

Chapter Six

“It Would Just Kill Me to Marry Mary Todd”:

Courtship and Marriage (1840-1842)

In 1842, Lincoln married Mary Todd, a woman who was to make his domestic life “a burning, scorching hell,” as “terrible as death and as gloomy as the grave,” according to one who knew him well.¹

COURTING MARY OWENS

Lincoln’s courtship of Mary Todd is poorly documented, but indirect light on it is shed by his earlier, well-documented romance with Mary S. Owens. Born in Kentucky a few months before Lincoln, Mary Owens received a good education at the home of her wealthy father, a planter in Green County.² She “was very different from Anne Rutledge.” Not only was she older, bigger, better-educated, and raised “in the most refined society,” she also “dressed much finer than any of the ladies who lived about New

¹ William H. Herndon, quoted in Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 268.

² Nathaniel Owens, out “of his deep concern for the education of his children . . . maintained a private school in his pretentious plantation home, to which came instructors from Transylvania University, Ky., to give instruction to his children and those of his neighbors.” On his 5000-acre plantation he grew cotton and tobacco, which he farmed with the help of two dozen slaves. Notes on Nathaniel Owens, Fern Nance Pond Papers, Menard County Historical Museum, Petersburg, Illinois. According to William B. Allen, Owens “was a farmer of good education for the times, and of a high order of native intellect. He was a man of untiring perseverance and industry, and acquired considerable wealth. He bestowed great attention to the education of his children, sent them from home to the best schools, and occasionally employed in his family a private teacher for their instruction.” Allen, *A History of Kentucky* (Louisville: Bradley & Gilbert, 1872), 383. See also Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 23 May and 29 October 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 256, 380.

Salem.” Her “fashionable silk dresses, kid shoes and leghorn hat were in striking contrast with the calico dress, calfskin shoes and straw bonnet that Anne had worn.”³

Her clothes may have been more attractive than Ann Rutledge’s, but her features and figure were not. Standing five feet, five inches tall, she was “portly,” weighing between 150 and 180 pounds, and considered “not pretty” but rather “matronly,” “Strong nervous & muscular,” with a “massive, angular, square, prominent, and broad” forehead, “fair skin, deep blue eyes,” and “dark curling hair.” If less comely than Ann Rutledge, Mary Owens was more intellectually gifted and accomplished. Caleb Carman remembered her as “Sharp – Shrewd and intellectual,” and brighter than Ann. Others deemed her “verry Talented,” “smart, sharp,” “quick & strong minded,” “very intellectual,” a “good conversationalist,” as well as “a splendid reader.” She reportedly “loved wit & humor,” had an “Excellent disposition,” was “jovial,” “social,” “good natured,” “gay and lively,” “light-hearted and cheery,” “kind and considerate.” In her dealings with men, she showed “a little dash of coquetry.”⁴ A historian who saw Mary Owens in “her declining years” called her “handsome, dignified and refined.”⁵

She was also spunky and unconventional, as her 1835 correspondence with Thomas J. Nance indicates: “You are well aware Thomas, that in writing you this letter, I am transgressing the circumscribed limits, laid down by tyrannical custom, for our sex.”

³ Harvey Lee Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, ed. Rufus Rockwell Wilson (Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1946), 13.

⁴ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 12 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 374; Lynn McNulty Greene to Herndon, Avon, Illinois, 3 May 1866, ibid., 250; statement by Benjamin R. Vineyard, enclosed in Vineyard to Jesse W. Weik, St. Joseph, Missouri, 14 March 1887, ibid., 609-10; Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 23 May and 6 August 1866, ibid., 256, 265; Johnson Gaines Green, interview with Herndon, [1866], ibid., 530; Esther Summers Bale, interview with Herndon, [1866], ibid., 527; William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 23 January 1866, ibid., 175; Mentor Graham, interview with Herndon, 2 April 1866, ibid., 243.

⁵ W. M. Paxton, Annals of Platte County, Missouri (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly, 1897), 480.

Social disapproval did not intimidate her: “if I am condemned by the cold, unfeeling and fastidious of either Sex, I care not, for I trust, my Heart, has learned to rise superior to those groveling feelings, dictated by bosoms, that are callous to every refined emotion.”⁶

In the fall of 1833, Mary Owens spent a month in New Salem with her sister, Mrs. Bennett Abell, who was eager to have Lincoln as a brother-in-law. He found Mary Owens intelligent and “agreeable.”⁷ She recalled that they “were congenial spirits” who saw “eye to eye” on political matters. Three years later, Lincoln accepted a startling proposition made by Betsey Abell: that she bring her sister Mary back from Kentucky for him to wed.⁸ (Mrs. Abell “was a great talker, and sometimes said more than she ought.”)⁹ Lincoln agreed, and Mary returned to New Salem for a year and a half, during which time Lincoln courted her.¹⁰

To a close friend, Lincoln described this romance in self-deprecating, jocular terms. After the relationship ended, he told Eliza Browning, wife of fellow Whig legislator Orville H. Browning, that he had seen “no good objection to plodding life through hand in hand with her.” But the courtship did not go well. According to his own account, Lincoln thought she was, upon her return to New Salem in 1836, less attractive than he had remembered her being. “I knew she was over-size,” he confided to Mrs.

⁶ Mary Owens to Thomas J. Nance, Green City, Kentucky, 11 April 1835, Fern Nance Pond, ed., “New Salem Community Activities: Documents,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 48 (1955): 100-1.

⁷ Lincoln to Mrs. Orville H. Browning, Springfield, 1 April 1838, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:117.

⁸ Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 22 July and 23 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 263, 256.

⁹ Parthena Hill, interview with Walter B. Stevens, 1886, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Michael Burlingame (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁰ Lynn McNulty Greene to Herndon, Avon, Illinois, 3 May 1866, in Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 250.

Browning, “but she now appeared a fair match for Falstaff.” In addition, she looked old: “when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features, for her skin was too full of fat, to permit its contracting in to wrinkles; but from her want of teeth, weather-beaten appearance in general, and from a kind of notion that ran in my head, that nothing could have commenced at the size of infancy, and reached her present bulk in less than thirty five or forty years; and, in short, I was not [at] all pleased with her.” He tried to convince himself “that the mind was much more to be valued than the person.” Despite his reservations, Lincoln felt honor-bound to follow through on his pledge: “I had told her sister that I would take her for better or for worse; and I made a point of honor and conscience in all things, to stick to my word, especially if others had been induced to act on it, which in this case, I doubted not they had, for I was now fairly convinced, that no other man on earth would have her.”

Understandably he hesitated before marrying such a woman. “Through life I have been in no bondage, either real or imaginary from the thralldom of which I so much desired to be free,” he told Mrs. Browning. He “really dreaded” the prospect of wedding Mary Owens “as much – perhaps more, than an irishman does the halter.” After procrastinating as long as possible, he finally proposed, but to his surprise, she turned him down: “I verry unexpectedly found myself mortified . . . in a hundred different ways. My vanity was deeply wounded by the reflection, that I had so long been too stupid to discover her intentions, and at the same time never doubting that I understood them perfectly; and also, that she whom I had taught myself to believe no body else would have, had actually rejected me with all my fancied greatness.” Ruefully he conceded that others “have been made fools of by the girls; but this can never be with truth said of me. I most

emphatically, in this instance, made a fool of myself.” He resolved “never again to think of marrying,” for “I can never be satisfied with any one who would be block-head enough to have me.”¹¹

This account of the courtship is misleading, for Lincoln’s correspondence with Mary Owens indicates that he “had grown very fond” of her and backed away only after she wounded him severely.¹² A letter he wrote her in December 1836 from Vandalia “shows that Lincoln was in love – deeply in love.”¹³ In it, Lincoln complained of “the mortification of looking in the Post Office for your letter and not finding it.” He scolded her: “You see, I am mad about that old letter yet. I don’t like verry well to risk you again. I’ll try you once more anyhow.” The prospect of spending ten weeks with the legislature in Vandalia was intolerable, he lamented, for he missed her. “Write back as soon as you get this, and if possible say something that will please me, for really I have not [been] pleased since I left you.”¹⁴ Such language, hardly that of an indifferent suitor, tends to confirm Parthena Hill’s statement that “Lincoln thought a great deal” of Mary Owens.¹⁵

The romance ended largely because of the couple’s incompatibility. With good reason she thought his manners oafish. As she explained, “Mr. Lincoln was deficient in those little links which make up the great chain of woman[’]s happiness, at least it was so in my case; not that I believed it proceeded from a lack of goodness of heart, but his training

¹¹ Lincoln to Mrs. O. H. Browning, Springfield, 1 April 1838, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:117.

¹² William G. Greene quoted in George A. Pierce, “Lincoln’s Love,” dispatch dated “on the cars,” 16 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 23 April 1881.

¹³ Herndon’s essay, “Lincoln’s Courtship with Miss Owens,” excerpted in R. Gerald McMurtry, appendix to Olive Carruthers, Lincoln’s Other Mary (Chicago: Ziff-Davis, 1946), 209.

¹⁴ Lincoln to Mary Owens, Vandalia, 13 December 1836, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:54-55.

¹⁵ Parthena Hill, interview with Walter B. Stevens, 1886, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 10.

had been different from mine, hence there was not that congeniality which would have otherwise existed.”¹⁶ To relatives she complained about Lincoln’s “lack of knowledge of etiquette” and lamented that “our whole outlook on life is so different.”¹⁷ Lincoln had behaved in ways that she understandably considered thoughtless and insensitive. Once, while riding with other New Salem young women and their swains, they came to a creek, and all the men save Lincoln gallantly helped their companions cross it. Mary Owens chided her escort: “You are a nice fellow! I suppose you did not care whether my neck was broken or not.” Lincoln replied that he reckoned she was “plenty smart enough to care for herself.”¹⁸

Mary Owens described to her cousin Gaines Green a similar incident that provoked her to tell Lincoln that she “did not believe he would make a kind husband.”¹⁹ One day Lincoln accompanied her and Mrs. Bowling Green on a walk. As they climbed a steep hill, he offered no help to Nancy Green, who was having difficulty carrying her youngster, “a great big fat child – heavy & crossly disposed.” After reaching their destination, “Miss Owens Said to Lincoln – laughingly – You would not make a good husband Abe.” Gaines Green testified that “they Sat on the fence & one word brought on

¹⁶ Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 23 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 256.

¹⁷ Kunigunde Duncan and D. F. Nickols, Mentor Graham: The Man Who Taught Lincoln (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 164–65.

¹⁸ Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 22 July 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 262.

¹⁹ Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 22 July 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 262; Johnson Gaines Green, interview with Herndon, [1866], ibid., 530-31. Green, her cousin, said of Mary Owens: “Saw her in 1866 in the winter and Spring at Weston Mo. – She & I had a Conversation about Lincoln when I Saw her at Weston Mo . . . – I had heard a great deal about Lincoln’s & her Courtship – was determined to have it & dragged it out by degrees.”

another, till a Split or breach Ensued.”²⁰ Another cousin of Mary Owens reported that neither she nor Lincoln “would yield a hair[‘]s breadth.”²¹ She allegedly chided Lincoln: “You’ve walked for more than a mile with us – a great, strong fellow like you, and let that woman carry a baby that weighs nearly forty pounds, and never so much as lifted your finger to help her.”

Lincoln replied: “Why, she never asked me.”

“Oh, she didn’t! And you hadn’t politeness enough to offer to help her, but must wait to be asked.”

“Why, I never thought of it. I always supposed she would be afraid to let a fellow like me touch the baby for fear he might break it or something. I’d carry a bushel of them for you, Mary.”

“Yes, now.”

“Any time.”

“If I asked you?”

“Well, I reckon you could ask me if you wanted them carried.”

“I just tell you what it is, Abe Lincoln, any man fit to be a husband would have offered to carry that child when he could see its mother was nearly tired to death.”

“And I didn’t offer?”

“No, you didn’t.”

“And so I’m not fit to be a husband?”

“That’s just the fact.”

²⁰ Johnson Gaines Green, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 531.

²¹ William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 175.

Lincoln “turned about with a laugh, and didn’t appear to think much more of the matter. He treated Mary very nicely, and much as if nothing had been said, but her words, no doubt, made a serious impression, for from that time their intimacy began to wane, and after a while there was a general understanding that the engagement was cancelled.”²²

Soon after this contretemps, Lincoln spent a few weeks on a surveying expedition; when he returned to New Salem, he encountered one of the Abells’ sons and inquired if Mary Owens was at their home. When the lad replied affirmatively, Lincoln asked him to tell her that he would visit later that day. But she had made plans to dine with her cousin, Mentor Graham. When she heard that Lincoln would call, she regarded the occasion as an opportunity to test his devotion: “She thought a moment and Said to herself if I can draw Lincoln up there to Graham[‘]s it will all be right. . . . She wanted to make L bend.” (A strong-minded woman, “she loved Power & conquest.”)²³ When Lincoln dropped by the Abells’ home to see Mary Owens, Betsey Abell informed him that she was at Mentor Graham’s, a mile and a half distant. Lincoln asked if Mary had known he was coming to call. When Mrs. Abell said no, one of her children corrected her, insisting that “the boy Saml who went to the P. O told her So.” His feelings hurt, Lincoln “Sat a Short time – went to Salem . . . and didn[‘]t go to Graham’s.” As Gaines Green reported, “Lincoln thought that as he was Extremely poor and Miss Owens very

²² William G. Greene in George A. Pierce, “Lincoln’s Love,” dispatch dated “on the cars,” 16 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 23 April 1881. Pierce has Greene quoting Mary Owens speaking in an ungrammatical, unsophisticated fashion. Her son protested, maintaining that she spoke like the well-educated woman that she was. Since Mary Owens claimed she had a good education, since her letters are perfectly grammatical, and since many others testified to her intelligence and refinement, I have recast Pierce’s words to make her language suit her known character and background. Benjamin R. Vineyard to Jesse W. Weik, St. Joseph, Missouri, 13 January 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 599.

²³ L. M. Greene to Herndon, Avon, Illinois, 30 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 81.

rich that it was a fling on him on that account. This was at that time Abe[‘]s tender spot.”²⁴

Lincoln’s hypersensitivity about the differences in their social class is evident in a letter he wrote to Mary Owens in May 1837, shortly after he had moved to Springfield. They had considered the possibility of her joining him there, evidently as Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. He discouraged her, saying: “I am afraid you would not be satisfied. There is a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here, which it would be your doom to see without sharing in it. You would have to be poor without the means of hiding your poverty.” For this reason he believed that they should not wed. “Whatever woman may cast her lot with mine, should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine, that would make more unhappy than to fail in the effort. I know I should be much happier with you than

²⁴ Johnson Gaines Green said “Abe was mistaken in his guesses for wealth Cut no figure in Miss Owens Eyes – Miss Owens regretted her Course – Abe would not bend and Miss Owens wouldn’t: She Said if She had it to do over again She would play her Cards differently.” Green, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 531. See also George U. Miles to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 23 March 1866, ibid., 237. Mentor Graham’s granddaughter related a similar tale: “The day before Lincoln was to go back to the legislature [in December 1836], he sent word to Mary by one of the Abell children, whom he met at the post office, that he would call that evening. She had planned to go to Grahams’ to supper and, thinking that Abe would come on over as usual, went early in the evening. But when Abe arrived at Abells’ and found Mary gone, he concluded that she wanted to avoid him. Sarah [Graham] put a plate on the table for Lincoln, but he did not come.

“After the children had left the table, Sarah said: ‘Now, Mary, you must not get out of patience with Abe. He is going to amount to something some day.’

“Mary began to stack the dishes. ‘I think you are right about his future,’ she answered, ‘but our whole outlook on life is so different, and our training, as for instance what he has done tonight, that I think it would be a mistake to become serious about him.’

“Mentor spoke up: ‘But you could help him, Mary—and you will never meet anybody again to compare with him.’

“‘Well, maybe I do think too much about the little niceties of behavior, but his lack of knowledge of etiquette might be due to some lack which he does not realize, or even try to overcome.’

“Sarah said, ‘Oh, Mary, he is one of the gentlest men I ever knew.’

“But Mary let down the leaf of the table with a deep sigh: ‘Yes, Sally, I know. I know he is good all the way through but –’ and she called goodbye to the children” and returned to the Abells’ home. Lincoln then went to legislature without seeing her. Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 164-65.

the way I am, provided I saw no signs of discontent in you.” He urged her to consider the prospect carefully before deciding. “My opinion is that you had better not do it. You have not been accustomed to hardship, and it may be more severe than you now imagine.” But, he hastened to add, “I am willing to abide your decision.”²⁵

Three months later, in his final surviving letter to Mary Owens, Lincoln discussed the prospect of marriage lukewarmly: “I want in all cases to do right, and most particularly so, in all cases with women. I want . . . more than any thing else, to do right with you, and if I knew it would be doing right, as I rather suspect it would, to let you alone, I would do it. And for the purpose of making the matter as plain as possible, I now say, that you can now drop the subject, dismiss your thoughts (if you ever had any) from me forever, and leave this letter unanswered, without calling forth one accusing murmur from me. And I will even go further, and say, that if it will add any thing to your comfort, or peace of mind, to do so, it is my sincere wish that you should. Do not understand by this, that I wish to cut your acquaintance. I mean no such thing. What I do wish is, that our further acquaintance shall depend upon yourself. If such further acquaintance would contribute nothing to your happiness, I am sure it would not to mine. If you feel yourself in any degree bound to me, I am now willing to release you, provided you wish it; while, on the other hand, I am willing, and even anxious to bind you faster, if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness.”²⁶ She rejected his proposal, returned to Kentucky, and eventually married her brother-in-law.²⁷ A few

²⁵ Lincoln to Mary Owens, Springfield, 7 May 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:78.

²⁶ Lincoln to Mary Owens, Springfield, 16 August 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:94.

²⁷ Statement by Benjamin R. Vineyard, enclosed in Vineyard to Jesse W. Weik, St. Joseph, Missouri, 14 March 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 609-10.

months after her departure, Lincoln remarked to Betsey Abell: “Tell your Sister, that I think she was a great fool, because she did not stay here and marry me.”²⁸

The Mary Owens courtship reveals an aspect of Lincoln’s character that helps explain his intense political ambition. Some political psychologists maintain that such ambition is often rooted in “an intense and ungratified craving for deference.” Many aspiring politicians like Lincoln expect power “to overcome low estimates of the self.”²⁹ The compensatory psychological benefits of political power and fame strongly appeal to those with damaged self-esteem, especially “the ‘provincial’ or the ‘small-town boy’ or the ‘country boy’” who wants “to succeed against the stigma of rusticity.”³⁰ Lincoln is a good example of such a “provincial.” As noted earlier, in his 1860 conversations with John Locke Scripps, he “seemed to be painfully impressed with the extreme poverty of his early surroundings—the utter absence of all romantic and heroic elements.”³¹ In the autobiography he prepared for Scripps, he virtually apologized for his humble origins, calling Thomas Lincoln “a wandering laboring boy” who “grew up literally without

²⁸ Mary Owens Vineyard to Herndon, Weston, Missouri, 22 July 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 263.

²⁹ Harold D. Lasswell, Power and Personality (New York: Norton, 1948), 38, 39. A prominent Washington journalist who observed the political world from 1961 to 1999, wrote that the typical successful public figure in the capital longed to be “a praised person,” a desire formed in childhood. Meg Greenfield, Washington (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 32. In a study of highly ambitious entrepreneurs, Orvis F. Collins and his colleagues found that many of their subjects had in childhood either lost a parent or suffered from other forms of emotional abandonment. Collins et al., The Enterprising Man (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964), 54–56.

³⁰ Lasswell, Power and Personality, 50. An unusually prominent business executive, Jim Barksdale, told an interviewer who asked him why he works hard even though he has far more money than he could ever need: “I am very conscious of coming from the South. I know that people laugh at the southern accent. I know of many successful people with hardscrabble backgrounds. Many of us are driven to overcome what we came from.” The media mogul Ted Turner “has attributed his relentless ambition to a ‘latent inferiority complex’ based on his childhood inability to satisfy a demanding father. . . . in the middle of a speech, Turner held up a copy of a business magazine with his face on the cover and called out, ‘Is this enough for you, dad?’” Dinesh D’Souza, The Virtue of Prosperity: Finding Values in an Age of Techno-Affluence (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 107-8.

³¹ Scripps to William Herndon, Chicago, 24 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 57.

education.” In that revealing sketch, Lincoln said of his meager schooling: “He regrets his want of education, and does what he can to supply the want.”³² For the Dictionary of Congress, Lincoln in 1858 described his education as “defective.”³³ As an attorney, he felt inferior to his better-educated colleagues.³⁴ His second law partner, Stephen T. Logan, recalled “an occasion when he had got very much discouraged.” In a Danville court, Edward D. Baker “had got very much the advantage of him,” and he “came and complained to me that Baker had got so much the start of him that he despaired of getting even with him in acquirements and skill.”³⁵ In 1861, Lincoln told an alumnus of Rutgers College that he “always regretted the want of a college education. Those who have it should thank God for it.”³⁶

In 1859, Lincoln wrote that his “parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families – second families, perhaps I should say.” He again pointed out that his father “grew up, literally without education.” As a child, Lincoln said, he had found “absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.”³⁷ Herndon believed that Lincoln was especially ashamed of his mother’s family.³⁸ He also expressed some

³² Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:61, 62.

³³ Brief autobiography, [15?] June 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:459.

³⁴ Ralph Emerson, “Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Emerson’s Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln” (pamphlet; Rockford, Illinois: privately printed, 1909), 7, 9.

³⁵ Stephen T. Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 38.

³⁶ Stephen Fiske, “When Lincoln Was First Inaugurated,” Ladies’ Home Journal 14 (March 1897): 8.

