taxes or bear arms, (by no means excluding females.)"

Scholars vary in their interpretation of Lincoln's words regarding women's suffrage. According to Harry V. Jaffa, this statement put Lincoln "on record as favoring female suffrage." In like manner, Michael Burlingame argues that Lincoln's words offered a "proto-feminist endorsement of women's suffrage" inspired by his general aversion toward "the sexual double standard." Similarly, Eric Foner maintains that Lincoln's statement "represented a remarkable departure from the prevailing gendered definition of 'the people.'" In contrast, Douglas L. Wilson suggests that Lincoln's comment might not have been "in earnest," while David Herbert Donald interprets Lincoln's remarks as a "tongue-in-cheek joke" since most Illinois women did not pay taxes and none could serve in the militia.

While Lincoln's true intent may never be known, suffragists in the twentieth century used his words to claim him as a supporter of their cause. By invoking Lincoln, they aimed to broaden support for woman suffrage, hoping his association would legitimize their movement and resonate with a wider audience.

Charles Benfanti and Eden McMillan are American Studies majors at Christopher Newport University.

In this 1912 photograph, Miss Louise Hall and Mrs. Susan Fitzgerald (holding brush at right) hang signs in Cincinnati featuring Lincoln's 1836 public letter. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)



Votes For Women, ***a Seattle magazine, published this poster supplement in 1910 to garner support for woman suffrage. The editors removed the parentheses and changed Lincoln's word from "females" to "women." They also interpreted his statement to mean that women "should vote." (Gilder Lehrman Collection)***

On Lincoln's birthday in 1917, members of the National Woman's Party displayed banners advocating for women's suffrage. One banner stated that "Lincoln stood for woman suffrage 60 years ago." Their banner also shamed the sitting president, Woodrow Wilson, for lagging "behind" Lincoln on this issue. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)

Lincoln LORE

ACPL.INFO • LINCOLNCOLLECTION.ORG • FRIENDSOFTHELINCOLNCOLLECTION.ORG