³⁷ Autobiographical sketch enclosed in Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Springfield, 20 December 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:511. Cf. Lincoln to Solomon Lincoln, Washington, 6 March 1848, ibid., 1:456.

³⁸ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

reservations about the Lincolns. When leading citizens of Logan County, Illinois, proposed to name their county seat after him, Lincoln replied: “I don’t believe I’d do that; I never knew anything named Lincoln that amounted to anything.”³⁹ The positive reception he received in the East in early 1860 astonished him. To a Norwich, Connecticut, minister who lauded his speech in that city, Lincoln said: “Certainly, I have had a most wonderful success, for a man of my limited education.” He was especially struck by the lavish praise of a Yale professor of rhetoric.⁴⁰ As he told voters during his first political campaign: “I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life.” A decade later he referred to himself at twenty-two as “a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy.”⁴¹ The psychologist G. Stanley Hall speculated that Lincoln’s ambition was rooted in his feelings about his appearance: “His height, long limbs, rough exterior, and frequent feeling of awkwardness must have very early made him realize that to succeed in life he must cultivate intrinsic mental and moral traits, which it is so hard for a handsome man or woman to excel in. Hence he compensated by trying to develop intellectual distinction.”⁴² In his initial political campaign, Lincoln declared candidly: “I have no other [ambition] so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow citizens.”⁴³

³⁹ This story was told many times to Lawrence B. Stringer by Col. Robert B. Latham, a founder of the town to whom Lincoln made the remark. Stringer, “The Lincoln Town,” unpublished essay, 11, Stringer Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁰ “A Talk with Abraham Lincoln,” Rev. John P. Gulliver, New York Independent, 1 September 1864. The professor may have been William A. Larned, who lectured his rhetoric class about the virtues of Lincoln’s address in Norwich. Reminiscences of Horace Bumstead, Congregationalist and Christian World, 30 January 1913, 168. Bumstead was a Yale freshman at the time,

⁴¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:8-9, 320.

⁴² Hall to William E. Barton, Worcester, Massachusetts, 3 October 1922, in a scrapbook marked “The Life of Lincoln, Vol. 2,” Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:8.

That thirst for admiration lasted a lifetime; only political success would slake it and permit relief from a nagging, deep-seated sense of inferiority.⁴⁴

Emotional as well as material and educational poverty seems to have plagued the young Lincoln, for neither parent met his most basic psychological needs. Nancy Hanks Lincoln may have provided her young son with love and support during his first nine years, but he evidently viewed her death as an act of abandonment. In later life, he seldom mentioned her; one of the few times he did so, in his letter to Eliza Browning about his love life, it was in unflattering terms. His father offered little nurturance. Perhaps the best thing Thomas Lincoln ever did for his son was to marry Sarah Bush Johnston, but by the time she arrived in Indiana, the boy's psyche had endured much. Lincoln, suffering from emotional malnutrition, thought himself unloved and unlovable. To compensate for the damage to his self-esteem, he sought in the political arena a surrogate form of the love and acceptance he had not found at home; by winning elections he would prove to himself that he was lovable.⁴⁵

Lincoln's conduct toward Mary Owens may have been affected by his distrust of women, stemming from the death of his mother. The "bitter agony" that Lincoln experienced as a nine-year-old in Indiana seems to have crippled his capacity for trusting and loving women lest they abandon him as his mother had done. Throughout life he

⁴⁴ Louis A. Warren declared that "Lincoln had a decided inferiority complex." Warren, interview with Francis Marion Van Natter, 6 September 1935, notes, Van Natter Papers, Vincennes University. Edgar Lee Masters thought Lincoln "was obsessed with an inferiority complex." Masters, in conversation with Zarel C. Spears, New York, February 1939, quoted in Spears to Robert S. Barton, Bedford Hills, New York, 19 February 1939, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois. William E. Connelley likened Lincoln to a "man with a delicate nervous organization who had ambition and high aspirations, but who mistrusts his culture, his polish, his manner of appearance in the higher social circles." Lincoln, Conelley speculated, "was probably unaware of this mistrust but there was some consciousness of loneliness in him even when in company, resulting in a self-disparagement of his powers." William E. Connelley, p. 4 of a commentary on chapter six of Albert J. Beveridge's biography of Lincoln, memo enclosed in Connelley to Beveridge, [Topeka, Kansas], 7 December 1925, copy, Beveridge Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁵ See Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 236-57.

harbored irrational fears of abandonment. When Joshua Speed married, Lincoln told the newlyweds: “I feel som[e]what jealous of both of you now; you will be so exclusively concerned for one another, that I shall be forgotten entirely.”⁴⁶ In 1858, after his defeat by Stephen A. Douglas, he remarked to a friend: “I expect everybody to desert me.”⁴⁷ In 1839, as already noted, he concluded a speech on banking with a strange peroration, envisioning himself abandoned in his defense of the right, alone boldly hurling defiance at his country’s enemies. In politics, his greatest anger was directed at former allies who had abandoned his party.⁴⁸

COURTING MARY TODD

In addition to illustrating the depth of Lincoln’s inferiority complex and his mistrust of women, the Mary Owens affair also reveals other qualities that were to affect his later courtship of Mary Todd: his extraordinary passivity in dealing with women and his scrupulous determination to carry out promises, even bad ones. Two years after Mary Owens disappeared from Lincoln’s life, he met Mary Todd, another well-educated Kentuckian from a prosperous family. A cousin of his law partner John Todd Stuart, she “came of a very clannish family, not only Scotch but Southern, both noted for clannishness.”⁴⁹ Evidently she “felt that if ‘Cousin John,’ a man whom she admired next

⁴⁶ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 25 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:281.

⁴⁷ Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell Idaho: Caxton, 1940), 467. See also Whitney to Herndon, Chicago, 18 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 620.

⁴⁸ Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 153-55.

⁴⁹ Katherine Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, manuscript version, fragment not appearing in the published biography (Katherine Helm, The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln [New York: Harper, 1928]), William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. On Mary Todd, see Stephen Berry, House of

to her father and Henry Clay, had selected this close associate he must be the same order of man as her cousin.”⁵⁰ At that time she was “short of stature,” having “a plump, round figure,” with features that “were not regularly beautiful,” a “lovely complexion,” “clear blue eyes,” “soft brown hair,” and “a bright intelligent face.” She was “impulsive & made no attempt to conceal her feeling, indeed it would have been an impossibility had she desired to do so, for her face was an index to every passing emotion.” Mary had “an unusual gift of sarcasm” and “now and then indulged in sarcastic, witty remarks, that cut like a Damascus blade.”⁵¹

While in Springfield to visit her sister Elizabeth, who had married Ninian W. Edwards – son of the former governor – Mary Todd met eligible bachelors aplenty at the Edwards’ home, a social center for the city’s elite. In Illinois, a surfeit of unmarried men so longed for mates that a transplanted Kentuckian, John J. Hardin, urged young women from his native state to migrate northward if they wanted husbands.⁵² In 1840, Sangamon County had 24% more men than women.⁵³ Catherine Bergen Jones of Springfield recalled that “In lieu of anything more exciting as a pastime nearly every young man in

Abraham: Lincoln and the he Todds, A Family Divided by War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007); W. A. Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln: A Study of Her Personality and Her Influence on Lincoln (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932); Jean Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987); Ruth Painter Randall, Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953).

⁵⁰ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 62.

⁵¹ Mrs. Elizabeth L. Norris (nee Humphreys) to Emilie Todd Helm, Garden City, Kansas, 28 September 1895, Elizabeth L. Norris Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Sarah Rickard, sister of Mrs. William Butler, interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907. Mrs. Norris was the niece of Elizabeth Humphreys Todd and lived with the Todds while attending school in Lexington. She and Mary were good friends.

⁵² In 1830, Hardin explained to a relative of Mary Todd: “Enterprising young men are numerous and when they have entered their land they want wives, and will have them. It occurred to me that a considerable speculation might be made by a qualified person who would bring out a cargo of the ladies. . . . it would be a very great accommodation to many young ladies of my acquaintance who have been a long time trying to make an equal swap but as yet have not succeeded.” John J. Hardin to Robert W. Scott, Jacksonville, Illinois, 24 September 1830, in Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 69-70.

⁵³ Kenneth J. Winkle, The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 62.

town would ask a young lady to take his arm in the evenings and promenade in a long procession down the muddy paths. Girls were in the minority and even those in their early teens were in demand.”⁵⁴

In the capital’s social whirl during sessions of the legislature, Mary Todd was a belle. Her “trenchant wit, affability, and candor pleased the young men not less than her culture and varied accomplishments impressed the older ones with whom she came in contact.”⁵⁵ She was “the very creature of excitement,” a friend in Springfield reported; she “never enjoys herself more than when in society and surrounded by a company of merry friends.”⁵⁶ One such friend was Joshua Speed, who brought Lincoln along to events at the Edwards home.⁵⁷ Lincoln began seeing Mary in the winter of 1839-40.

Initially, Mrs. Edwards encouraged the romance, for she “Knew he was a rising Man” and “desired Mary at first to Marry L[incoln].” But in time she came to recognize his social deficiencies: “L. Could not hold a lengthy Conversation with a lady – was not sufficiently Educated & intelligent in the female line to do so – He was charmed with Mary’s wit and fascinated with her quick sagacity – her will – her nature – and Culture – I have happened in the room where they were sitting often & often and Mary led the Conversation – Lincoln would listen & gaze on her as if drawn by some Superior power,

⁵⁴ Octavia Roberts Corneau, “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” 9, typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences,” folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library. This version of Mrs. Corneau’s paper is fuller than the one published as “‘We All Knew Abr’ham’” in the Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 4 (1946): 17-29. It is not clear when Mrs. Corneau conducted her interviews. It may have been as early as 1894 or as late as 1902. Margaret A. Flint to Mrs. James G. Randall, Springfield, 21 March 1950, Randal Papers, Library of Congress. On the shortage of women in Springfield, see Winkle, Young Eagle, 62-63.

⁵⁵ William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, Herndon’s Lincoln, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (1889; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 134.

⁵⁶ James C. Conkling to Mercy Levering, Springfield, 21 September 1840, Conkling Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁵⁷ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 134.

irresistably So: he listened – never Scarcely Said a word.” Mrs. Edwards withdrew her earlier support for Lincoln and prophetically told her sister that they were not “Suitable to Each other. . . . Mary was quick, lively, gay – frivalous it may be, Social and loved glitter Show & pomp & power.”⁵⁸ Lincoln was “deeply hurt by the opposition of Mary’s family.”⁵⁹

Lincoln was known in Springfield as “a mighty rough man,” “uncouth,” “moody,” “dull in society,” “careless of his personal appearance,” “awkward and shy.”⁶⁰ When he first arrived at the capital, he confessed to Mary Owens that he did not attend church because, as he put it, “I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself.”⁶¹ Herndon recalled that “Lincoln had poor judgment of the fitness and appropriateness of things. He would wade into a ballroom and speak aloud to some friend: ‘How clean these women look!’”⁶² At Springfield social gatherings, young ladies avoided Lincoln. “We girls,” Catherine Bergen Jones recollected, “maneuvered so as to shift on each other the two awkward, diffident young lawyers, Abraham Lincoln and Samuel H. Treat. We preferred the jovial Robert Allen, Stephen A. Douglas, William Black, or the Jones

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 443. Ninian and Elizabeth Edwards “told Mary & Lincoln that they had better not Ever marry – that their natures, mind – Education – raising &c were So different they Could not live happy as husband & wife.” Ibid. The Edwards’ son Albert told a different version of his parents’ story. He said that they “both liked Mr. Lincoln” and “they had made Lincoln welcome and had encouraged his visits” before the courtship began. But they “didn’t want Mary to marry Mr. Lincoln” because he “then hadn’t \$500 to his name” and he “was just getting started in the practice of his profession.” The Edwardses “felt that he could not support Mary as they thought she ought to be maintained, and for that reason only they opposed the engagement.” And so Elizabeth Edwards “did what she could to break up the match.” Albert Stevenson Edwards, quoted in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 114.

⁵⁹ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 87.

⁶⁰ Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 446; Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 62-63.

⁶¹ Lincoln to Mary Owens, Springfield, 7 May 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:78.

⁶² Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

brothers, John Albert and Edward, for our escorts.”⁶³ The girls may have shunned Lincoln in part because of his ineptitude on the dance floor. When asked why he did not dance, he explained that “my feet weren’t made that way.”⁶⁴ At a party in Jacksonville, Lincoln reportedly approached Mary Todd, saying: “I want to dance with you in the worst way.” Afterwards she told him: “Mr. Lincoln I think you have literally fulfilled your request – you have danced the worst way possible.”⁶⁵

So Mary became aware of Lincoln’s gaucheries early on. His failure to “observe the conventionalities of society” irritated her. When she “poked fun at him for committing some faux pas,” Lincoln “would look at her quizzically . . . as if to say ‘How can you attach such great importance to matters so trivial?’” If “she spoke sharply in reproof, the hurt look in his eyes made her repentant and almost ready to weep.” Her cousin Stephen T. Logan warned Mary that Lincoln “is much too rugged for your little white hands to attempt to polish.” During their courtship she had “a bitter struggle with herself” whenever “Lincoln would carelessly ignore some social custom or forget an engagement.”⁶⁶

(Later, after they were married, she continued to be exasperated by his lack of polish. A Springfield resident, who called Mrs. Lincoln “haughty,” said “it hurt her that Lincoln

⁶³ Reminiscences of Catherine Bergen Jones, daughter of the Reverend Mr. John G. Bergen, who founded the first Presbyterian Church in Springfield, in Eugenia Jones Hunt, My Personal Recollections of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, ed. Helen A. Moser (Peoria, Illinois: Helen A. Moser, 1966), 5.

⁶⁴ Reminiscences of Elizabeth Harmon, Vermilion County Museum, in Donald G. Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie (Mattoon, Illinois: United Graphics, 1999), 225.

⁶⁵ Mrs. Charles Ridgely (née Jane Maria Barret; 1836-1922), who attended the Jacksonville party, told this story to Caroline Owsley Brown. Brown, “Springfield Society before the Civil War,” [Edwards Brown, Jr.], Rewarding Years Recalled (privately published, 1973), 35-36. This is a fuller version of Mrs. Brown’s article, originally written for the “Anti Rust Club,” than the one of the same title published in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 15 (1922).

⁶⁶ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 80-81, 83.

was so plain and dressed so plain.”⁶⁷ Her half-sister Emilie reported that “she complained because L. would open [the] front door instead of having [a] servant do so and because L. would eat butter with his knife she raised ‘merry war.’”⁶⁸ When a friend remarked, “Mary if I had a husband with a mind like yours [has,] I wouldn[’]t care what he did,” she admitted: “It is very foolish. It is a small thing to complain of.”⁶⁹ Whenever he answered the door in his shirtsleeves and told callers that he would “trot [the] woman folks out,” it “made Mrs L. mad.”⁷⁰ As president, he often read in his stocking feet, prompting Mary Lincoln to order a servant to fetch his slippers. Extremely clothes-conscious, she would “criticize his cuffs for being a trifle more frayed than was becoming to his position,” and protested that he did not remove his hat “decently.” She asked Ward Hill Lamon to instruct her husband how to do so, but despite the best efforts of Lamon and William Henry Seward, the president was unable to master that social grace.)⁷¹

Just how Lincoln courted Mary Todd is unclear. When in Springfield, he regularly spent Sundays at the Edwards home.⁷² Ninian Edwards recalled that “Mr. Lincoln and Mr

⁶⁷ Mrs. John Lyman Child, interviewed by Katherine Pope, “Memories of Lincoln’s Day,” Streator, Illinois, Independent Times, clipping [1920], Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, vol. 9, p. 2235, Library of Congress.

⁶⁸ Emilie Todd Helm, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 22 March 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 612.

⁶⁹ Norman F. Boas, “Unpublished Manuscripts: Recollections of Mary Todd Lincoln by Her Sister Emilie Todd Helm; An Invitation to a Lincoln Party,” Manuscripts 43 (Winter 1991): 25. I am indebted to S. L. Carson for calling this to my attention.

⁷⁰ Harriet A. Chapman, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886-87], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 646.

⁷¹ Julia Taft Bayne, Tad Lincoln’s Father (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), 3; Henry W. Fischer, Abroad with Mark Twain and Eugene Field: Tales They Told to a Fellow Correspondent (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1922), 118–19. Early in the Civil War, Robert Gould Shaw reported that while reviewing troops, Lincoln “took off his hat in the most awkward way, putting it on again with his hand on the back part of the rim, country fashion.” Shaw to his mother, [Washington], 27 April 1861, Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, ed. Russell Duncan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 82.

⁷² Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 446.

Speed were frequently at our house – seemed to enjoy themselves in their conversation beneath the dense shade of our forest trees.”⁷³ But Lincoln could not have visited that home often in the winter and spring of 1840, for politics and his law practice frequently took him out of town. He would not have seen much of Mary Todd in the summer, which she spent with relatives in Missouri. When she returned, Lincoln was busily campaigning throughout southern Illinois.⁷⁴ He did not mention her in any of the surviving letters he wrote in 1840, nor does her correspondence or that of their friends refer to any romance between them that year.⁷⁵ Joshua Speed said that they courted through the mails that fall: “In 1840 Lincoln went into the Southern partt of the State as Elector Canvasser debator Speaker – Here first wrote his Mary – She darted after him – wrote him.”⁷⁶

Others confirmed Speed’s report that Mary Todd took the initiative in the courtship. In 1875, Orville H. Browning told an interviewer: “I always thought then and ever since that in her affair with Mr. Lincoln, Mary Todd did most of the courting.” Browning added that “Miss Todd was thoroughly in earnest [in] her endeavors to get Mr. Lincoln” and stated flatly, there “is no doubt of her exceeding anxiety to marry him.” Browning related that in “those times I was at Mr. Edwards’ a great deal, and Miss Todd used to sit down with me, and talk to me sometimes till midnight, about this affair of hers with Mr.

⁷³ Elizabeth and Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, 27 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 623.

⁷⁴ Douglas Wilson, Honor’s Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Knopf, 1998), 213-30. I have relied heavily on Wilson’s persuasive account, based on a careful, sensitive analysis of the confusing evidence about the courtship.

⁷⁵ In letters to his fiancée (Mary’s close friend Mercy Levering), James Conkling related much gossip about Springfield social life in general and Mary Todd in particular, but he did not mention any relationship between Lincoln and Mary Todd. Conkling to Levering, Springfield, 21 September, 24 October, and 7 December 1840, Conkling Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁷⁶ Joshua F. Speed, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 474.

Lincoln.”⁷⁷ William Butler’s sister-in-law, Sarah Rickard, thought that Mary Todd “certainly made most of the plans and did the courting” and “would have him [Lincoln], whether or no.” She alleged that “it was the talk of Springfield that Mary Todd would marry him in spite of himself.”⁷⁸ Herndon believed that “Miss Todd wanted L. terribly and worked, played her cards, through Mrs. [Simeon] Francis’s hands.”⁷⁹ In pursuing her quarry, “she read much & committed much to memory to make herself agreeable.”⁸⁰ They evidently became engaged some time in the fall of 1840, after spending little time together. Lincoln’s matrimonial rashness in dealing with Mary Todd recalls his acceptance of Betsey Abell’s 1836 proposition that he wed Mary Owens.

Why they decided to marry is difficult to understand, for they were, as Elizabeth Edwards and many others noted, quite different.⁸¹ Howard M. Powel, a Springfield neighbor, recalled that “Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were not a congenial couple; their tastes were so different that when a boy I often wondered why they were married.”⁸² William

⁷⁷ Orville H. Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2.

⁷⁸ Sarah Rickard interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907.

⁷⁹ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 January 1889, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Herndon claimed that Joshua Speed informed him of this collusion.

⁸⁰ Notes of a conversation with Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards, 1895, “Lincoln Marriage” folder, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁸¹ Mary Todd’s defensive biographer Ruth Painter Randall acknowledged that she and Abraham Lincoln “had come into the world endowed with qualities of personality and temperament singularly opposite. In family background and environment up to the time of their meeting there was violent contrast.” Randall, Mary Todd Lincoln, 20. Another defensive biographer, Jean Baker, observed that “clearly Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln were an oddly matched couple.” Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 83. Albert J. Beveridge noted that “[f]ew couples have been more unsuited in temperament, manners, taste, and everything else.” Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:312.

⁸² Reminiscences of H. M. Powel, Taylorville, Illinois, Semi-Weekly Breeze, 12 February 1909. As a youth of twelve and thirteen, Powel (b. 1839) recalled, he was hired to spend the night at the Lincoln home while Lincoln was away on business. From the summer of 1851 to the fall of 1853, Powel said, he often visited the Lincolns. His father was Richard Powel (1801-75), born in Pennsylvania and living in Parkersburg, Virginia, in September 1851, when he moved his family to Springfield, where they lived until 1853, when they settled in Taylorville. Portrait and Biographical Record of Christian County, Illinois (Chicago: Lake City, 1893), 286.

Herndon concluded that she was “the exact reverse” of her husband in “figure and physical proportions, in education, bearing, temperament, history – in everything.”⁸³

Mary Lincoln herself referred to “our opposite natures” when discussing her marriage.⁸⁴

Their backgrounds could hardly have been more dissimilar. Almost ten years after Lincoln was born in the Kentucky backwoods, Eliza Parker Todd, descendant of friends of George Washington, and Robert S. Todd, son of the eminent General Levi Todd, had their fourth child – a daughter they whom named Mary. The Todds lived in a very different Kentucky from the one inhabited by Thomas Lincoln, occupying as they did a prominent social position in Lexington, self-identified as “the Athens of the West.” While young Abe supplemented his all-too-brief formal education by reading in his spare time, Mary Todd was sent to Lexington’s best private schools, among them Madame Victorie Charlotte Leclere Mentelle’s Academy, where French was spoken exclusively. There she studied social graces like conversation, dancing, and letter writing. Soon after Lincoln’s sister died bearing a child to a frontiersman in Indiana, Mary Todd’s sister Elizabeth wed the son of Illinois’ governor. When Lincoln left his father’s cabin for New Salem, Mary Todd visited the stately mansion of Henry Clay to show off her new pony.⁸⁵

For all their differences, Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd did share an important childhood experience in common: the premature death of their mothers. Mary was six when Eliza Parker Todd succumbed to a postbirth bacterial infection; Lincoln was nine when the milk sick cut short Nancy Hanks’s life. From these grim losses, both children

⁸³ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 134.

⁸⁴ Mary Lincoln to Abram Wakeman, Washington, 30 January [1865], in Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 200.

⁸⁵ Mary Todd Lincoln, interview with Herndon, [September 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 357; Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 1-5.

sustained debilitating psychological wounds that contributed to the marital problems they would later face.

Mary Todd called her privileged childhood “desolate” not only because of the actual death of her mother but also because of the metaphorical death of her father.⁸⁶ After her mother died, Mary evidently received little attention from Robert Smith Todd, who, a scant few weeks after his wife’s burial, traveled secretly to nearby Frankfort and courted young Elizabeth “Betsey” Humphreys, whom he wed a year later.⁸⁷ To Mary’s chagrin, the couple produced eight half-siblings for her over the next fifteen years. She evidently felt betrayed, abandoned, and rejected by her “impetuous, high-strung, sensitive” father.⁸⁸ As a result, deep-seated anger at him apparently smoldered in her unconscious.

Mary Todd was also angry at Elizabeth Humphreys Todd; according to Elizabeth Todd, her sister “left her home in Kentucky to avoid living under the same roof with a stepmother.”⁸⁹ Mary was not the only disaffected child of Robert Smith Todd’s first marriage. Her younger brother George “complained bitterly” about Betsey Humphreys’ “settled hostility” and alleged that he had been forced to leave “his father’s house in

⁸⁶ Mary Todd Lincoln to Eliza Stuart Steele, Chicago, May [23, 1871], Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 588.

⁸⁷ The Humphreys family was highly educated and accomplished. Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 34.

⁸⁸ William H. Townsend, Lincoln and His Wife’s Home Town (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), 46; Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 24, 28-32, 330-32, 333; Charles B. Strozier, Lincoln’s Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 72-73. Mary Lincoln’s letters say almost nothing about her father, mother, or stepmother. Jean Baker suggests that even before the death of her mother, Mary Todd had suffered dislocating shocks, including abrupt weaning at age one, when her mother delivered another baby; the loss of a brother when she was four; and the surrender of her middle name, Ann, when she was five. Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 28.

⁸⁹ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 133, quoting a statement given by Mrs. Edwards to Herndon on 3 August 1887. She also told Herndon that Mary “had a Step Mother with whom she did not agree.” Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 443.

consequence of the malignant & continued attempts on the part of his stepmother to poison the mind of his father toward him.” George claimed that his father was “mortified that his last child by his first wife should be obliged, like all his other first children, to abandon his house by the relentless persecution of a stepmother.”⁹⁰

George evidently articulated the profound resentment that the children of Robert Todd’s first marriage, like many other stepchildren, harbored against their father and stepmother.⁹¹ All of Eliza Todd’s daughters quit Lexington when of age.⁹² The eldest, Elizabeth, married Ninian W. Edwards and settled in Springfield, where her sisters moved, were introduced to society, and wed.⁹³ Robert and Betsey Todd rarely visited these offspring, who seldom returned to Kentucky. Exacerbating family tensions was the hostility of Eliza Todd’s mother, the formidable Widow Parker, toward her son-in-law and his second wife.⁹⁴

Mary Todd had some legitimate grievances against her stepmother. She confided to a friend that her “early home was truly at a boarding school,” Madame Mentelle’s Academy.⁹⁵ Mary “was a bundle of nervous activity, wilful and original in planning

⁹⁰ Deposition in the case of George R. C. Todd v. Elizabeth L. Todd et al., regarding the estate of Robert S. Todd, in Townsend, Lincoln and His Wife’s Home Town, 229.

⁹¹ Irene Fast and Albert C. Cain, “The Step-Parent Role: Potential for Disturbances in Family Functioning,” American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 36 (1966): 485-91.

⁹² Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 74-75.

⁹³ Mrs. Edwards informed her granddaughter, Mary Edwards Brown, that her younger sisters (including Mary) “had visited her in Springfield because of their differences with their stepmother but that in her after years she thought their stepmother had done very well by them.” Jessie Palmer Weber to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 23 March 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁴ Townsend, Lincoln and His Wife’s Home Town, 74; Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 17; Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 29.

⁹⁵ Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Keckley, Chicago, 29 October [1867], Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 447; Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 40-45.

mischief” and therefore clashed “with her very conventional young stepmother.”⁹⁶ At the age of ten, Mary had a row with Betsey Todd when the youngster awkwardly deployed willow branches to convert her narrow frock into a hoop skirt. Upon seeing the clumsy result, the stepmother ordered Mary and her niece Elizabeth to “take those things off, & then go to Sunday school.” Elizabeth remembered that she and Mary “went to our room chagrined and angry. Mary burst into tears and gave the first exhibition of temper I had ever seen or known her to make. She thought we were badly treated – and expressed herself freely on the subject.”⁹⁷

As an adult, Mary continued to have difficulties with her stepmother. In the late 1840s, while Lincoln attended Congress, his wife and their two boys, Robert and Eddie, stayed with the Todds in Lexington. One day Eddie Lincoln brought in a kitten, much to his step-grandmother’s dismay. Mrs. Lincoln reported the sequel to her husband: “In the midst of his happiness Ma [Betsey Todd] came in, she you must know dislikes the whole cat race, I thought in a very unfeeling manner, she ordered the servant near, to throw it out, which, of course, was done, Ed – screaming & protesting loudly against the proceeding, she never appeared to mind his screams, which were long & loud, I assure you.” Significantly she added: “Tis unusual for her now a days, to do any thing quite so striking, she is very obliging & accommodating, but if she thought any of us, were on her hands again, I believe she would be worse than ever.”⁹⁸ Mary Lincoln underscored now a days, implying that such unfeeling treatment of children was common earlier. Perhaps

⁹⁶ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 17.

⁹⁷ E[lizabeth] Humphreys Norris to Emilie [Todd Helm], Garden City, Kansas, 28 September 1895, Norris Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹⁸ Mary Lincoln to her husband, Lexington, May 1848, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 37.

Betsey Todd's indifference to Eddie's sensibilities reminded Mary of similar episodes in her own childhood.

Mary Todd may also have disliked Betsey Humphreys Todd for bearing nine rivals for paternal favor. During the Civil War, all but one of these half-siblings supported the Southern cause. In 1862, the First Lady shocked a confidante by expressing the hope that her brothers in Confederate uniform would be captured or slain. "They would kill my husband if they could, and destroy our Government – the dearest of all things to us," she declared, shortly after her half-brother Samuel had died at the battle of Shiloh.⁹⁹ When her half-brother Alexander was killed in 1863, Mary Lincoln said "it is but natural that I should feel for one so nearly related to me," but Alexander had "made his choice long ago. He decided against my husband, and through him against me. He has been fighting against us; and since he chose to be our deadly enemy, I see no special reason why I should bitterly mourn his death."¹⁰⁰ When the press condemned her sadistic brother David, chief of Richmond's prisons during the war, she stated that "by no word or act of hers should he escape punishment for his treason against her husband's government."¹⁰¹

Though such evidence of Mary Todd's attitude toward her family is hardly conclusive, it does suggest that she was enraged but unable to vent her rage directly. It also suggests that she required a surrogate father; indeed, she may have married Lincoln

⁹⁹ Noyes W. Miner, "Mrs. Abraham Lincoln: A Vindication," 2–3, manuscript, Small Collection 1052, folder 1, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. This document, dated New York, 1 April 1888, appeared in the New York Tribune, 15 April 1888. Samuel B. Todd was born in 1830. Miner (1818-93), pastor of the First Baptist Church of Springfield, lived for a while at Eighth and Jackson Streets, at the same intersection where the Lincolns resided, and later moved to 7th Street between Jackson and Edwards. Wayne C. Temple, Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet (Mahomet, Illinois: Mayhaven, 1995), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868), 135–36. Alexander H. Todd was killed at Baton Rouge on 5 August 1863.

¹⁰¹ Eliode Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, 23 July 1861, in Berry, House of Abraham, 92.

in part because she needed someone like a benevolent paterfamilias to indulge her. When Robert Smith Todd began a second family, he created a void in Mary’s life that Lincoln was ideally qualified to fill. More than a foot taller and nearly ten years older than Mary, he radiated the quality of being old.¹⁰² During Lincoln’s early years in Springfield, one observer said that the lanky attorney called to mind “the pictures I formerly saw of old Father Jupiter, bending down from the clouds, to see what was going on below,” especially when Lincoln conversed with young women at parties: just “as an agreeable smile of satisfaction graced the countenance of the old heathen god, as he perceived the incense rising up – so the face of L[incoln] was occasionally distorted into a grin as he succeeded in eliciting applause from some of the fair votaries by whom he was surrounded.”¹⁰³ Among such “fair votaries” was Mary Todd, a young woman likely to be attracted to a man resembling Father Jupiter.

Mary Todd may have sensed that Lincoln would take care of her like a kind father.¹⁰⁴ She certainly needed a great deal of looking after, for she had mental problems, including manic-depressive disorder.¹⁰⁵ Orville H. Browning, who thought her “demented,” recalled that she “was a girl of much vivacity in conversation, but was subject to . . .

¹⁰² Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 73-91.

¹⁰³ James C. Conkling to Mercy Levering, Springfield, 7 March 1841, Carl Sandburg and Paul M. Angle, Mary Lincoln: Wife and Widow (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 180-81.

¹⁰⁴ One of Mary Todd’s biographers, Ruth Painter Randall, speculated that her subject, an “emotionally unstable girl,” might “unconsciously have sensed” that Lincoln “was one who would pass her ‘imperfections lightly by,’ who would deal gently, understandingly, and paternally with her undisciplined and often headstrong spirit,” and that she “needed a slow, balanced, deliberate person” like Lincoln “to look after her.” Randall, The Courtship of Mr. Lincoln (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), 87, 41.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Lincoln’s symptoms fit the description of manic-depressive illness as given in Kay Redfield Jamison, Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament (New York: Free Press, 1993). On her narcissism, see James A. Brussel, “Mary Todd Lincoln: A Psychiatric Study,” Psychiatric Quarterly 15, 16 (1941), 14, and Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 330-32. Studies of her mental state have suffered from incomplete awareness of her symptoms and behavior. See John M. Suarez, “Mary Todd Lincoln: A Case Study,” American Journal of Psychiatry 122 (1966), 816-19; Jennifer Bach, “Was Mary Todd Lincoln Bipolar?” Journal of Illinois History 8 (2005): 281-94; Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.

spells of mental depression. . . . As we used familiarly to state it she was always ‘either in the garret or cellar.’”¹⁰⁶ A childhood friend, Margaret Stuart, testified that Mary in her Kentucky years was “very highly strung, nervous, impulsive, excitable, having an emotional temperament much like an April day, sunning all over with laughter one moment, the next crying as though her heart would break.”¹⁰⁷ Manic depression is not the only diagnosis that seems to fit Mary Lincoln’s condition; she exhibited many symptoms associated with narcissism and borderline personality disorder.¹⁰⁸ Her nephew, Albert Stevenson Edwards, believed that she “was insane from the time of her husband[’s] death until her own death.”¹⁰⁹ In 1875, an Illinois court adjudged her insane and had her confined in a mental hospital.¹¹⁰ David Davis, alluding to her conduct as First Lady during the Civil War, called her a “natural born thief” for whom “stealing was a sort of insanity.”¹¹¹ He thought she was deranged as far back as the 1840s.¹¹² In Springfield it was reported that her “mania was for shopping which she pitifully carried to the extreme of shop-lifting. Her family devised schemes to shield her and to protect or reimburse the

¹⁰⁶ Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 330.

¹⁰⁹ Albert S. Edwards to S. M. Inglis, Springfield, 20 February 1897, Small Collection 923, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹¹⁰ On 19 May 1875, she was adjudged insane. The following day she was taken to the Bellevue Place sanitarium in Batavia, Illinois, which advertised itself as a “Hospital for the Insane of the Private Class.” She was released in the following September. See Mark E. Neely, Jr., and R. Gerald McMurtry, The Insanity File: The Case of Mary Todd Lincoln (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Jason Emerson, The Madness of Mary Lincoln (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

¹¹¹ Davis told this to Orville Hickman Browning in 1873. Browning diary, 3 July 1873, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹¹² When Mary Todd Lincoln died in 1882, Davis wrote: “Poor Mrs. Lincoln! She is at last at rest. She has been a deranged woman, ever since her husband’s death. In fact she was so, during his life.” Davis to Adeline Burr, 19 July 1882, Adeline Ellery Burr Davis Green Papers, Duke University. I am grateful to Jason Emerson for calling this document to my attention.

merchants.”¹¹³ After her husband’s death, she looted the White House, sending many of its contents to Springfield. According to A. K. McClure, his friend Thaddeus Stevens, chairman of the ways and means committee of the U. S. House, adroitly concealed the scandal and persuaded Congress to appropriate funds to refurnish the Executive Mansion. McClure concluded that “she was mentally unbalanced when she came to Washington and seemed to have been . . . all her life.”¹¹⁴

Mary Todd was not the only member of her family with psychiatric problems. Dr. George R. C. Todd, youngest of her biological siblings, was especially troubled. A fellow physician in South Carolina who knew him well said that Dr. Todd referred to himself as the “black sheep” of the family, that he did “not get along with people,” that he was “very egotistical, and extremely jealous of his professional reputation. Very peculiar and eccentric. Drank whiskey to excess.” Dr. Todd’s lawyer recalled that he was “inclined to be abrupt almost to brusqueness in his manner to those whom he did not like.” He “took no pains to conceal his dislike for those who had incurred his displeasure” and “refused to consort with his own contemporaries to any great extent.” He was “given to moods of deep melancholy.”¹¹⁵ Like his sister Mary, he had an explosive temper that bordered on madness. He was described by a Union prisoner-of-war as “the most vicious wretch I ever knew” because he cruelly mistreated enemy patients. During the Civil War,

¹¹³ Lulu Robinson, “Childhood and Girlhood Recollections about Lincoln,” enclosed in Lulu Robinson to a Miss Warner, Bloomington, Indiana, 17 October 1950, Lincoln Collection, Indiana University. Lulu J. Robinson was the granddaughter of James C. Robinson, a prominent Democrat in Lincoln’s day who served in congress during the Civil War. She heard stories from her grandfather about the Lincolns. He moved to Springfield in 1868, when residents were still speaking often about the Lincolns.

¹¹⁴ A. K. McClure to Alonzo Rothschild, Philadelphia, 9 May 1907, Lincoln Contemporaries Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; David Davis statement in the Orville Hickman Browning diary, 3 July 1873, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

The New York Herald reported that “Mrs. Lincoln’s agitation nearly discovered [i.e., revealed] the whole secret.” Harrisburg correspondence 23 February, New York Herald, 24 February 1861.

¹¹⁵ Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, 47-50.

he would, in “raving fits of madness,” assault sick and wounded Yankees under his care. When a young Union lieutenant from Kentucky irritated him, Dr. Todd “pulled him off the bunk to the floor and kicked him in the most brutal manner.” Upon the death of the prisoner the next day, Dr. Todd declared: “I am G-d d—d glad of it. I meant to kill the son of a b—h before he left here.”¹¹⁶ During the Gettysburg campaign, he infuriated Northerners by looting private homes.¹¹⁷ He told dubious tales about his role in divvying up the last of the Confederate treasury in 1865.¹¹⁸ He also claimed, most improbably, that had visited the White House early in the war and aroused the president’s suspicions about his loyalty; when ordered to be arrested, he said, he outwitted his pursuers and escaped.

Other siblings betrayed signs of mental instability. Mary’s eccentric, heavily tattooed half-brother David, who ran away from home at the age of fourteen, also mistreated Union prisoners.¹¹⁹ Stationed briefly at Libby Prison in Richmond, with the rank of captain in the Confederate Army, David Todd, who was known as one of the most sadistic officers in that grim facility, slashed POWs with his saber, kicked the corpses of Union dead, calling them damned abolitionists, and declared regularly: “I would like to cut ‘Old Abe’s’ heart out.”¹²⁰ He claimed, most improbably, that had visited the White House early in the war and aroused the president’s suspicions about his loyalty; when

¹¹⁶ Testimony of Captain C. W. Brant, in Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Rebel Authorities during the War of the Rebellion, Serial Set # 1391, House Report # 45, 40th Congress, 3rd session (Washington, 1869), 1086. See also testimony by H. A. Coats, ibid., 1005, 1008.

¹¹⁷ Berry, House of Abraham, 141.

¹¹⁸ Undated, unidentified clipping, Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, vol. 9, p. 1805, Library of Congress; Berry, House of Abraham, 188-89.

¹¹⁹ See Berry, House of Abraham, 44-45.

¹²⁰ Washington correspondence, 1 October, New York Times, 2 October 1861; testimony of Charles S. Cooper, Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Rebel Authorities, 862; Berry, House of Abraham, 83-98.

ordered to be arrested, he outwitted his pursuers and managed to escape.¹²¹ In 1871, he died supposedly of wounds sustained at Vicksburg, but some friends maintained that “he had been shot in a whore house brawl before he went to War . . . and that this old wound had more to do with his early demise than the Yankee Minie [bullet].”¹²²

Mary’s brother Levi, two years her senior, was described by his wife as an improvident drunkard with a cruel and “inhuman manner.” He alienated family and acquaintances and died friendless at an insane asylum in 1864.¹²³ Mary’s “pugnacious, loud voiced” sister Ann was “the most quick tempered and vituperative” of Robert Smith Todd’s daughters, with a face “exactly like a pug bulldog.”¹²⁴ Mary called Ann a woman who “possesses such a miserable disposition & so false a tongue” that “no one respects” her. Ann’s “tongue for so many years, has been considered ‘no slander’ – and as a child & young girl, [she] could not be outdone in falsehood. . . . I grieve for those, who have to come in contact with her malice, yet even that, is so well understood, [that] the object of her wrath, generally rises, with good people, in proportion to her vindictiveness.”¹²⁵ (When shown this assessment of her character, Ann replied with some justice: “Mary was writing about herself.”)¹²⁶

¹²¹ Emilie Todd Helm scrapbook, cited in Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 318.

¹²² William H. Townsend to Harry E. Pratt, n.p., 22 March 1954, carbon copy, Townsend Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹²³ Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, 44-48; Berry, House of Abraham, 173-74; Temple, From Skeptic to Prophet, 421.

¹²⁴ Jessie Palmer Weber to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 23 March 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress; Albert J. Beveridge to [William E. Barton], Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, 4 January 1926, Lincoln Collection, Brown University. In his letter, Beveridge cited as his source Mrs. Weber, who remembered Ann well. She said Ann was “usually in a temper.”

¹²⁵ Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, Washington, 29 September 1861, in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 105.

¹²⁶ Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, 105.

Mary's niece Julia, daughter of Elizabeth Edwards, was also mentally unstable. "Insanity," Elizabeth said in 1875, "appeared . . . in the case of my own daughter, at the early age of thirteen, – for six months, she was so decidedly flighty, as to be closely guarded." At "no time has she ever been natural in her demeanor. God pity those who are the victims – and who are the anxious sufferers in such terrible afflictions!"¹²⁷ Born in 1837, the beautiful Julia at the age of eighteen wed Edward Lewis Baker, co-owner of the Springfield Illinois State Journal. A good friend of Julia's, Ada Bailhache, wife of Edward Baker's business partner, recalled that "Mrs Baker was a wayward girl and very attractive woman to the great sorrow of her family and friends. There was a scandal connected with her about 1872, and Mr Baker was sent as Consul to the Argentine Republic where they remained until Mr Baker's death [in 1897] He was probably not molested in courtesy to [the] memory of Lincoln, as it was better for them not to return." The "blow to her mother and father, was one they never recovered from."¹²⁸ Because Julia was unable to manage her own affairs, a court in the 1870s appointed a trustee for her.¹²⁹ Mary Lincoln referred to her niece as a "poor, silly" creature and expressed sympathy for Elizabeth Edwards: "How unfortunate a Mother, must consider

¹²⁷ Elizabeth Edwards to Robert Todd Lincoln, Springfield, 13 August 1875, Insanity File, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹²⁸ Mrs. William H. Bailhache (née Ada Brayman) to Truman Bartlett, Coronado, Colorado, 4 July 1912, Truman Bartlett Papers, Boston University. Bailhache and Baker, who had owned the Alton Telegraph, bought the Springfield newspaper in 1855. In 1869, Baker (1829-97) was appointed U. S. Assessor, a post he held until its abolition in 1873, when President Grant named him U. S. Consul in Buenos Aires. There he spent the remainder of his life. Upon his death, Julia Edwards Baker (1837-1908) settled in Chicago. Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 31 July 1908.

¹²⁹ That trustee was Christopher Columbus Brown. "Condemnation proceedings to acquire more State House land," manuscript dated 3 April 1878, State House File, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, cited in Temple, From Skeptic to Prophet, 384. A map dated 1878 shows a plot of land across from the state capitol owned by "Christopher C. Brown trustee of Julia C. Baker." Wayne C. Temple, "Alfred Henry Piquenard: Architect of Illinois' Sixth Capitol," in Mark W. Sorenson, ed., Capitol Centennial Papers: Papers Prepared for the Centennial Observation of the Completion of the Illinois State Capitol, 1888 (Springfield: Illinois State Archives, 1990), 24.

herself, to so rear, a child – Naturally weak.” When she visited Washington in 1864, Julia Baker scandalized polite society with her bizarre, risqué behavior.¹³⁰

Other signs of mental instability appeared in Mary Todd’s relatives. A niece, Elizabeth Edwards Clover (Julia Baker’s sister), inherited much of her famous aunt’s wardrobe, which she regularly wore, even though the large silk skirts, lace shawls, and tiny carriage parasols had long since passed out of style. No one “thought anything of it” because “the Todds had always been eccentric.”¹³¹ Mary’s sister Elodie told her fiancé, “I am a Todd, and some of these days you may be unfortunate enough to find out what they are.” She confessed to him that “I cannot govern my temper or tongue” and that “I am one of the most unforgiving creatures you ever knew [of].”¹³² The daughter of Mary Todd Lincoln’s nephew, Albert S. Edwards (Julia Baker’s brother), died in the Norbury Sanitarium, a “Private Residential Home for the Treatment of Nervous and Mental Disorders.”¹³³ A nephew, the son of Mary’s sister Ann, was reportedly “very peculiar – almost if not quite crazy” as well as an alcoholic.¹³⁴ The daughter of Mary Todd Lincoln’s nephew, Albert S. Edwards (Julia Baker’s brother), died in the Norbury Sanitarium, a “Private Residential Home for the Treatment of Nervous and Mental

¹³⁰ Mary Lincoln to Mercy Levering Conkling, 19 November [1864], Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 187-88.

¹³¹ Octavia Roberts Corneau (Mrs. Barton Corneau), “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, 17, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences” folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Octavia Roberts, “We All Knew Abr’ham,” 29. Mrs. Clover (b. 1843) was the daughter of Ninian Edwards and Elizabeth Todd Edwards. In 1863, she married Eugene C. Clover, who became rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Springfield. After he was killed in the Civil War, she lived with her parents in Springfield.

¹³² Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, 23 May, 23 July, 21 June 1861, Dawson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in Berry, House of Abraham, xi, 128.

¹³³ Temple, From Skeptic to Prophet, 384.

¹³⁴ W. A. Evans to William E. Barton, Chicago, 24 July 1929, Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

Disorders.”¹³⁵ In 1906, Mary Lincoln’s son Robert told his aunt Emilie Todd Helm: “I was so much out of sorts when your letter came that I could not write you A good deal of work & bother seem to have brought on again my old nervous breakdown & I am breaking away from business & hope to be in Augusta Ga.” He also reported to her that he was “in the depths of gloom.”¹³⁶ According to Robert, his cousin Mattie Todd of Cynthiana, Kentucky, the daughter of Mary Todd Lincoln’s brother George, “became so disordered” at the age of fifty-four that she was committed to a sanitarium in Cincinnati.¹³⁷ Mary Todd’s grandniece, Nellie Canfield, committed suicide. According to Elizabeth Edwards, she had “a hereditary liability to insanity. . . . Her grandfather [Mary’s brother Levi Owen Todd] died in an insane assylum, and there are now fourteen members of the Canfield family, in the various assylums.”¹³⁸

Lincoln may have admired Mary Todd’s “naturally fine mind and cultivated tastes,” for she was “a great reader and possessed of a remarkably retentive memory,” was “quick at repartee and when the occasion seemed to require it was sarcastic and severe,” and her “brilliant conversation, often embellished with apt quotations,” made her “much sought after by the young people of the town.”¹³⁹ In addition, Mary Todd’s youthful qualities may have appealed to Lincoln. A woman in Washington during the Civil War believed that the president saw in his wife, “despite her foibles and sometimes

¹³⁵ Temple, From Skeptic to Prophet, 384.

¹³⁶ R. T. Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, Chicago, 25 January 1906, R. T. Lincoln Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹³⁷ Robert Todd Lincoln to Ben [Helm], Chicago, 11 January 1909, R. T. Lincoln Papers, Chicago History Museum. Mattie Dee Todd was born in 1858 and died in 1909.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Todd Edwards to Emilie Todd Helm, Springfield, 22 June [no year indicated], Emilie Todd Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort. Nellie was the granddaughter of Mary’s brother Levi Owen Todd, who married Louisa Searles. Their daughter Ella married John C. Canfield.

¹³⁹ Mary Edwards Raymond, Some Incidents in the Life of Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards (n.p.: n.p., 1909), 11–12.

her puerileness, just what he needed.” Those foibles included “natural want of tact,” “deficiency in the sense of the fitness of things,” “blundering outspokenness,” and “impolitic disregard of diplomatic considerations.”¹⁴⁰ That very puerileness was perhaps what attracted him to her; with his deep paternal streak, he enjoyed children and child surrogates.¹⁴¹ Mary Todd fit that role well; as Helen Nicolay put it, Lincoln’s “attitude toward his wife had something of the paternal in it, almost as though she were a child, under his protection.”¹⁴² Lincoln’s solicitude for his wife resembled his feelings toward General Joseph Hooker, who in 1863 led the Army of the Potomac to defeat at Chancellorsville. Lincoln said he “regarded Hooker very much as a father might regard a son who was lame, or who had some other incurable physical infirmity. His love for his son would be even intensified by the reflection that the lad could never be a strong and successful man.”¹⁴³

Thus, when Lincoln proposed to Mary Todd – the exact date is uncertain – he did so because, in all likelihood, he believed she wanted him to do so and because he desired a “child-wife.”

¹⁴⁰ Laura Catherine Redden Searing, writing under the pen name Howard Glyndon, “The Truth about Mrs. Lincoln,” The Independent (New York), 10 August 1882. Another female journalist also found her essentially childish. Mary Clemmer [Ames], Ten Years in Washington; or, Inside Life and Scenes in Our National Capital as a Woman Sees Them (Hartford: Hartford Publishing Co., 1882), 236-42.

¹⁴¹ Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 73-91.

¹⁴² Helen Nicolay, Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Century, 1912), 205. According to Ruth Painter Randall, Lincoln needed “someone of his very own to pet and humor.” Mary Todd “aroused the paternal instinct that was always so strong an element in his make-up.” Randall, Courtship of Lincoln, 88, 40, 193.

¹⁴³ Noah Brooks, Washington, D.C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 62-63. Moved to tears, Hooker told Noah Brooks, “Well, the President may regard me as a cripple; but if he will give me a chance, I will yet show him that I know how to fight.” Hooker did in fact achieve distinction later as a corps commander.

In late 1840, Lincoln broke the engagement, for he realized that he and Mary Todd “were not congenial, and were incompatible” and “ought not to marry.”¹⁴⁴ He may well have doubted his ability to satisfy her emotional neediness. After his death, she stated that, despite his “deep feeling” and his “amiable nature,” Lincoln was “not, a demonstrative man, when he felt most deeply, he expressed, the least.”¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Edwards called Lincoln “a cold man” with “no affection.”¹⁴⁶ Herndon, who thought “Lincoln was not a warm hearted man,” declared that he “ought never to have married,” for he “had no quality for a husband. He was abstracted, cool, never loved, and could not from his very nature.”¹⁴⁷ Henry C. Whitney agreed.¹⁴⁸

Another consideration gave Lincoln pause as he contemplated marriage: in the autumn of 1840 he fell in love with Matilda Edwards, a beautiful eighteen-year-old cousin of Ninian Edwards who had come to Springfield from Alton and stayed with Mary Todd at the Edwards home.¹⁴⁹ Like many other young women, she visited the capital

¹⁴⁴ “Brief account of Lincoln’s courtship & marriage,” typescript marked “From Ms. in [Oliver] Barrett Collection – S. C. Parks,” Carl Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois.

¹⁴⁵ Mary Lincoln to Josiah G. Holland, Chicago, 4 December 1865, and to James Smith, [Marienbad, 8 June 1870], Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 293, 566.

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 443.

¹⁴⁷ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 February 1887, and to Henry C. Whitney, Springfield, 16 April 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁸ Whitney believed that “so great & peculiar a man as Lincoln could not make any woman happy,” for “he was too much allied to his intellect to get down to the plane of the domestic relations.” Whitney to Herndon, Chicago, 4 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 621.

¹⁴⁹ On Matilda Edwards and Lincoln, see Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 219-42, and “Abraham Lincoln and ‘That Fatal First of January,’” in Douglas L. Wilson, Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 99-132; J. Bennett Nolan, “Of a Tomb in the Reading Cemetery and the Long Shadow of Abraham Lincoln,” Pennsylvania History 19 (1952): 262-306; Orville H. Browning, interview with Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 1; Harry O. Knerr, two essays, both titled “Abraham Lincoln and Matilda Edwards,” enclosed in Knerr to Ida M. Tarbell, Allentown, 26 October 1936, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Allentown (Pennsylvania) Morning Call, 9 February 1936; Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Jane D. Bell to Anne Bell, Springfield, 27 January 1841, copy, Lincoln files, “Wife” folder, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate,

during the legislative session to attend the numerous parties given at that time. A “legislative winter was as eagerly looked forward to by the ladies of the State as the politicians because it promised a season of constant gaiety and entertainment. An invitation to spend such a time in Springfield was a coveted honor. The pretty girls from all over the State flocked [t]here under the care of fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, any relation, however remote who could be induced to bring them.”¹⁵⁰

The “very bright” Matilda Edwards was “something of a coquette” and “a most fascinating and handsome girl, tall, graceful, and rather reserved,” who “moved at ease among the social and refined classes at Alton.”¹⁵¹ Her “gentle temper, her conciliatory manners, and the sweetness of her heart made her dear to all who knew her.”¹⁵² Lincoln

Tennessee; Albert S. Edwards in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 113; Octavia Roberts, “We All Knew Abr’ham,” 27; William O. Stoddard, Abraham Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life (New York: Ford, Howard, & Hulbert, 1884), 122. Mrs. Nicholas H. Ridgely (née Jane Huntington), a leader of Springfield society in Lincoln’s day, told her granddaughter, Octavia Roberts Corneau, “that it was common report that Lincoln had fallen in love with Matilda Edwards.” There “was never the least doubt in her mind that this was the case, and she left the story to her daughters.” Octavia Roberts Corneau, “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences” folder 5, p. 11; Octavia Roberts Corneau, “The Road of Remembrance,” unpublished manuscript, 119, Corneau Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Matilda Edwards’s niece told Mrs. Corneau that “It is an undisputed fact that Lincoln was in love with her. She never cared for him.” Virginia Quigley to [Octavia Roberts] Corneau, Alton, Illinois, 13 July [1939?], F. Lauriston Bullard Papers, Boston University. In the Edwards’ family tradition it was reported that “Lincoln was very anxious to marry into the Edwards family because of their political influence, but his attempts to court the Edwards girls were rudely repulsed.” Edward M. Quigley to J. G. Randall, Louisville, Kentucky, 7 February 1950, Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

Lincoln had earlier been smitten by a beautiful girl. In August 1827, it is reported, he was captivated by the beauty of Julia Evans in Princeton, Indiana. John M. Lockwood to Jesse W. Weik, Mount Vernon, Indiana, 4 January 1896, and two letters to Mr. J. A. Stuart of Indianapolis, dated Princeton, Indiana, 25 and 26 January 1909, one from an unknown correspondent and the other from “Hastings,” in Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 365-67.

¹⁵⁰ Brown, “Springfield Society,” 33-34.

¹⁵¹ Alice Edwards Quigley to “Dear Sir,” Alton, Illinois, 22 March 1935, Allentown, Pennsylvania, Morning Call, 9 February 1936; Virginia Quigley to [Octavia Roberts] Corneau, Alton, Illinois, 13 July [1939?], F. Lauriston Bullard Papers, Boston University; Orville H. Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 1; Albert S. Edwards, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 113.

¹⁵² Berks and Schuykill Journal, 8 February 1851, quoted in Nolan, “Of a Tomb in the Reading Cemetery,” 292.

was among the many young men who held her dear. In the winter of 1840-1841, she and Mary Todd “seemed to form the grand centre of attraction. Swarms of strangers who had little else to engage their attention hovered around them, to catch a passing smile.”¹⁵³ (She received twenty-two offers of marriage before wedding Newton D. Strong in 1843.)¹⁵⁴ In January 1841, Jane D. Bell reported that Lincoln had declared “if he had it in his power he would not have one feature in her face altered, he thinks she is so perfect.” Mrs. Bell added that Lincoln and Joshua Speed “spent the most of their time at [the] Edwards [home] this winter” and that “Lincoln could never bear to leave Miss Edwards’ side in company” because “he fell desperately in love with her.”¹⁵⁵ Yet he was too shy to approach the young beauty, who informed Elizabeth Edwards that Lincoln “never mentioned Such a Subject to me: he never even Stooped to pay me a Compliment.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ James C. Conkling to Mercy Levering, Springfield, 7 March 1841, Sandburg and Angle, Mary Lincoln, 180.

¹⁵⁴ Jennie Edwards Nisbet to William E. Barton, La Jolla, California, 8 January 1927, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Matilda Edwards’s niece told Octavia Roberts Corneau: “Never did any one have so many offers of marriage as Mathilda did” during that winter. Roberts, “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, 12, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences,” folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Cf. Virginia Quigley to [Octavia Roberts] Corneau, Alton, 13 July [1939?], F. Lauriston Bullard Papers, Boston University.

¹⁵⁵ Jane Hamilton Daviess Bell to Anne Bell, Springfield, 27 January 1841, copy, Lincoln files, “Wife” folder, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards recalled that Lincoln “was deeply in love with Matilda Edwards.” Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards to Ida M. Tarbell, Springfield, 8 October 1895, copy, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Orville H. Browning thought that “Lincoln became very much attached” to Matilda Edwards and “finally fell desperately in love with her.” Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2. Alice Edwards Quigley, a niece of Matilda Edwards, told an interviewer: “Undoubtedly Lincoln was in love with Mathilda Edwards, although she never cared for him.” Octavia Roberts Corneau, “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, 11, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences” folder 5. See also Virginia Quigley to [Octavia Roberts] Corneau, Alton, 13 July [1939?], F. Lauriston Bullard Papers, Boston University. Jane Bell, wife of Joseph Montgomery Bell, was a half-sister of Mary Montgomery Helm, who wed Joshua Bell, after whom Bell County, Kentucky, was named. Anne Bell, recipient of this letter, was Joshua Bell’s sister; she married Ormond Beatty, who became president of Centre College in Kentucky. Mary M. B. E. Jackson (Mrs. Henry Jackson) to John B. Clark, Danville, Kentucky, 25 August 1948, copy, ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 444. Matilda Edwards may not have been entirely truthful with Elizabeth Edwards. A niece of

After becoming enamored of Matilda Edwards, Lincoln confided to John J. Hardin “that he thought he did not love” Mary Todd “as he should and that he would do her a great wrong if he married her.”¹⁵⁷ Mary’s cousin Elizabeth Grimsley thought Lincoln “doubted whether he was responding as fully as a manly generous nature” should to Mary Todd; his feeling for her “had not the overmastering depth of an early love.”¹⁵⁸ To Mrs. William Butler, Lincoln declared, “it would just kill me to marry Mary Todd.”¹⁵⁹

And so Lincoln felt compelled to break his engagement, but just how he did so is unclear. Ninian W. Edwards recollected that Lincoln “fell in Love” with Matilda Edwards, but “did not Ever by act or deed directly or indirectly hint or speak of it to Miss Edwards.” Mary Todd “became aware of this – Lincoln’s affections – The Lincoln & Todd Engagement was broken off in Consequence of it – Miss Todd released Lincoln from the Contract.”¹⁶⁰ Alluding to Matilda Edwards, Joshua Speed recalled that “Lincoln – seeing another girl – & finding he did not love [the woman who eventually became] his wife wrote a letter saying he did not love her.” When Speed was shown that document, he

one of Mary Todd’s sisters said it “was always known in our family . . . that Mr. Lincoln courted Matilda Edwards, a fact which for many reasons she divulged only to her nearest and dearest.” Horace Green, “New Cases of Women’s Influence over Lincoln,” New York Times, 11 February 1923, section 8, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Hardin’s sister, Mrs. Alexander R. McKee (née Martinette Hardin), “A Romance of Lincoln,” clipping identified as “Indianapolis, January 1896,” Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Hardin also shared this story with another of his sisters, Lucy Jane, whose son-in-law informed a journalist that “some have questioned whether he [Lincoln] ever wanted to marry Mary Todd. He was in love with her cousin,” Matilda Edwards. Unidentified newspaper article by Frank G. Carpenter, [1891], Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Carpenter’s source was Judge Daniel H. Solomon of Iowa, whose wife (née Elizabeth Hardin at Jacksonville in 1839) was the daughter of John J. Hardin’s sister, Lucy Jane. Despite all this evidence, some have questioned whether Lincoln ever loved Matilda Edwards. See, for example, David Herbert Donald, Lincoln (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 84-87.

¹⁵⁸ Mrs. Grimsley to Ida Tarbell, Springfield, 9 March 1895, copy, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹⁵⁹ Sarah Rickard, sister of Mrs. Butler, interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907.

¹⁶⁰ Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, 22 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 133.

“tried to persuade Lincoln to burn it up,” whereupon Lincoln said: “Speed I always Knew you were an obstinate man. If you won’t deliver it I will get Some one to do it.” Speed replied: “I Shall not deliver it nor give it to you to be delivered: Words are forgotten – Misunderstood – passed by – not noticed in a private Conversation – but once put your words in writing and they Stand as a living & eternal Monument against you. If you think you have will & Manhood Enough to go and see her and Speak to her what you say in that letter, you may do that.” Acting on Speed’s advice, Lincoln visited Mary Todd and “told her that he did not love her – She rose – and Said ‘The deciever shall be decieved wo is me.’; alluding to a young man She fooled.” Speed reported that “Lincoln drew her down on his Knee – Kissed her – & parted – He going one way & She another – Lincoln did Love Miss [Matilda] Edwards – ‘Mary’ Saw it – told Lincoln the reason of his Change of mind – heart & soul – released him.”¹⁶¹

It is not known what Mary Todd said to Lincoln when he asked to be released. She admitted after his death that, during their courtship, “I doubtless trespassed, many times & oft, upon his great tenderness & amiability of character.”¹⁶² Perhaps she deliberately manipulated his conscience to win him back. Her sister Elizabeth recalled that the “world had it that Mr L backed out, and this placed Mary in a peculiar Situation & to set herself right and to free Mr Lincoln’s mind She wrote a letter to Mr L Stating that She would release him from his Engagements,” with the understanding “that She

¹⁶¹ Speed, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 474-75. According to Orville H. Browning, Lincoln “told Miss Todd that he loved Matilda Edwards.” Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2. Browning added that Mary “had very bitter feelings towards her rival.” But if she did, those feelings did not last long, for in April 1842, Mary Todd invited Matilda Edwards to visit her in Springfield. Letter from Matilda Edwards to her brother Nelson, n.d., quoted in Randall, Lincoln’s Courtship, 163. Matilda Edwards died childless in 1851 at the age of twenty-nine.

¹⁶² Mary Lincoln to Josiah G. Holland, Chicago, 4 December 1865, and to Charles Sumner, Chicago, 10 April 1866, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 293, 356.

would hold the question an open one – that is that She had not Changed her mind, but felt as always.”¹⁶³ She thus left him the option of renewing the engagement if he so desired.

She clearly hoped he would do so.

Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that, as Ninian Edwards put it, Lincoln “in his Conflicts of duty – honor & his love went as Crazy as a Loon.”¹⁶⁴ On January 21, Martinette Hardin McKee told her brother: “We have been very much distressed, on Mr Lincoln[’]s account; hearing he had two Cat fits, and a Duck fit.”¹⁶⁵ A week later, Jane D. Bell reported that Lincoln “is in rather a bad way The doctors say he came within an inch of being a perfect lunatic for life. He was perfectly crazy for some time, not able to attend to his business at all. They say he does not look like the same person.”¹⁶⁶

In fact, Lincoln went “crazy for a week or so” and was nursed back to health at the Butlers’ home, where his friend Orville H. Browning was staying.¹⁶⁷ Browning said his friend “was so much affected as to talk incoherently, and to be delirious to the extent of not knowing what he was doing.” This “aberration of mind resulted entirely from the

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 444.

¹⁶⁴ Ninian Edwards, interview with Herndon, 22 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 133. Edwards’s wife Elizabeth also described Lincoln in the month of January 1841 as “crazy.” Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 443. It is possible that Lincoln suffered two separate attacks, one in late November or early December and the other in January. Wilson, Honor’s Voice; Joshua Wolf Shenk, Lincoln’s Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled his Greatness (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 43-65.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Jacksonville, 22 January 1841, quoted in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:229n. Basler mistakenly identifies the author as “Martin McKee” instead of Martinette Hardin McKee.

¹⁶⁶ Jane D. Bell to Anne Bell, Springfield, 27 January 1841, copy, Lincoln files, “Wife” folder, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee

¹⁶⁷ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 251; Sarah Rickard, sister of Mrs. Butler, interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907. That week was the third week in January, when he missed virtually all the roll calls in the legislature.

situation he . . . got himself into – he was engaged to Miss Todd, and in love with Miss Edwards, and his conscience troubled him dreadfully for the supposed injustice he had done, and the supposed violation of his word which he had committed.”¹⁶⁸ Many friends, including James H. Matheny, “thought L[incoln] would commit suicide.”¹⁶⁹ They “had to remove razors from his room – take away all Knives and other such dangerous things – &c – it was terrible.”¹⁷⁰ Joshua Speed wrote that “a gloom came over him till his friends were alarmed for his life.”¹⁷¹ According to Speed, Lincoln wrote a poem about suicide and declared that he “would be more than willing” to die, but, he said, “I have an irrepressible desire to live till I can be assured that the world is a little better for my having lived in it.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Orville H. Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 1. In January 1841, legal business took Browning to Springfield from his home in Quincy. Browning said “L[incoln]’s insanity was but an exaggerated attack of the fits of despondency or melancholy to which he was subject. . . . his greater trials and embarrassments pressed him down to a lower point than at other times.” Herndon thought that Lincoln succumbed to “insanity” for the same reason cited by Browning. Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Mrs. William Butler confided to her sister that Lincoln was tormented by “the thought that he had treated Mary badly, knowing that she loved him and that he did not love her.” This caused him “an agony of remorse.” Sarah Rickard, sister of Mrs. Butler, interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907. Jane D. Bell reported on January 27, 1841, that “It seems he had addressed Mary Todd and she accepted him and they had been engaged some time when a Miss Edwards of Alton came here, and he fell desperately in love with her and found he was not so much attached to Mary as he thought.” Jane D. Bell to Anne Bell, Springfield, 27 January 1841, copy, Lincoln files, “Wife” folder, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.

¹⁶⁹ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 251. Speed wrote, “a gloom came over him till his friends were alarmed for his life.” Joshua F. Speed, Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Notes of a Visit to California: Two Lectures (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1884), 39.

¹⁷⁰ Speed, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 474-75. According to Orville H. Browning, Lincoln “told Miss Todd that he loved Matilda Edwards.” Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2. Browning added that Mary “had very bitter feelings towards her rival.” But if she did, those feelings did not last long, for in April 1842 Mary Todd invited Matilda Edwards to visit her in Springfield. Letter from Matilda Edwards to her brother Nelson, n.d., quoted in Randall, Lincoln’s Courtship, 163. Matilda Edwards died childless in 1851 at the age of twenty-nine.

¹⁷¹ Joshua F. Speed, Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Notes of a Visit to California: Two Lectures (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1884), 39.

¹⁷² Speed, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 39; Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 7 February and 13 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 197, 337. The extant files of the Sangamo Journal for

Before those friends were able to confiscate potentially lethal objects, a fellow legislator, Hiram W. Thornton, encountered Lincoln “sitting on a box behind a woodshed. One leg was resting upon the other in a flexed position and he was whetting a knife on the bootleg.” When Thornton asked what he was doing, Lincoln replied: “I am just getting this knife sharp enough to do what I want to do with it.” Thornton then took the knife and spoke with his colleague, who “emphasized that he was no good and he had better be out of the world than in it.”¹⁷³

In despair, Lincoln turned to his physician-friend, Anson G. Henry, who may have helped persuade Mary Todd to release him from the engagement.¹⁷⁴ He spent several hours each day from January 13 to 18 with Henry.¹⁷⁵ It is not known what Dr. Henry prescribed as a treatment, but if he followed the customary procedures of that time he would have subjected Lincoln to a painful regimen (bleeding, leeching, the application of heated cups to the temples, mustard rubs, foul-tasting medicines, and cold water baths).¹⁷⁶

1841 contain no poem about suicide. Herndon alleged that when he searched that file, he discovered that someone had clipped excerpts from an issue of the paper. He guessed that Lincoln or someone acting at his instigation had excised the poem. Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. In 1899, J. McCan Davis also searched the 1841 file of the Sangamo Journal, which he found incomplete but which contained no issue from which anything had been clipped. J. McCan Davis, “Lincoln’s Poem on ‘Suicide,’” memo dated Springfield, 5 June 1899, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Smith College. A similar search in 1997 of the microfilmed version of the paper revealed no issue with a portion clipped out. On 15 August 1838, however, the Sangamo Journal ran an unsigned poem titled “The Suicide’s Soliloquy,” which may have been by Lincoln. For the text of those verses, see above, chapter four.

¹⁷³ Thornton told this story to his brother, who in turn related it to his son. Frank Norbury to Logan Hay, 26 December 1936, copy, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, folder “Historical Data, K-N,” Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Norbury said that this episode took place in Vandalia, but Thornton served in the legislature between 1840 and 1842, after the capital had moved from Vandalia to Springfield. Thornton told a different story to Ida Tarbell. Tarbell, Lincoln, 1:180.

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 237-38.

¹⁷⁵ Undated statement by Hiram W. Thornton, Tarbell, Lincoln, 1:208.

¹⁷⁶ Shenk, Lincoln’s Melancholy, 58-59.

On January 20, Lincoln confessed to John T. Stuart: “I have, within the last few days, been making a most discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondriaism [i.e., depression] and thereby got an impression that Dr. Henry is necessary to my existence.” Three days later he elaborated: “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me.”¹⁷⁷ He also wrote to Dr. Daniel Drake describing his symptoms and asking advice. That well-known Cincinnati physician replied that he could make no recommendation without a personal interview.¹⁷⁸

In the General Assembly, Lincoln behaved oddly that January. With unwonted testiness, he lashed out at a fellow legislator who had chided him about his “jump” from

¹⁷⁷ Lincoln to Stuart, Springfield, 20, 23 January 1841, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:228-29. In a popular medical handbook, A Valuable, Vegetable, Medical Prescription, with a Table of Detergent and Corroborant Medicines to Suit the Treatment of Different Certificates (Versailles, Kentucky: John H. Wilkins, 1825), Dr. Richard Carter dealt extensively with the “hypo.” According to a study of pioneer physicians,

that volume said of the malady: “This dread disease manifested itself by feelings of dullness, fear, indefinite pains, and lack of desire to attend to any business. When one had it, he felt ‘disposed to be retired,’ to tell his troubles, and to feel that he was afflicted with any disease which anyone else had. Carter did not diagnose this affliction as a real disorder unconnected with any other, for it made its appearance only when the ‘system was released from any cause; such as hard drink, colds, fevers, dropsies, gout, night air, loss of sleep, incessant studying, loss of friends, and scolding companions.’ He reasoned that the body and mind were so inseparably connected that one could not suffer without the other’s participating. The idea that the complaint was entirely of the mind was erroneous. ‘My opinion of the hypo is, that it is very hard to exterminate, when it has once taken good hold, it becomes ingrained, and is in a measure second nature.’” To cure the hypo was extremely difficult, “particularly after it became deeply rooted in the system. Blood-letting was in certain cases recommended, also foot-baths, injections, and dosages of calomel and aloes.” Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, The Midwest Pioneer: His Ills, Cures, & Doctors (Crawfordsville, Indiana: R. E. Banta, 1945), 67, 69-70.

¹⁷⁸ Lincoln read parts of this letter, which is not extant, to Joshua Speed. Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 431. For a biographical sketch of Dr. Drake, see Daniel Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800, ed. Emmet Field Horine (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), xiii-xxix.

the church window the previous month.¹⁷⁹ Lincoln “said that as to jumping, he should jump when he pleased and no one should hinder him.”¹⁸⁰ Soon thereafter on the floor of the House of Representatives he alluded to his lack of appeal to the opposite sex: “if any woman, old or young, ever thought there was any peculiar charm in this distinguished specimen . . . I have, as yet, been so unfortunate as not to have discovered it.”¹⁸¹ Shortly after making these remarks, he stopped attending sessions of the General Assembly, just when his leadership was needed to combat the Democrats’ court packing scheme, which barely passed the House. He answered no roll calls on January 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, or 20. On the 19th, he voted on only one of the day’s five roll calls. On January 21, he resumed casting votes regularly.¹⁸² Such absenteeism was unusual for Lincoln, who in four legislative terms missed only 180 of 1334 roll calls; over half of those absences occurred during this session.¹⁸³

On January 24, James C. Conkling reported that Lincoln appeared so “reduced and emaciated” that he could barely “speak above a whisper.” Conkling sympathized with him: “Poor L! How are the mighty fallen! . . . His case at present is truly deplorable but what prospect there may be for ultimate relief I cannot pretend to say. I doubt not but

¹⁷⁹ Democrat William H. Bissell, responding to Whig protests that the legislature should not waste time by adjourning for half a day to commemorate Andrew Jackson’s victory at New Orleans in 1815, said that the Whigs had the previous month held up the House by boycotting its deliberations and “some of them, burst through the windows and made their escape.” Report on proceedings in the Illinois House of Representatives, 8 January 1841, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 15 January 1841.

¹⁸⁰ Remarks in the legislature, 8 January 1841, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:226.

¹⁸¹ Speech in the Illinois legislature concerning apportionment, [9 January 1841?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:227–28.

¹⁸² House Journal, 1840-41, 216-62.

¹⁸³ He missed 91 of the 437 roll calls between 7 December 1840 and 1 March 1841. Harlan Hoyt Horner, “The Education of a Politician: Being the Experience of Abraham Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature,” unpublished manuscript, 310, Horner Collection, University of Illinois. Most of those absences were recorded in January. Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:289-90.

he can declare ‘That loving is a painful thrill, And not to love more painful still’ but would not like to intimate that he has experienced ‘That surely ‘tis the worst of pain To love and not be loved again.’”¹⁸⁴ In the midst of this period of depression, John Todd Stuart’s wife observed Lincoln in the capitol “with his feet braced against one of the pillars. His face looked like Bunyan’s figure, ‘Giant Despair.’”¹⁸⁵

By late January, Lincoln had recovered. On the 26th, Mrs. John J. Hardin told her husband: “I am glad to hear Lincoln has got over his cat fits[.] we have concluded it was a very unsatisfactory way of terminating his romance[.] he ought to have died or gone crazy[.] we are very much disappointed indeed.”¹⁸⁶

In March, after the legislature had adjourned, Turner R. King saw Lincoln in Springfield “hanging about – moody – silent.” King believed that the “question in his mind was ‘Have I incurred any obligation to marry that woman.’”¹⁸⁷ Though he had broken the engagement, Lincoln was still tormented by the thought that he really should wed Mary Todd, not because he loved her, but because his tyrannical conscience nagged him unmercifully. James C. Conkling reported that Lincoln, the “poor hapless simple swain who loved most true but was not loved again,” would probably “now endeavor to drown his cares among the intricacies and perplexities of the law.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ James C. Conkling to Mercy Levering, Springfield, 24 January 1841, Conkling Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁸⁵ Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900.

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Hardin to John J. Hardin, [Jacksonville], 26 January 1841, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁸⁷ Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 464.

¹⁸⁸ Conkling to Mercy Levering, Springfield, 7 March 1841, Sandburg and Angle, Mary Lincoln, 180.

NEW LAW PARTNER

Conkling was right. The following month, Lincoln amicably ended his partnership with John Todd Stuart and joined forces with Stephen T. Logan, a better lawyer and worse politician than Stuart.¹⁸⁹ Logan, displeased with the ethical obtuseness of his partner Edward D. Baker, sought to replace him.¹⁹⁰ He had observed young Lincoln in three cases where they opposed each other (Lincoln won all three).¹⁹¹ At that time Lincoln may have felt the need for more rigorous legal training than could be provided by Stuart, who, as a Congressman, perforce spent much time in Washington.¹⁹² If so, Lincoln could hardly have picked a better mentor than Logan, a Kentuckian nine years his senior.¹⁹³ Stuart, who regarded Logan as the ablest attorney in Sangamon County, said that the “rapidity of his intellectual perceptions were like flashes of lightning.”¹⁹⁴ In 1843, the Sangamo Journal declared that Logan “is regarded as perhaps the best lawyer in the State, and has undoubtedly a fine logical mind. His voice is not pleasant, but he has a most happy faculty of elucidating, and simplifying the most obstinate questions.”¹⁹⁵ John Hay thought him “one of the finest examples of the purely legal mind that the West has

¹⁸⁹ Judge Thomas Drummond in Memorials of the Life and Character of Stephen T. Logan (Springfield: H. W. Rokker, 1882), 33.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen T. Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 37.

¹⁹¹ Cannon vs. Kinney, Bailey vs. Cromwell, and Elkin et al. vs. The People. See Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis et al., eds., The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition, DVD-ROM (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), hereafter cited as LPAL.

¹⁹² Paul M. Angle and Robert P. Howard, One Hundred Fifty Years of Law: An Account of the Law Office which John T. Stuart Founded in Springfield, Illinois, a Century and a Half Ago (Springfield: Brown, Hay, and Stephens, 1978), 25.

¹⁹³ On Logan, see Memorials of Logan, *passim*.

¹⁹⁴ Memorials of Logan, 16-17.

¹⁹⁵ Sangamo Journal, 13 April 1843.

ever produced.”¹⁹⁶ Supreme Court justices John McLean and David Davis, as well as leading attorneys like Gustave Koerner, Usher F. Linder, Elihu B. Washburne, Isaac N. Arnold, and Benjamin S. Edwards, all concurred.¹⁹⁷

Unlike his mind, Logan’s appearance was unimpressive. In 1843, an observer called him “the very personification of carelessness.”¹⁹⁸ Gustave Koerner, who sat in the General Assembly with Logan, deemed him “the most slovenly man, not only in the Legislature, but in the city of Springfield.” Although he was a man “of ample means, occupying a very fine residence surrounded by a large and beautiful park, his clothes were shabby.” Koerner “never saw him wear a necktie.” In cold weather he “wore an old fur cap” which in the summer he replaced with “a fifty-cent straw hat.” Completing his wardrobe were “coarse brogan shoes,” “baggy trousers, and a coat to match.” Logan was, Koerner said, “hardly of medium size, and quite thin, but wiry. Thick, reddish curling hair covered his rather small head.”¹⁹⁹ Hezekiah Morse Wead reported that when Logan “rises to speak, his mouth is filled with tobacco which he rolls over and stows away inside of his cheek, and spits forth as he get[s] excited in small punches from his filthy

¹⁹⁶ Hay, “Colonel Baker,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, 24 (December 1861), in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 154.

¹⁹⁷ David Davis to [William P. Walker], Springfield, 25 June 1847, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Memorials of Logan, 21, 29; Thomas J. McCormack, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 1:178-79; Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News Company, 1879), 155; Elihu Washburne in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1886), 10-11; Isaac N. Arnold, “Reminiscences of the Illinois Bar Forty Years Ago: Lincoln and Douglas as Orators and Lawyers” (pamphlet; Chicago: Fergus, 1881), 4.

¹⁹⁸ Sangamo Journal (Springfield), 13 April 1843.

¹⁹⁹ Koerner, Memoirs, 1:178-79. For other descriptions of Logan, see Elihu B. Washburne in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 10-11; I. M. Short, Abraham Lincoln: Early Days in Illinois: Reminiscences of Different Persons Who Became Eminent in American History (Kansas City, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, 1927), 54; William H. Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln,” lecture of 26 December 1865, Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (1941): 437-38.

mouth.”²⁰⁰ People were astonished that such an eminent lawyer would dress so shabbily and have “the marks of tobacco juice running down from the corners of his mouth.”²⁰¹

Logan did not have a winning personality, for “the Irish in his blood made him lose control of his temper.”²⁰² Herndon called him “a little shriveled-up man” who was “cold, ungenerous, snappy, [and] irritable” and who died “without a warm friend in the world.”²⁰³ Equally unflattering were observations made by Hezekiah Morse Wead, a fellow delegate to the 1847 Illinois constitutional convention, who confided to his diary that Logan was “always specious, frequently ingenious and sometimes powerful, but his great forte is in making a skillful use of men’s prejudices, and in appeals to their peculiar views of things. In this particular he is unrivalled and evinces great skill. Sometimes he approaches a subject boldly, probes it to the bottom and handles it like a man of intellect, but such instances are rare, and only occur where the subject itself is not deep or obscure. He has always, an argument calculated to draw the mind from deep and useful investigation – he plays around the true question, raising collateral issues, and deceiving men with straws and chaff, while the grain is not seen. . . . He cannot think deeply, but as far as he does think, he thinks quickly & sees clearly. His mind is limited to a certain sphere, but in that limit he is superior. Quick of apprehension, possessing a happy faculty of compassion, and great knowledge of the prejudices of men, he is calculated to exercise & does exercise a great influence: but with all his influence and all his tact he is utterly unable to comprehend the strength of a powerful intellect or the superiority of a mind

²⁰⁰ Hezekiah Morse Wead diary, 15 July 1847, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁰¹ Samuel Willard, “Personal Reminiscences of Life in Illinois, 1830-1850,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 11 (1906): 85-86.

²⁰² Koerner, Memoirs, 1:178-79.

²⁰³ Herndon, “Character of Lincoln,” 437-38; Herndon, “Lincoln the Lawyer,” Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

which towers immensely above his own. . . . Day after day, he struggles on with his sophistry, and specious reasons never diving deeply, but always skillful, keeping his eye continually on the prejudices entertained by members [of the convention], and striving in every way to gain his point.”²⁰⁴

Logan and Lincoln became close friends personally and politically even though they “could scarcely have been more opposite in looks than in the character and natural quality of their make-up.” Logan “loved money and made it,” while Lincoln “did not care for it, only for its use, neither did he make much of it.” Logan “cared for the law,” while “Lincoln did not, only as a means to an end.”²⁰⁵

According to Logan, Lincoln had not systematically studied law under Stuart, who was “never a reader of law; he always depended more on the management of his case;” hence “Lincoln’s knowledge of the law was very small when I took him in.” Logan thought he had not “studied very much,” but rather “learned his law more in the study of cases” as he went along: “He would work hard and learn all there was in a case he had in hand.” In this fashion Lincoln “got to be a pretty good lawyer though his general knowledge of law was never very formidable.” He would, however, “study out his case and make about as much of it as anybody.” Although he “didn’t have confidence enough at first,” in time “he began to pick up a considerable ambition in the law.” After joining forces with Logan, Lincoln “turned in to try to know more and studied to learn how to prepare his cases.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Hezekiah Morse Weed diary, 15 July 1847, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁰⁵ Short, Lincoln: Early Days in Illinois, 54.

²⁰⁶ Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 37.

(To William H. Herndon, Lincoln explained: “I cannot read generally. I never read text books for I have no particular motive to drive and whip me to it. As I am constituted I don’t love to read generally, and as I do not love to read I feel no interest in what is thus read. I don’t, & can’t remember such reading. When I have a particular case in hand I have that motive, and feel an interest in the case – feel an interest in ferriting out the questions to the bottom – love to dig up the question by the roots and hold it up and dry it before the fires of the mind. I know that general reading broadens the mind – makes it universal, but it never makes a precise deep clear mind. The study of particular cases does do that thing, as I understand it. General reading has its advantages and its disadvantages. Special case reading has its advantages & its disadvantages.”)²⁰⁷

For three years, Lincoln worked with Logan, who taught his young partner a great deal. The older man may have strengthened Lincoln’s resolve to act as a peacemaker, for Logan “never encouraged litigation, but as a friend and neighbor strove for the peaceful adjustment of all controversies.” He “preserved harmony among members of families, who might otherwise have been perpetually estranged by the bitterness of a lawsuit.”²⁰⁸

Logan may also have influenced Lincoln’s approach to jury trials. Joseph Wallace found it “entertaining and instructive” to watch Logan argue a case to a jury: “Resting one foot on a chair, he commences with a few commonplace remarks uttered in a clear conversational tone.” Then he “lays hold of the leading facts and strong points of his case, states them with singular perspicuity and force, dwells on them at length, and presents them from every standpoint favorable to his client.” As “he warms to his work,”

²⁰⁷ Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln,” 431.

²⁰⁸ Benjamin S. Edwards in Memorials of Logan, 22. John Todd Stuart remembered that Logan “was not a promoter of litigations. He settled more controversies than he brought suits.” Ibid., 17.

his “small frame involuntarily assumes a more erect and impressive attitude; his gestures become more rapid; his shrill voice is pitched to a higher key; his gray eyes glow with animation; every muscle is at play, and every energy of his nature aroused, while words, sentences, arguments, illustrations, appeals, flow in torrents from his lips.”²⁰⁹

Such performances inspired Lincoln, who said “that it was his highest ambition to become as good a lawyer as Logan.”²¹⁰ Lincoln declared that Logan, whom he described as “the best nisi prius [i.e., trial] lawyer he ever saw” and “almost a father to me,” could “make a nice distinction in the law, or upon the facts, more palpable to the common understanding, than any lawyer he ever knew.”²¹¹ Lincoln “regarded Judge Logan as the most thorough and accomplished lawyer he had ever known, and through his whole life, he cherished for him an affection, admiration and respect which approached to reverence and adoration.”²¹²

Lincoln was not always as finicky as his partner in accepting dubious clients. Judge John D. Caton once asked Logan if he were going to argue an upcoming case. “I don’t think I shall trouble you,” came the reply. “I don’t see it as clear as Mr. Lincoln does. I prefer to leave it with him.” Caton was flattered that Logan “thought an intimation from him that he did not believe that his associate was right” would have no impact on the judge’s handling of the case.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Memorials of Logan, 38-39.

²¹⁰ Linder, Reminiscences, 155.

²¹¹ Reminiscences of R. R. Hitt, in Otis B. Goodall, “Hon. Robert Roberts Hitt,” The Phonographic Magazine 7 (1 June 1893): 206-7; Lincoln’s endorsement, dated 26 March 1862, on a letter by Logan, Springfield, 13 January 1862, Gilder-Lehrman Collection, New-York Historical Society; Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 19 July 1880.

²¹² Memorials of Logan, 61.

²¹³ Memorials of Logan, 67.

Under Logan's tutelage, Lincoln expanded his legal horizons to include practice in the Federal Courts and the Illinois Supreme Court. In 1839, when Springfield became the state capital, those courts, which had been held in Vandalia, transferred their operations to Springfield. In response to the hard times following the Panic of 1837, Congress enacted a short-lived bankruptcy law to relieve debtors, many of whom enlisted the services of Logan and Lincoln. They handled seventy-seven such cases, the most of any firm in Springfield and the fourth largest number of any firm in the state.²¹⁴

With Logan, Lincoln practiced more frequently before the Illinois Supreme Court. Of the 411 Supreme Court cases that Lincoln appeared in during his twenty-four-year legal career, a substantial number were tried during his brief partnership with Logan.²¹⁵

Logan stopped riding the circuit when he joined forces with Lincoln, who traveled not only the Eighth Judicial Circuit but also many other counties, among them Coles, where his stepmother and father resided. He ventured as far east as Clark County along the Indiana border and as far west as Madison County on the Mississippi River. At first, Logan and Lincoln occupied an office across from Hoffman's Row; in 1843, they moved to the Tinsley building on the southeast corner of the public square. Of the roughly 850 cases they were involved in, 70% related to debt collection.²¹⁶

In the winter and spring of 1841, Lincoln avoided Mary Todd, much to her distress. He may even have considered leaving the country; on March 5, John Todd Stuart

²¹⁴ Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln and Bankruptcy Law," Illinois Bar Journal 31 (1943), 201-6.

²¹⁵ LPAL, statistical portrait. In the four years they were partners, Lincoln and Logan argued over 100 cases before the Illinois Supreme Court.

²¹⁶ John A. Lupton, "A. Lincoln, Esquire: The Evolution of a Lawyer," in Allen D. Spiegel, A. Lincoln, Esquire: A Shrewd, Sophisticated Lawyer in His Time (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 26-27.

recommended him for the post of chargé d'affaires at Bogotá, Colombia.²¹⁷ In June, Mary Todd lamented to a friend that Lincoln “deems me unworthy of notice, as I have not met him in the gay world for months.” She consoled herself with the knowledge “that others were as seldom gladdened by his presence as my humble self.” Yet, she confessed, “I would that the case were different, that he would once more resume his Station in Society, that ‘Richard should be himself again,’ much, much happiness would it afford me.”²¹⁸ According to her cousin Martinette Hardin, Mary Todd wanted Lincoln back because she had “made up her mind that he should marry her at the cost of her pride to show us all that she was not defeated.”²¹⁹

While ignoring Mary Todd, Lincoln sometime in 1841 courted Sarah Rickard, the sister of Mrs. William Butler (née Elizabeth Rickard). Between 1837 and 1842, when Lincoln boarded at the Butlers’ house, he often saw Sarah, who lived there. She was only twelve years old when they first met; four years later he seriously paid her court and proposed marriage, remarking that since she was named Sarah, she was destined to marry Abraham. She rejected the offer because, as she explained, “his peculiar manner and his General department would not be likely to fascinate a young girl just entering the society world.”²²⁰ She “liked him as a big brother,” not as a potential mate.²²¹

²¹⁷ Stuart to Daniel Webster, Washington, 5 March 1841, in F. Lauriston Bullard, “When John T. Stuart Sought to Send Lincoln to South America,” Lincoln Herald 47 (1945): 21.

²¹⁸ Mary Todd to Mercy Levering, Springfield, June 1841, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Lincoln, 27.

²¹⁹ Interview with Mrs. Alexander R. McKee (née Martinette Hardin), Marietta Holdstock Brown, “A Romance of Lincoln,” clipping identified as “Indianapolis, January 1896,” Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²²⁰ Sarah A. Rickard Basset to Herndon, Connors, Kansas, 3, 12 August 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 663-64, 665; Anna Miles Herndon, interview with William Herndon, [13 September 1887], ibid., 640; Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8 August 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; interview with Sarah Rickard Barrett by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907. Jesse W. Weik interviewed Sarah Rickard about the courtship and was told that her elder sister had opposed the match because of the girl’s youth. Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 66-68.

In the summer of 1841, Lincoln spent six weeks in Kentucky with Joshua Speed at his family's stately home, Farmington, near Louisville. There his spirits revived as he enjoyed the Speeds' gracious hospitality, the luxurious appointments of a house far grander than any he had lived in, the companionship of his closest friend, the maternal warmth of Speed's mother, the playfulness of Speed's older half-sister Mary, and the intellectual stimulation provided by Speed's brother James, who later recalled: "I saw him daily; he sat in my office, read my books, and talked with me about his life, his reading, his studies, his aspirations." Lincoln "made a decided impression on all with his intelligent, vigorous mind, strong in grasp, and original." He showed himself to be "earnest, frank, manly, and sincere in every thought and expression. The artificial was all wanting."²²² (In 1864, Lincoln would appoint James Speed attorney general of the U.S.)

Lincoln "endeared himself to all the members of the Speed family by his patient gentleness and his total lack of self-consciousness." An example of those qualities was his conduct at dinner one evening at which mutton was served along with mint jelly. Unfamiliar with that condiment, he helped himself to all of it. When another container of jelly was brought out, he noticed that each of the other diners took only a small amount.

Despite all this evidence, some biographers doubt the whole story. See Sandburg and Angle, Mary Lincoln, 54-55, 344-50, and Gary Lee Williams, "James and Joshua Speed" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1971), 19-25. After the spring of 1841, when Speed returned to Kentucky, Lincoln roomed as well as boarded with the Butlers. William J. Butler, grandson of William Butler, in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1937. See also Nicolay's interview with William Butler, Springfield, June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 22-24.

²²¹ William E. Barton, memorandum of a conversation in Springfield with Mrs. Charles Ridgely, [1921], Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Mrs. Ridgely said that Sarah Rickard, her sister-in-law, "told me Lincoln proposed to her. But she did not take it very seriously. . . . when he came to be famous she spoke jokingly of it without regret. Held him in high honor but no real affection, and she was very young."

²²² Address by James Speed at Cincinnati, 4 May 1887, Speed Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

Without embarrassment he said with a quiet laugh, “I seem to have taken more than my share.”²²³

When it came time to leave, Speed’s mother gave Lincoln an Oxford Bible, which she called “the best cure for the ‘Blues.’”²²⁴ In late October, Joshua Speed reported that since Lincoln’s return to Springfield, “he has been eminently successful in his practice” and “is in fine spirits and good health.”²²⁵ Three months later, Lincoln cheerfully told Speed that he had “been quite clear of the hypo” recently.²²⁶

Lincoln soon found an opportunity to return the Speeds’ kindness, for just as he was recovering from his romantic misadventures with Mary Todd, Joshua Speed, who was highly susceptible to Cupid’s arrows, found himself tormented by an affair of the heart.²²⁷ He had fallen in love with a young neighbor, Fanny Henning, and impulsively proposed to her.²²⁸ When she accepted, Speed endured “immense suffering” because he doubted that he really loved her.²²⁹ Lincoln now played counselor and emotional nursemaid to Speed, reversing their earlier roles, writing him several letters that reveal as much about their author as they do about their recipient.²³⁰ He reassured Speed that his anxiety was

²²³ John Gilmer Speed, “Lincoln’s Hesitancy to Marry,” Ladies’ Home Journal 12 (October 1895): 2.

²²⁴ Lincoln to Mary Speed, Bloomington, Illinois, 27 September 1841, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:261.

²²⁵ Joshua Speed to Mary L. Speed, Springfield, 31 October 1841, Speed Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

²²⁶ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 3 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:268.

²²⁷ On Speed’s romantic propensities, see Joshua Speed to Mary L. Speed, Springfield, 31 October 1841, Speed Family Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky, and Joshua Speed to Eliza Speed, Springfield, 12 March 1841, copy, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

²²⁸ Robert Lee Kincaid, Joshua Speed, Lincoln’s Most Intimate Friend (Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University, 1943), 16.

²²⁹ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 5 October 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:303.

²³⁰ Speed recalled, “[i]n the summer of 1841. I became engaged to my wife – He was here on a visit when I courted her – and strange to say something of the same feeling which I regarded as so foolish in him – took possession of me – and kept me very unhappy from the time of my engagement until I was married.” Speed

groundless, asking his doubt-torn friend: “How came you to court her? Was it because you thought she desired it; and that you had given her reason to expect it? If it was for that, why did not the same reason make you court Ann Todd [cousin of Mary Todd], and at least twenty others of whom you can think, & to whom it would apply with greater force than to her? Did you court her for her wealth? Why, you knew she had none. But you say you reasoned yourself into it. What do you mean by that? Was it not, that you found yourself unable to reason yourself out of it? Did you not think, and partly form the purpose, of courting her the first time you ever saw or heard of her? What had reason to do with it, at that early stage? There was nothing at that time for reason to work upon. Whether she was moral, amiable, sensible, or even of good character, you did not, nor could not then know; except perhaps you might infer the last from the company you found her in. All you then did or could know of her, was her personal appearance and deportment; and these, if they impress at all, impress the heart and not the head. Say candidly, were not those heavenly black eyes, the whole basis of all your early reasoning on the subject?”²³¹ From this document it might be inferred that Lincoln had several doubts about wedding Mary Todd: that he persuaded himself that he loved her because she wanted and expected him to do so; that he feared he was interested in her wealth and social status; and that he had allowed his head to rule his heart.

When Speed reported that he was deeply concerned about his fiancée’s health, Lincoln poignantly referred to his own experience as he tried to reassure his friend:

to Herndon, Louisville, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 430. “I fancy he [Lincoln] has described his own case in the advice to Speed.” John G. Nicolay to John Hay, Washington, 24 January 1879, Hay Papers, Brown University.

²³¹ Lincoln to Speed, n.p., [3 January? 1842], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:266. Ann Todd was the daughter of David Todd of Columbia, Missouri, brother of Mary Todd’s father, Robert Smith Todd.

“Why, Speed, if you did not love her, although you might not wish her death, you would most calmly be resigned to it. Perhaps this point is no longer a question with you, and my pertinacious dwelling upon it, is a rude intrusion upon your feelings. If so, you must pardon me.” Alluding to his doubts about his love for Mary Todd, he added: “You know the Hell I have suffered on that point, and how tender I am upon it.”²³²

To help Speed cope with his depression, Lincoln offered some advice: “I do fondly hope . . . that you will never again need any comfort from abroad. But should I be mistaken in this . . . still let me urge you, as I have ever done, to remember in the dep[t]h and even the agony of despondency, that verry shortly you are to feel well again. I am now fully convinced, that you love her as ardently as you are capable of loving. Your ever being happy in her presence, and your intense anxiety about her health, if there were nothing else, would place this beyond all dispute in my mind. I incline to think it probable, that your nerves will fail you occasionally for a while; but once you get them fairly graded now, that trouble is over forever. I think if I were you, in case my mind were not exactly right, I would avoid being idle; I would immediately engage in some business, or go to making preparations for it, which would be the same thing.”²³³ Lincoln seems to be trying to persuade himself not to take seriously his doubts about Mary Todd, and if he should perchance succumb to them, he should immediately busy himself with some project.

As the day of Speed’s wedding approached, Lincoln became agitated. On February 15, 1842, despite his misgivings, Speed married Fanny Henning, prompting Lincoln to write yet another revealing letter. When Speed wrote him shortly after the ceremony,

²³² Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 3 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:268.

²³³ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 13 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 269-70.

Lincoln opened the envelope, as he later reported, “with intense anxiety and trepidation – so much, that although it turned out better than I expected, I have hardly yet, at the distance of ten hours, become calm.” With relief he told Speed, “our forebodings, for which you and I are rather peculiar, are all the worst sort of nonsense.” Speed confided his fear that the Elysium of which he had dreamed “is never to be realized.” Lincoln reassured him that “it is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me, to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that any thing earthly can realize. Far short of your dreams as you may be no woman could do more to realize them, than that same black-eyed Fanny. If you could but contemplate her through my imagination, it would appear ridiculous to you, that any one should for a moment think of being unhappy with her. My old Father used to have a saying that ‘If you make a bad bargain, hug it all the tighter’; and it occurs to me, that if the bargain you have just closed can possibly be called a bad one, it is certainly the most pleasant one for applying that maxim to, which my fancy can, by any effort, picture.”²³⁴ Here Lincoln seemed to be telling himself that he should not be disappointed if Mary Todd did not measure up to his unreasonable ideal and that he should marry her even if the engagement was a “bad bargain.”

In March 1842, when Speed informed Lincoln that he was much happier than he had anticipated being, Lincoln rejoiced with him but confessed that his own pleasure in the newlyweds’ bliss was diminished by his guilty conscience, which continued to torment him about Mary Todd. Referring cryptically to “that fatal first of Jany. ’41,” he asserted that since that time, “it seems to me, I should have been entirely happy, but for the never-absent idea, that there is one still unhappy whom I have contributed to make so. That still

²³⁴ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 25 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 1:280.

kills my soul. I can not but reproach myself, for even wishing to be happy while she is otherwise.”²³⁵

In July, Lincoln again confided to Speed his misgivings about having broken the engagement to Mary Todd. He said he could not follow Speed’s (unidentified) advice yet: “I must regain my confidence in my own ability to keep my resolves when they are made. In that ability, you know, I once prided myself as the only, or at least the chief, gem of my character; that gem I lost – how, and when, you too well know. I have not yet regained it; and until I do, I can not trust myself in any matter of such importance.” With characteristic fatalism and passivity in matters of the heart, he declared that his own course was now to obey the injunction of Moses: “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.”²³⁶

NEAR-DUEL

While awaiting a sign from the Almighty, Lincoln accepted a challenge to fight a duel, an act which he later called “the meanest thing he ever did in his life.”²³⁷ In August and September 1842, the Sangamo Journal ran three letters signed by “Aunt Rebecca” of

²³⁵ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 27 March 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:282. January 1 is customarily thought to be the day on which Lincoln broke his engagement to Mary Todd, but Douglas L. Wilson has shown that this is most improbable. Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 231-55.

²³⁶ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 4 July 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:289. In the Book of Exodus (14:13), Moses tells the Israelites as Pharaoh’s army closed in on them: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today.”

²³⁷ A writer in the Chicago Press and Tribune declared in 1860 that “we have heard of Mr. Lincoln’s saying that the acceptance of the challenge was the meanest thing that he ever did in his life.” Chicago Press and Tribune, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 27 April 1860. An article based on information supplied by John J. Hardin’s daughter, Mrs. Mansfield T. Walworth, stated that “Lincoln often said afterwards that his participation in this affair was the meanest act of his life.” Baltimore American, 7 June [no year given], clipping, Lincoln Scrapbook, pp. 17-18, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress.

“Lost Townships” ridiculing the Democratic leader James Shields, a thirty-six-year-old native of Ireland, “trim-built and raw-boned, with a swarthy complexion, dark eyes,” an “erect and soldierly” bearing, and a temperament “choleric and impetuous.”²³⁸ His law partner and intimate friend, Gustave Koerner, described him as “exceedingly vain,” “very ambitious,” and “quite egotistical,” with an “eccentric, sometimes erratic” mind.

Shields’s vanity, Koerner said, was so “inordinate” that “it rather became amusing than offensive,” and his “impulsiveness made him sometimes act very illogically.”²³⁹ In 1849, that impulsiveness led Shields to write a letter to his opponent for a U.S. senate seat, Judge Sidney Breese, threatening to kill him.²⁴⁰ At Hillsboro he once “got into a dispute

²³⁸ Joseph Wallace, “James Shields,” manuscript, 36-37, Joseph Wallace Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²³⁹ Koerner, Memoirs, 1:414; Koerner, undated letter to The Century Magazine 33 (October 1887): 973-74. Koerner and Shields were partners from 1837 to 1841. Koerner said that by 1854 “Shields and I had for nearly twenty years been intimate friends.” Koerner, Memoirs, 1:618. Charles P. Johnson, a St. Louis attorney who became lieutenant governor of Missouri, thought Shields possessed “overweening vanity and excessive egotism.” Johnson, “Personal Recollections of Some of the Eminent Statesmen and Lawyers of Illinois,” Publications of the Lincoln Presidential Library 9 (1904): 36. Political opponents reviled him as “an arrogant, vain, ignorant, lying Irishman.” Shawneetown Advocate, n.d., in Arthur Charles Cole, The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870 (vol. 3 of The Centennial History of Illinois, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord; Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919), 62-63.

²⁴⁰ In the letter to Breese, written after its author had been chosen senator, Shields said that if Breese had been elected, “I had sworn in my heart that you never should have profited by your success and depend upon it I would have kept that vow regardless of Consequences. That however is now past, and the vow is cancelled by your defeat.” He went on to threaten Breese, saying that if the judge did not send him a letter acknowledging his legitimate rights as a naturalized citizen, “I here give you fair warning – Let the consequences fall on your own head. I shall hold myself acquitted both before God and man for the course I shall feel bound to pursue towards you.” Shields to Breese, Washington, 23 February 1849, Breese Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Somewhat lamely Shields protested that his letter had been misinterpreted and that his implicit threat was not that he would murder Breese but to expose his opponent’s unfair tactics. Letter by Shields dated Washington, 28 February 1849, National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.), 3 March 1849. On March 13, Shields also apologized to the U.S. Senate for his letter to Breese. Shields complained privately that every “effort has been made by Breese and his set to injure me, to misinterpret me, to misconstrue me and to abuse me in the papers.” This, Shields protested, constituted “a system of persecution pursued toward me which is cruel.” Shields to Augustus C. French, Washington, 14 and 17 March 1849, French Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Shields’s threatening letter to Breese caused the Senate to take seriously allegations that Shields was ineligible to hold his seat because of irregularities in his naturalization. John Wentworth to Augustus C. French, Chicago, 20 May 1849, ibid.

with another attorney and grabbing a law book he struck the attorney over the head at the same time exclaiming – ‘If you have no law in your head I’ll bate some into it.’”²⁴¹

In August 1842, Shields, as State Auditor, announced that his office would no longer accept in payment of taxes any notes issued by Illinois’s state bank.²⁴² Written the day after this order was published, the second “Rebecca” letter, which Lincoln was to acknowledge as his handiwork, ridiculed Shields as a “conceity dunce” and “a fool as well as a liar” with whom “truth is out of the question, and as for getting a good bright passable lie out of him, you might as well try to strike fire from a cake of tallow.” The letter also poked fun at Shields’s manliness and vanity, having him say to a group of young women: “Dear girls, it is distressing, but I cannot marry you all. Too well I know how much you suffer; but do, do, remember, it is not my fault that I am so handsome and so interesting.”²⁴³

Shields “became very sensitive about it, for it created a great stir. People twitted him on the streets and when he went into stores he was made the butt of jokes.”²⁴⁴ Understandably enraged, Shields demanded the author’s identity; when Lincoln confessed, the feisty Irishman demanded a retraction and apology, alleging that “I have become the object of slander, vituperation and personal abuse, which were I capable of

²⁴¹ Mel T. Cook to Jesse W. Weik, New Brunswick, N.J., 4 March 1923, Weik Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁴² Shields to the collectors of revenue in Illinois counties, Springfield, 20 August 1842, Sangamo Journal, 26 August 1842.

²⁴³ The “Rebecca” Letter, 27 August 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:295-96. The first and third “Rebecca” letters were probably by Simeon Francis, while the fourth may have been the handiwork of Mary Todd and Julia Jayne. Roy P. Basler, “The Authorship of the ‘Rebecca’ Letters,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 2 (1942): 80-90.

²⁴⁴ Article by Shields’ widow, Mary Carr Shields, Boston Post, 10 February 1929.

submitting to, I would prove myself worthy of the whole of it.”²⁴⁵ His response was understandable, for as Gustave Koerner observed: “No man of the least spirit could have taken those insults without seeking satisfaction, even by arms, if necessary.” Shields “was a young man who had his reputation for honesty at stake; and to have in addition his personal features and peculiar habits ridiculed in a small but select society in which he daily moved was more than even a saint could have borne.”²⁴⁶

For guidance, Lincoln turned to his friend, Dr. Elias Merryman, who had once fought a duel and had, as a surgeon, witnessed several others. (Merryman “boasted in his peculiar way that he had killed a white man, a negro and an Indian by virtue of his diploma.”)²⁴⁷ To Merryman, Lincoln “stated that he was wholly opposed to duelling, and would do any thing to avoid it that might not degrade him in the estimation of himself and friends; but, if such degradation or a fight were the only alternative, he would fight.”²⁴⁸ The notoriously combative Merryman, known as “the bully of Springfield,”

²⁴⁵ Shields to Lincoln, Tremont, Illinois, 17 September 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:299n. Most Lincoln biographers have asserted that Lincoln was protecting Mary Todd, who had allegedly written the Rebecca letter that so offended Shields. They were seemingly justified, for she, in a somewhat garbled account, said that Lincoln had done so. Mary Todd Lincoln to Mary Jane Welles, Chicago, 6 December 1865, and to Francis B. Carpenter, Chicago, 8 December 1865, in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Lincoln, 295, 299. But Douglas L. Wilson has demonstrated that Mary Todd’s version of events could not be accurate. Wilson, Honors’ Voice, 265-83. After the three Rebecca letters appeared, Mary Todd did compose some verses signed “Cathleen,” published two weeks after the abusive second Rebecca letter. Julia Jayne’s husband “never understood that the Shields duel had any thing to do with hastening the marriage” of Lincoln and Mary Todd. Lyman Trumbull to Jesse W. Weik, Chicago, 17 April 1895, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 378.

²⁴⁶ Koerner, undated letter to The Century Magazine 33 (October 1887): 974. Mark E. Neely, Jr., observed that it “must be said that the ‘Rebecca’ letter was abusive enough to provoke Shields’ challenge.” Neely, The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982), 181. See also William H. Condon, Life of Major-General James Shields (Chicago: Blakely, 1900), 48-49, and Ward Hill Lamon, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Boston: Osgood, 1872), 259.

²⁴⁷ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 1:206; undated article by Col. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, reproduced in another undated article, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Born in Massachusetts and raised in Louisiana, Thorpe became a celebrated humorist, painter, and journalist who, during the Civil War, served in the Union army at New Orleans. There he took a leading role in politics as a champion of the Free State cause.

²⁴⁸ Merryman to the editor, Springfield, 8 October, Sangamo Journal, 14 October 1842.

relished the prospect of a duel between Lincoln and Shields.²⁴⁹ Chagrined by Merryman's truculence, Lincoln consulted his fellow Whig leader, Albert Taylor Bledsoe, who recalled that Lincoln came to his office one night "with somewhat more than the usual gloom seated on his melancholy face" and said: "That fool letter which I wrote for the Sangamo Journal has made Shields mad, and he has challenged me. I have accepted the challenge, and, without thinking, I have chosen Dr. Merryman for my second. I believe he would rather see a fight than not; if I have to fight, I will fight; but I don't care about fighting just to gratify Dr. Merryman. Now, if you will come in, and make Dr. Merryman do right (for I know you have more influence with him than any other man), the whole difficulty may be settled." When Bledsoe asked about Merryman's role, Lincoln replied: "the friend of Shields says that if I will explain or apologize he will withdraw the challenge, and the quarrel can be settled honorably to both parties. But Dr. Merryman says, if Shields will first withdraw the challenge, then I will explain or apologize, and the quarrel may be settled honorably to both parties. And there they have come to a deadlock. Now I don't see, if both things have to be done, that it makes much difference which is done first. It seems to me that Dr. Merryman is disposed to stand upon niceties, and I don't think he ought to stand upon niceties in a case of life and death."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Undated article by Col. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, reproduced in another undated article, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; Short, Lincoln: Early Days in Illinois, 35-37. In October, Merryman would insult Shields's second, John D. Whiteside, who challenged him to a duel; nothing came of it. Merryman to the editor, Springfield, 5 October, Sangamo Journal, 7 October 1842; Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 5 October 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:303. When summoned by the court to testify in the matter, Merryman refused to do so. See motion by Illinois Attorney General Josiah Lamborn in the case of the people against Merryman, undated manuscript, Lincoln's Early Associates Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

²⁵⁰ Bledsoe, "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," Alexandria Gazette (Virginia), 8 November 1876. Albert J. Beveridge concluded that if Lincoln's "hot-headed friends, who as their own statements make plain wanted a duel to come off, had stayed in Springfield, it is well-nigh certain that Lincoln would have

Acting on Merryman’s advice, Lincoln had formally replied to Shields that “there is in this so much of assumption of facts, and so much menace as to consequences, that I cannot submit to answer that note.”²⁵¹ When Shields responded with a more temperate and specific letter of complaint, Lincoln again refused to answer until the Auditor withdrew his first note. Frustrated by such maneuvers, Shields without further ado issued a challenge.²⁵²

Bledsoe recommended to Lincoln, who had the choice of weapons, that he select cavalry broadswords. “I know Shields well,” Bledsoe counseled, “and his courage is not of the truest stamp; there is altogether too much of bluster and bravado about the man . . . ; he is trying to make you back out, and you can make him back out very easily. . . . if you will choose broadswords.” Bledsoe assured Lincoln that Shields “will never fight you in the world. You are at least seven inches taller than Shields, and your arms are three or four inches longer than his; so that you could cut him down before he could get near enough to touch you. I know you will never do this; because he will never fight you with broadswords. He will show the white feather first.”²⁵³ (Shields was approximately five feet eight inches tall; Lincoln was six feet four inches.)²⁵⁴

Lincoln took Bledsoe’s advice and stipulated that the weapons be broadswords “of the largest size” and that the field of honor be divided into two contiguous rectangular

made to Shields the explanation which he afterwards did make. The language of the notes signed by Lincoln is that of Merryman rather than of Lincoln. In fact Merryman appears to have been the combative, if not the malicious influence, throughout this, the most unhappy and dramatic event in Lincoln’s life.” Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:345.

²⁵¹ Lincoln to Shields, Tremont, 17 September 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:299.

²⁵² Shields to Lincoln, Tremont, 17 September 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:299n.

²⁵³ Bledsoe, “Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Alexandria Gazette (Virginia), 8 November 1876.

²⁵⁴ Shields was “about five feet eight inches.” Wallace, “James Shields,” 36. Cf. Judith M. Curran, “The Career of James Shields, an Immigrant Irishman in Nineteenth Century America” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia Teachers College, 1980), 41.

zones, each ten feet wide and six feet deep, which the combatants would occupy during the fight. Separating the two zones would be a plank set on edge, which neither duelist could cross over.²⁵⁵ When Shields's second protested that broadswords were "barbarous weapons for the nineteenth century" and insisted that the duelists use pistols or rifles, Lincoln replied: "Yes, they are barbarous; so is dueling, for that matter. It is just as well to have the whole thing of a piece."²⁵⁶

To Usher F. Linder, Lincoln explained his choice of broadswords: "I did not want to kill Shields, and felt sure that I could disarm him . . . ; and furthermore, I didn't want the d--d fellow to kill me, which I rather think he would have done if we had selected pistols."²⁵⁷ With a broadsword, Lincoln declared, "I could have split him in two."²⁵⁸ (Lincoln's clever tactic seemed to violate the spirit of the code of honor, whose "first and foremost rule" was "that the combatants should, as much as possible, meet on an equal footing.")²⁵⁹ Lincoln may have received coaching from Bledsoe, who had learned the broadsword drill at West Point, or from Dr. Merryman, "a splendid

²⁵⁵ Memorandum of instruction for E. H. Merryman, [19 September 1842], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:300.

²⁵⁶ Bledsoe, "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," Alexandria Gazette (Virginia), 8 November 1876; Sophie Bledsoe Herrick, letter to The Century Magazine, March 1892, 796. See also Sophie Bledsoe Herrick, "Personal Recollections of My Father and Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Davis," in Rufus Rockwell Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln (Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1945), 62 (originally published in Methodist Review, Nashville, October 1915, pp. 666-79).

²⁵⁷ Linder, Reminiscences, 65-67.

²⁵⁸ Reminiscences of Josiah M. Lucas, Chicago Journal, n.d., copied in the Washington Post, 22 August 1882.

²⁵⁹ Koerner, undated letter to The Century Magazine, 33 (October 1887): 974. A Lincoln biographer remarked that it "was not very nice for a big, powerful man to choose the unusual, almost brutal weapon of a cavalry sabre for fighting with an ordinary opponent." John T. Morse to Albert J. Beveridge, Boston, 28 June 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

swordsman,” or from Major Thomas Duncan, a brother-in-law of his friend Josiah M. Lucas.²⁶⁰

Because dueling was illegal in Illinois, the combat, scheduled for September 22, was to take place on Missouri soil across the Mississippi River from Alton.²⁶¹ En route to that city, Lincoln and Dr. Merryman stopped in White Hall, where Merryman’s friend Elijah Lott, the local postmaster, learned of the duel. Eager to avert bloodshed, Lott notified John J. Hardin, who was attending court in nearby Carrollton. When Hardin heard about the proposed duel, he immediately left for Alton.²⁶² Joining him was Dr. Revel W. English, a Democratic legislator.²⁶³

On his way to Alton, Lincoln cracked a joke. The situation reminded him, he said, of a Kentuckian who volunteered for service in the War of 1812. As he was about to leave home, his sweetheart presented him with a bullet pouch and belt with the embroidered motto: “Victory or Death.” In expressing his gratitude, the young man said:

²⁶⁰ Albert J. Beveridge to David Rankin Barbee, 21 March 1927, in Barbee, An Excursion into Southern History: Briefly Set Forth in the Correspondence between Senator A. J. Beveridge and David Rankin Barbee (Richmond, Virginia: Langbourne M. Williams, 1928), 19-20; Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:349; reminiscences of Josiah M. Lucas, Chicago Journal, n.d, copied in the Washington Post, 22 August 1882. It is possible that Lincoln took lessons in broadswordsmanship from one A. Bielaski, who in December 1840 opened a school in Springfield offering instruction in broadsword, bayonet, and lance. Miers, ed., Lincoln Day by Day, 1:150.

²⁶¹ Many accounts say that the duel was to be fought on Bloody Island, but Edward Levis, Sr., of Alton, told Ida Tarbell that the “point of meeting was on the Missouri shore. I repeat this because I have read in Holland’s ‘Life of Lincoln’ and in other places that the men met on ‘Bloody Island.’ This island is 25 miles down the river and now forms part of East St. Louis. There was then no island directly opposite the levee at Alton, but Bayliss’ or Alton Island was below. However the men went above the island and landed on the bar which formed part of the mainland, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding.” Undated statement by Levis, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁶² D. H. Fletcher to Ida M. Tarbell, Chicago, 3 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁶³ English eventually became postmaster of Alton. W. T. Norton, ed., Centennial History of Madison County and Its People, 1812 to 1912 (Chicago: Lewis, 1912), 1:210.

“Isn’t that rather too strong? Suppose you put ‘Victory or Be Crippled.’”²⁶⁴ When Lincoln and his entourage (Merryman, Bledsoe, and Bledsoe’s father, Moses O. Bledsoe) arrived and unloaded a bundle of huge broadswords, “the lookers-on began to exchange excited comments.” After breakfasting at the hotel, Lincoln and Shields, with their seconds and surgeons, boarded a ferry. Word spread quickly, drawing hundreds of curious residents to the hotel galleries, the streets, and the river bank. Many clambered aboard the ferry, including the town constable and would-be peacemakers, among them Lincoln’s friends William Butler and John J. Hardin as well as Dr. English and two Altonians, Samuel Buckmaster, director of the state penitentiary, and Dr. Thomas M. Hope, editor of the Democratic Union who five years later would fight a duel himself.²⁶⁵ The dueling parties sat at opposite ends of the boat. After they reached the appointed location, the seconds prepared the field of honor while Lincoln sat silent, looking “grave and serious.” He slowly removed from its scabbard a saber “as long as a fence rail” (cavalry sabers were three and a half feet in length and weighed nearly five pounds), scrutinized its edge, and “after the manner of one who has been grinding a scythe or a corn knife,” felt “gingerly the edge with the ball of his thumb.” He then arose, lifted “the mighty weapon with his long arm,” and “reached and clipped one of the topmost twigs of the willow.” Meanwhile, the peacemakers sought a compromise. Hardin and English appealed to both Merriman and Whiteside, urging that the matter be submitted “to four or

²⁶⁴ Undated article by Col. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, reproduced in another undated article, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. For another version of this story, see Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 198-99.

²⁶⁵ Bledsoe, “Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Alexandria Gazette (Virginia), 8 November 1876; Alexander Davidson and Bernard Struvé, A Complete History of Illinois from 1673 to 1873 (Springfield: Illinois Journal, 1874), 628-29. Attorney Moses Bledsoe, clerk of the Greene County circuit court, was an influential man in his neighborhood and a mentor to Edward D. Baker, Lincoln’s close friend. Samuel Willard, “Personal Reminiscences,” 84-85.

more gentlemen to be selected by yourselves, who shall consider the affair and report thereon for your consideration.” The leading role was taken by Dr. Hope, “a very large, brusque man” with “a voice like a steam calliope.” After vainly begging Shields to compromise, Hope grew angry and “said Shields was bringing the Democratic party of Illinois into ridicule and contempt by his folly.” Impatiently he blurted out: “Jimmy, you — little whippersnapper, if you don’t settle this I will take you across my knee and spank you.”²⁶⁶

Shields’s seconds thereupon agreed to withdraw his notes, and in return Lincoln acknowledged: “I did write the ‘Lost Township’ letter which appeared in the Journal of the 2nd. inst but had no participation, in any form, in any other article alluding to you. I wrote that, wholly for political effect. I had no intention of injuring your personal or private character, or standing as a man or a gentleman; and I did not then think, and do not now think that that article could produce or has produced that effect against you, and had I anticipated such an effect I would have forborne to write it. And I will add, that your conduct towards me, so far as I knew, had always been gentlemanly; and that I had no personal pique against you, and no cause for any.”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Hardin and English to Whiteside and Merriman, Alton, 22 September 1842, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 162. This description of the near-duel is based on the eye witness accounts by William G. Souther, a reporter for the Alton Telegraph. See H. G. McPike, “The Lincoln-Shields Duel,” The Magazine of History 4 (1906): 145-47; Topeka correspondence of the Kansas City Journal, n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 25 May 1896; Topeka correspondence, 11 May, Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1896; and Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 15-20. See also William Butler, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 24-25. The longest cavalry saber (there was no such thing as a cavalry broadsword) in use at the time was forty-three inches and weighed four pounds, eight ounces. Dwight F. Davis to Albert J. Beveridge, Washington, 22 May 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. On Hardin’s role in settling the matter, see reminiscences of Josiah M. Lucas, Chicago Journal, n.d., copied in the Washington Post, 22 August 1882.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Lincoln’s memo of duel instructions for E. H. Merryman, [19 September 1842], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:301.

All participants in the near-duel took the ferry back to Alton, where a crowd awaited them. A humorist on the boat had draped a sheet over a log, “so as to resemble a human figure, and as the boat approached the landing bent over the figure and engaged industriously in wielding a fan, giving the impression that he was attending a wounded man.” Shields and Lincoln debarked together “chatting in a nonchalant and pleasant manner.”²⁶⁸

Not surprisingly, the Democratic press lashed out at Lincoln (derisively referred to as “Aunt Becca”), rebuking him for his “most unwarrantable and unprovoked attack” on Shields, sneering at him for imagining that “an Irishman would run at the sight of a broad sword,” and ridiculing him as a “valiant man, who once attempted to frighten an Irishman with a broad sword, and who, when he found that impracticable procured his friends to manage ‘an amicable settlement.’”²⁶⁹ The editor of the Shawneetown Illinois Republican, Samuel D. Marshall, was less indignant: “We are gratified to learn that the duel which was to have taken place between our friends Shields and Lincoln did not come off, and that the whole affair was arranged satisfactorily to the parties, without bloodshed. They are both gentlemen of undoubted personal and moral courage, and we feel highly gratified that the matter has terminated thus happily.”²⁷⁰ When the Chicago Democrat demanded that Shields and Lincoln be punished, Marshall protested that “the evils of dueling like those of Intemperance must be cured by public opinion and not by the Legislature.” Marshall contended that if “Lincoln had refused to fight Mr. Shields no

²⁶⁸ Norton, ed., History of Madison County, 1:210-11; Edward Levis, undated statement, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁶⁹ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 November 1842, 30 June, 11 and 18 August 1843; letter by “Loco,” Jacksonville, 7 October, ibid., 20 October 1843.

²⁷⁰ Shawneetown Illinois Republican, 8 October 1842, reprinted in Springhouse 14 (1998): 16.

one would have gone further in denouncing him as a coward than the Editor of the Democrat,” John Wentworth, who “now seeks to impose an infamous punishment on him for doing the very thing he would have abused him most unmercifully for not doing.” Marshall declared that once “public opinion makes the refusal to accept as honorable as the offer of a challenge, then come on with your laws but not till then.” But as things stood, with “the present most repugnant and incomprehensible state of public opinion upon this subject,” Marshall would “deem a conviction for this offence highly disgraceful to the State. So long as public opinion countenances fighting let men fight in ‘peace.’” If dueling were to be outlawed, “let the man who sends a challenge be punished alone.”²⁷¹

Though Lincoln may have derived some solace from Marshall’s words, he was probably startled when a Whig editor, George T. M. Davis, attacked him in the Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review. Davis scolded the would-be duelists, maintaining that “these gentlemen have both violated the laws of the country” and insisting “that neither their influence, their respectability nor their private worth, should save them from being made amenable to those laws they have violated.” Shields and Lincoln “are lawyers – both have been Legislators of the State, and aided in the construction of laws for the protection of society – both exercise no small influence in [the] community – all of which, in our estimation, aggravates instead of mitigating their offense.” They ought not “be permitted to escape punishment, while a friendless, penniless, and obscure person, for a much less offense, is hurried to the cells of our county jail, forced through a trial, with scarcely the forms of law, and finally immured within the dreary walls of a Penitentiary.” No crime, Davis said, “is more aggravated and less excusable” than dueling. “It is the

²⁷¹ Shawneetown Illinois Republican, 3 November 1842, reprinted in Springhouse 14 (1998): 17.

calmest, most deliberate and malicious species of murder – a relict of the most cruel barbarism that ever disgraced the darkest periods of the world – and one which every principle of religion, virtue and good order, loudly demands should be put a stop to.”²⁷²

Another Whig paper, the Jacksonville Illinoisan, chastised Lincoln, Shields, and other potential duelists in Springfield, warning that if they passed through Jacksonville en route to their appointed fields of honor, those “vaunted knights of chivalry” would “be unceremoniously arrested and taken to the first hog-hole and there cooled off.”²⁷³ In late September, a Chicagoan sarcastically told Lyman Trumbull that “We are very busy here, indeed too much so to fight duels; but there are a number of gentlemen practicing cut and thrust to prepare themselves for a Winter Campaign in Springfield.”²⁷⁴

Such criticism understandably embarrassed Lincoln. The following year, the Whig party rejected his bid for a Congressional nomination in part because, as he put it, he “had talked about fighting a duel.”²⁷⁵ After a participant in the near-duel later attempted to discuss it with him, Lincoln said that he “seems anxious to revive the memory of an affair that I am trying to forget.”²⁷⁶ Shortly before his death, he replied abruptly to a question about the Shields affair: “If you desire my friendship you will never mention the circumstance again!”²⁷⁷ A few months after her husband’s assassination, Mary Lincoln told a friend that Lincoln “was always so ashamed “ of the near-duel that they agreed

²⁷² Alton Daily Telegraph & Democratic Review, 1 October 1842.

²⁷³ Jacksonville Illinoisan, n.d., copied in the Chicago Weekly Democrat, 8 October 1842.

²⁷⁴ George W. Meeker to Lyman Trumbull, Chicago, 29 September 1842, Illinois State Archives, copied on the website of the Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, Northern Illinois University.

²⁷⁵ Lincoln to Martin S. Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320.

²⁷⁶ Milton Hay to Thomas Vennum, Springfield, 16 January [18]92, Milton Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁷⁷ F. B. Carpenter, Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Picture (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 305.

never to allude to it.²⁷⁸ Whenever his colleague at the bar, Henry C. Whitney, tried to get him to talk about the matter, “he always parried the subject, as if he was ashamed of it.”²⁷⁹ In 1858, when Herndon reported to him that people in the East were eager to hear about the Shields affair, Lincoln “regretfully” observed: “If all the good things I have ever done are remembered as long and well as my scrape with Shields, it is plain I shall not soon be forgotten.”²⁸⁰ His embarrassment prompted Lincoln to stop writing abusive anonymous and pseudonymous letters, though he kept on ridiculing political opponents in speeches.²⁸¹

MARRIAGE

Five days after helping Lincoln reconcile his differences with Shields, John J. Hardin assisted him in effecting another reconciliation, this time with Mary Todd. Hardin and his wife, who fancied herself a “maker of matrimony,” invited Lincoln and Mary to attend the wedding of Hardin’s sister Martinette at their home in Jacksonville on September 27.²⁸² When the young people who were assembled at the Hardins’ went for a ride, they

²⁷⁸ Mary Todd Lincoln to Mary Jane Welles, Chicago, 6 December 1865, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 296.

²⁷⁹ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 58.

²⁸⁰ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 146.

²⁸¹ Albert J. Beveridge called this “the most lurid personal incident in Lincoln’s entire life” and concluded that Lincoln had “needlessly and heedlessly assailed” Shields. In Beveridge’s view, the episode marked a key turning point for Lincoln: “At last his habit, formed in boyhood, of ridiculing other persons through offensive, anonymous writing, had been sternly checked. . . . Never did Lincoln forget that experience. Never again did he write an anonymous letter.” Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:353. Lincoln did continue to write anonymous and pseudonymous contributions for the press, but refrained from personal abuse.

²⁸² Sarah Hardin to John J. Hardin, Princeton, Mississippi, 17 January 1842, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum. Most biographers have credited Simeon Francis and his wife with facilitating the rapprochement. See Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 143-44. Douglas L. Wilson has shown that the Hardins were more responsible for that development. Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 281-84.

left Mary behind because she had no escort. As she sadly watched their carriage depart, she was astonished to see Lincoln ride up. “She went down & he said he had come for her to join the party.” Off they went and “a reconciliation followed.” Thereafter they met clandestinely at the house Simeon Francis.²⁸³ Sarah Rickard recalled a different version of the event: “I sat next to Mr. Lincoln at the wedding dinner. . . . Mary Todd sat just across. Of course, rather than bring constraint upon the company, they spoke to each other, and that was the beginning of the reconciliation.”²⁸⁴ They renewed courting clandestinely because, as Mary explained, “the world – woman & man were uncertain & slippery and [we thought] that it was best to keep the secret Courtship from all Eyes & Ears.”²⁸⁵

A week after that wedding in Jacksonville, Lincoln asked Joshua Speed a pointed question: “Are you now in feeling as well as judgement, glad you are married as you are?” He acknowledged that such a query would be “impudent” coming from anyone but himself, but he was sure Speed would pardon him. “Please answer it quickly as I feel impatient to know.”²⁸⁶ Lincoln believed he could not wed Mary Todd unless Speed had

²⁸³ Mary V. Stuart, undated interview with Ida Tarbell, Tarbell Papers, quoted in Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 283; reminiscences of Christopher C. Brown, Chicago Times-Herald, 25 August 1895. Ninian and Elizabeth Todd Edwards told Herndon that “[a]fter the match was broken off between Mary and Lincoln Mrs Francis shrewdly got them together. Doct. Henry who admired and loved Mr. Lincoln had much to do in getting Mary and Lincoln together again.” Elizabeth and Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, 27 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 623. Leigh Kimball, who lived with the Edwards family, “said he frequently took Miss Mary Todd to the house of Mr. Simeon Francis to meet Mr. Lincoln.” Brown, “Springfield Society,” 35. The great-grandniece of Simeon Francis, who married Eliza Rumsey of New London, Connecticut, in 1820, reported a similar tradition. Katherine M. Goodloe to Katherine Helm, Rio Vista, California, 18 May 1928, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. Mrs. Francis refused Herndon’s request for a statement about the Lincolns. Mrs. Francis to Herndon, Portland, Oregon, 10 August 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 624.

²⁸⁴ Sarah Rickard interviewed by Nellie Crandall Sanford, Kansas City Star, 10 February 1907.

²⁸⁵ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 444.

²⁸⁶ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 5 October 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:303.

found happiness in matrimony.²⁸⁷ In reply, Speed advised Lincoln “as a friend not to hesitate or longer doubt that happiness would be the result of his marriage to Miss Todd, giving his own experience of depression and melancholy before he and Miss Henning had finally made up and determined to risk their happiness in each other’s keeping.”²⁸⁸

Taking this advice, Lincoln wed Mary Todd on November 4. That morning, the bride-to-be announced to her sister that “she and Mr. Lincoln would get married that night.”²⁸⁹ Similarly, Lincoln informed Charles Dresser, an Episcopal minister, “I want to get hitched tonight.”²⁹⁰ When Lincoln also told Ninian Edwards of their plans to wed that evening at Dresser’s home, Edwards demurred, saying: “That will never do. Mary Todd is my ward. If the marriage is going to take place, it must be at my house.”²⁹¹ His wife Elizabeth also insisted that the ceremony take place in their home, admonishing Mary: “Do not forget that you are a Todd. But, Mary, if you insist on being married today, we will make merry, and have the wedding here this evening. I will not permit you to be married out of my house.”²⁹² She added angrily: “Mary Todd even a free negro would

²⁸⁷ Speed told Herndon that “One thing is plainly discernable – If I had not been married & happy – far more happy than I ever expected to be – He would not have married.” Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 431.

²⁸⁸ Speed’s friend W. H. McKnight reporting what Speed had told him, in McKnight to Ida M. Tarbell, Louisville, 1 February 1909, Louisville Courier-Journal, n.d., clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²⁸⁹ Caroline Owsley Brown, quoting Elizabeth Edwards, in “Springfield Society before the Civil War,” [Brown], Rewarding Years Recalled, 34. This is a fuller version of Mrs. Brown’s article, originally written for the “Anti Rust Club,” than the one published in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 15 (1922). See also Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 94.

²⁹⁰ Betsey Davis, a relative of Dr. Dresser, in Corneau, “Road of Remembrance,” 120.

²⁹¹ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 94; Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards’s reminiscences, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900; Albert S. Edwards in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 117; Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 60-61. According to Albert S. Edwards, Lincoln said that he and Mary planned to wed at the home of Simeon Francis.

²⁹² Frances Todd Wallace, quoted in Hunt, My Personal Recollections of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, 8.

give her family time to bake a ginger cake.”²⁹³ Instead, they would be compelled to send into town for gingerbread and beer instead of more elaborate fare. Mary, who resented the patronizing attitude of her sister and brother-in-law toward Lincoln as a man of humble origins, replied: “Well, that will be good enough for plebeians I suppose.”²⁹⁴ Those cakes, still warm, arrived just before the ceremony.²⁹⁵

A handful of people, including the two groomsmen, James H. Matheny and Beverly Powell, and the two bridesmaids, Julia Jayne and Ann Rodney, gathered in the Edwards’ home that evening.²⁹⁶ Matheny recalled that at first “there was more or less

²⁹³ Brown, “Springfield Society before the Civil War,” 34.

²⁹⁴ Raymond, Incidents in the Life of Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards, 14-15; letter by Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards, n.d., unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; reminiscences of Mrs. Edwards’s niece, Mrs. H. D. Ames, Washington Post, 13 February 1929. See also T. G. Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties (Peoria: J. W. Franks and Sons, 1902), 36; Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt, “An Old Lady’s Lincoln Memories,” Life, 9 February 1959, 57. Mary Lincoln’s sister-in-law witnessed the scene and described it much later to Octavia Roberts. Roberts, “Our Townsman: Pictures of Lincoln as a Friend and Neighbor,” Collier’s, 12 February 1909, 17, 24.

²⁹⁵ Corneau, “Road of Remembrance,” 120. Her source was Julia Jayne Trumbull, who “spoke with great reticence, revealing little of all that had gone on before the ceremony. She would only tell me of the hurried preparations.” Another wedding guest, Leigh Kimball, also recollected that the cakes were warm. Brown, “Springfield Society,” 35.

²⁹⁶ James H. Matheny, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 21 August 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 665; Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 59. Julia Jayne, a long-time friend of Mary’s, later wed U.S. Senator Lyman Trumbull. Delaware-born Ann Rodney (d. 1888) was the sister-in-law of Congressman William L. May and the granddaughter of Caesar Rodney, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. In 1843, she married Col. W. H. W. Cushman of Ottawa, Ottawa, Illinois, Free Trader, 6 October 1888; Ottawa, Illinois, Republican Times, 2 February 1957; George Pasfield to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 13 November 1914, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 378. Beverly Powell, according to William Jayne, clerked in a dry goods store, “was very popular, and was regarded as the best dressed man in Springfield.” Jacob C. Thompson to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 23 May 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. In 1911, James A. Connolly, assistant superintendent of schools in Springfield, informed Jesse W. Weik that “I have made such inquiries as I could from the few old persons here who would be likely to remember anything about your man Beverly Powell. Mr E H Thayer, p[a]st 96 years old, who is a merchant here now, and has been since the late 30s, remembers Powell as a clerk in the store of Speed & Bell. He was a neat dresser, quite a popular fellow with the ladies, attended all the balls and parties, and he remembers one occasion when he and Powell got a team and carriage and went three miles in the country for two sisters whom they escorted to a ball and back home next morning after the ball. Mr Thayer says Powell went back to Kentucky, from whence he came. He probably returned there when the Speed & Bell [store] closed out here, for Speed then returned to Kentucky and likely Powell did too. Nobody else here remembers anything about him. The memory of Mr Thayer is wonderful considering his great age, and everybody here goes to him for authentic information about very ancient Springfield matters . . . Mr Thayer also says: ‘He was a handsome fellow, tall and straight.’” James A. Connolly to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 20 November 1911, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 347-48.

stiffness about the affair due, no doubt, to the sudden change of plans and resulting ‘town talk,’ and I could not help noticing a certain amount of whispering and elevation of eyebrows on the part of a few of the guests, as if preparing each other for something dramatic or unlooked-for to happen.” That something was provided by the “corpulent, vain, coarse, and effusive” State Supreme Court Justice Thomas C. Browne, “a rough ‘old timer’” known as “the Falstaff of the bench” who “always said just what he thought without regard to place or Surroundings.” Unfamiliar with the Episcopal service, Browne was nonplussed when the groom turned to the bride and said “with this ring I thee endow with all my goods and chattles, lands and tenements.” At that point the judge blurted out: “Lord Jesus Christ, God Almighty, Lincoln, the Statute fixes all that.” The Rev. Mr. Dresser “broke down” and nearly gave way to “an almost irresistible desire to laugh” and “checked his proceeding for a minute or so” but managed to regain his composure and pronounce the couple man and wife.²⁹⁷

In commenting on his marriage a week after the ceremony, Lincoln told Samuel D. Marshall: “Nothing new here, except my marrying, which to me, is matter of profound wonder.”²⁹⁸ A newspaper in Winchester found it noteworthy that the duelist of September had become the bridegroom of November: “Linco[l]n, who was to have been flayed alive by the sword of Shields, has given up the notion of dueling, and taken up one no less fatal to bachelors than the sword is to animal existence – in short, he is married! ‘Grim visaged

²⁹⁷ James H. Matheny, quoted in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 61; Linder, Reminiscences, 73; James H. Matheny, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 21 August 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 665; John Dean Caton, Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1893), 173-74. A few weeks after the wedding, the Illinois House of Representatives conducted an investigation of Browne, who had been accused of intellectual incompetence, deficient legal learning, and general unfitness for his post. Lincoln helped conduct his defense in a two-day hearing, which resulted in the dismissal of the charges. Harry E. Pratt, “In Defense of Mr. Justice Browne,” Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association no. 56 (June 1939): 3-8.

²⁹⁸ Lincoln to Samuel D. Marshall, Springfield, 11 November 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works, 1:305.

war hath smoothed his wrinkled front,’ and now ‘he capers nimbly in a ladys’ [chamber].”²⁹⁹

After the ceremony, the newlyweds took no honeymoon but moved into the Globe Tavern, a hostelry which Lincoln thought “very well kept” and economical, with room and board costing a mere four dollars per week.³⁰⁰ At that low rate, it is no wonder that the Globe, “a primitive sort of house – a big, ugly frame building,” was a no-frills establishment. The proprietor was “extremely prudent and economical, in regard to the burning of tallow candles . . . and also in regard to the arrangement of his table.” The menu consisted primarily of “buckwheat cakes, corn cakes and short biscuits – the two former often being sour.”³⁰¹ John Todd Stuart and his bride had lived there immediately after their wedding, and Mary’s sister Frances and her husband, William Wallace, had spent the early years of their married life at the Globe.³⁰²

A guest at the Lincolns’ wedding, Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards, detected little love between the bride and groom. “I have often doubted,” she later wrote, “that it was really a love affair.” Mrs. Edwards believed that Lincoln’s marriage to Mary Todd was a match “made up” by “mutual friends.”³⁰³ Ida Tarbell, who queried many friends and relatives of the Lincolns, stated that Abraham and Mary “were utterly unsuited for sympathetic

²⁹⁹ Battle Axe, and Political Reformer (Winchester, Illinois), 19 November 1842, in Thomas F. Schwartz, “—in short, he is married!”: A Contemporary Newspaper Account,” For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association (winter 1999), 4. The quoted verse is from Shakespeare’s Richard III.

³⁰⁰ Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 18 May 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:325.

³⁰¹ Herrick, “Personal Recollections of My Father and Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Davis,” 61; Mrs. David Davis to Mrs. David R. Williams, Springfield, 23 February 1846, photostatic copy, Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum. See also James T. Hickey, “The Lincolns’ Globe Tavern: A Study in Tracing the History of a Nineteenth-Century Building” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 56 (1963): 629-53.

³⁰² Reminiscences of Frances Todd Wallace, Chicago Times-Herald, 25 August 1895; Brown, “Springfield Society before the Civil War,” 33.

³⁰³ Mrs. B. S. Edwards to Ida Tarbell, Springfield, 8 October 1895, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

companionship. I doubt if Mary Todd had the faintest conception of the meaning of the words.”³⁰⁴ Eleanor Gridley, who also interviewed people who had known the Lincolns, concluded that Mary Todd did not love Lincoln. Mrs. Gridley, who believed that “LOVE is the essence of kindness, compassion, tenderness, thoughtfulness, [and] consideration,” asked a biographer of Mrs. Lincoln rhetorically: “if she loved him, would she have often annoyed him, confused him and later when her husband became the most distinguished man of the Commonwealth would she have embarrassed and humiliated him, which she often did? No, rather, if she loved she would have been considerate, thoughtful, careful lest she add another burden to his troubled soul.”³⁰⁵ (Orville H. Browning recalled that Lincoln “several times told me there [in the White House] that he was constantly under great apprehension lest his wife should do something which would bring him into disgrace.”)³⁰⁶ Yet another woman who interviewed friends and neighbors of the Lincolns in Springfield – including a bridesmaid at their wedding – concluded that the “question whether Lincoln loved her, even when he married her, cannot be answered.”³⁰⁷ An exceptionally thorough biographer of Lincoln, Albert J. Beveridge, doubted that he “really ‘loved’” Mary Todd.³⁰⁸

In later years, Mary Lincoln sometimes spoke of her husband’s death as if she desired it. Once she said that if he were to die, “his spirit will never find me living outside the

³⁰⁴ Ida Tarbell to T. A. Frank Jones, n.p., 12 December 1922, copy, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

³⁰⁵ Eleanor Gridley to W. A. Evans, n.p., 4 June 1932, copy, Gridley Papers, Chicago History Museum.

³⁰⁶ Orville H. Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2.

³⁰⁷ Corneau, “The Road of Remembrance,” 118.

³⁰⁸ Beveridge to William E. Barton, Indianapolis, 24 January 1927, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

boundaries of a slave State.”³⁰⁹ In 1857, she told her half-sister Emilie: “I often laugh & tell Mr. L[incoln] that I am determined my next Husband shall be rich.”³¹⁰

Lincoln expressed similar sentiments. In 1860, he told an audience in Bloomington: “I think very much of the people, as an old friend said he thought of woman. He said when he lost his first wife, who had been a great help to him in his business, he thought he was ruined—that he could never find another to fill her place. At length, however, he married another, who he found did quite as well as the first, and that his opinion now was that any woman would do well who was well done by.”³¹¹ A journalist wondered what Mrs. Lincoln would “say of her husband’s opinion, that her loss can be so easily and satisfactorily replaced.”³¹²

Friends believed that Mary Lincoln’s emotional detachment was reciprocated by her spouse. Herndon asserted that “Lincoln knew that he did not love the girl: he had promised to wed her: he knew what would eventually come of it and it was a conflict between sacrificing his honor and sacrificing his domestic peace: he chose the latter – saved his honor and threw away domestic happiness.”³¹³ Joshua Speed declared that “Lincoln Married her for honor – feeling his honor bound to her.”³¹⁴ According to Orville H. Browning, Lincoln “undoubtedly felt that he had made [a mistake] in having engaged himself to Miss Todd. But having done so, he felt himself in honor bound to act in perfect

³⁰⁹ John S. Bradford, in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 99.

³¹⁰ Mary Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, Springfield, 20 September [1857], in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 50.

³¹¹ Remarks at Bloomington, 21 November 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:143-44.

³¹² Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 8 December 1860.

³¹³ Herndon, “Lincoln and Mary Todd,” manuscript, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. See also Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 289-91, 317-21.

³¹⁴ Speed, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 475.

good faith towards her – and that good faith compelled him to fulfill his engagement with her, if she persisted in claiming the fulfillment of his word.” Browning “always doubted whether, had circumstances left him entirely free to act upon his own impulses, he would have voluntarily made proposals of marriage to Miss Todd.”³¹⁵ Mrs. William Butler “advised him if he had given his promise to marry Miss Todd he must in honor keep his word unless she released him.”³¹⁶

John Todd Stuart agreed that little love was involved; he told Herndon “that the marriage of Lincoln to Mary Todd was a policy match all around.”³¹⁷ Herndon himself called it a “political match.” She wanted Lincoln because he was “a rising man,” while he wanted “her family power.”³¹⁸ It is possible that Lincoln saw that by wedding Mary Todd he could enhance his political career through an alliance with the more aristocratic Whig element, but such a calculating approach to wedlock seems out of character for Lincoln, who was engaged to Ann Rutledge and later proposed to Sarah Rickard, neither of whom belonged to well-connected Illinois society. A few months after his nuptials, he was defeated for the Whig congressional nomination partly because of his reputation “as the

³¹⁵ Browning, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 2.

³¹⁶ William J. Butler, grandson of William Butler, in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1937.

³¹⁷ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [late June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 64.

³¹⁸ Note by Jesse W. Weik, n.d., memo book no. 2, box 2, Weik Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In Herndon's biography of Lincoln, he speculated that because “Lincoln was inordinately ambitious,” it was therefore “natural that he should seek by marriage in an influential family to establish strong connections and at the same time foster his political fortunes.” Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 132.

candidate of pride, wealth, and aristocratic family distinction,” a reputation that accompanied his new status as an in-law of the Todd family.³¹⁹

The circumstances surrounding the wedding are curious. Its abruptness startled Elizabeth Edwards, who told an interviewer that the “marriage of Mr L & Mary was quick & sudden – one or two hours notice.”³²⁰ The license was issued on the day of the ceremony.³²¹ Three years earlier, Mrs. Edwards had given her sister Frances an elaborate wedding – “one of the grand affairs of its time” – and counted on providing one for Mary.³²² Springfield aristocrats like the Edwardses and Todds customarily held elaborate weddings.³²³

On his wedding day, Lincoln appeared and acted “as if he were going to the slaughter.” He said to one of his groomsmen, James Matheny: “I shall have to marry that girl.” Matheny reported that Lincoln “often” confided “directly & indirectly” that “he was driven into the marriage.”³²⁴ While dressing for the ceremony, he was asked where he was going. “I guess I am going to hell,” came the reply.³²⁵

³¹⁹ Lincoln to Martin S. Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320.

³²⁰ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 444.

³²¹ Illinois State Journal-Register (Springfield), 12 February 1975.

³²² Albert S. Edwards, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 116. The bride recalled that her sister “gave us quite a big wedding” and that her sister Elizabeth “wanted to give her [Mary Todd] a big wedding.” On 12 May 1839, Frances was married to William S. Wallace. Chicago Times Herald, 25 August 1895.

³²³ Brown, “Springfield Society,” 36-38.

³²⁴ Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 475. Herndon’s notes of his interview with Matheny contain this further explanation: “Said it was Concocted & planned by the Edwards family.” It is not clear whether Matheny is paraphrasing what Lincoln told him or offering his own speculation about why Lincoln felt “driven” into wedding Mary Todd.

³²⁵ Lincoln allegedly told this to Speed Butler, son of William Butler. William J. Butler, grandson of William Butler, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1937. See also Salome Butler, daughter of William Butler, in Roberts, “We All Knew Abr’ham,” 28, and in Hunt, My Personal Recollections of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, 10; statement by Speed Butler to Lincoln Dubois, in a questionnaire

All this, coupled with the fact that Mary gave birth slightly less than nine months after the wedding, tends to confirm historian Wayne C. Temple's hypothesis that she seduced Lincoln the night before and made him feel obliged to wed her immediately in order to preserve her honor.³²⁶ She could not, of course, have known if she were pregnant, but she might have been, and this knowledge could have impelled a man with an exceptionally tender conscience and highly developed sense of honor to marry her, despite strong misgivings. Lincoln's willingness to do so would have been fortified if, as James Matheny alleged, Mary Todd "told L. that he was in honor bound to marry her."³²⁷ This explanation is plausible, if not provable. It helps explain why the wedding took place on such short notice; why Lincoln looked like an animal en route to the slaughter; why he said he was "going to hell;" why he married someone whom he did not love; why Orville H. Browning "always doubted whether, had circumstances left him entirely free to act upon his own impulses, he would have voluntarily made proposals of marriage to Miss Todd"; why Herndon claimed that Lincoln "self-sacrificed himself rather than to be charged with dishonor"; and why Lincoln told Matheny that he "had to marry that girl" and that he "was driven into the marriage."³²⁸

Other considerations make it seem likely that Mary Todd seduced Lincoln in order to trap him into matrimony. It would not have been out of character, for her ethical sense was underdeveloped. Two decades after her wedding, as First Lady of the U.S., she accepted bribes, padded expense accounts and payrolls, appropriated wages from White

filled out by Dubois, 15 June 1924, enclosed in Lincoln Dubois to Albert J. Beveridge, 15 June 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

³²⁶ Temple, Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet, 27-28.

³²⁷ Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 251.

³²⁸ Herndon to Charles H. Hart, Springfield, 12 December 1866, Hart Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

House servants, tried to raid the stationery fund, disguised personal expenses in government bills, helped peddle cotton trading permits, and engaged in other illegal activities.³²⁹ Moreover, she was twenty-three years old, rapidly approaching the much-dreaded state of old-maidhood. (In the 1830s and 1840s, women in Sangamon County on average married at nineteen and men at twenty-seven.)³³⁰ The historian Frank H. Hodder speculated that she “hung on to Lincoln because she knew mighty well that unless she captured some green-horn she would never marry at all.”³³¹ To be sure, she was courted by the love-sick Edwin Bathurst (“Bat”) Webb, a courtly, “rather aristocratic” Virginia-born legislator.³³² In early 1842, Webb confided to a friend: “I wish I was married to some quiet sensible body who would love me a little & my children a great deal. I would enter into [a] compact to stay at home & obey orders the balance of my days.”³³³ But Webb’s small children were, in Mary Todd’s view, “two sweet little objections.”³³⁴ His age presented another problem (he was sixteen years her senior).

³²⁹ These activities are detailed in Michael Burlingame, “Mary Todd Lincoln’s Unethical Conduct as First Lady,” in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 185-203, based in part on long-suppressed passages from the diary of Orville Hickman Browning, which were made public in 1994. See also David Rankin Barbee’s untitled essay on Mrs. Lincoln’s misconduct, Barbee Papers, Georgetown University. Barbee was an indefatigable researcher who turned up abundant evidence in newspapers, manuscripts, archives, and the Congressional Record.

³³⁰ Winkle, Young Eagle, 62; Faragher, Sugar Creek, 88.

³³¹ Hodder to Albert J. Beveridge, Lawrence, Kansas, 30 May 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. In this letter, Hodder speculated “that Mary captured him and that he finally married her from an exaggerated sense of justice.”

³³² Linder, Reminiscences, 266-67; Joseph Gillespie, annotation on verso of Webb to Gillespie, Carmi, Illinois, 6 December 1854, Gillespie Papers, Chicago History Museum. Mary Todd described his assiduous wooing in a letter to Mercy Ann Levering, dated Springfield, June 1841, in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 26.

³³³ E. B. Webb to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 6 January 1842, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum. Webb’s wife had died in 1839.

³³⁴ Mary Todd to Mercy Ann Levering, Springfield, June 1841, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 26.

Neither Lincoln nor Mary Todd seems to have been undersexed. William Herndon considered her “the most sensual woman” he ever knew.³³⁵ William Jayne, brother of Mary Todd’s bridesmaid Julia Jayne, reported that in the early 1840s, Mary was “a woman of . . . strong passions” who was “capable of making herself quite attractive to young gentlemen.”³³⁶ Her niece called her “an incorrigible flirt.”³³⁷ A Springfield neighbor of the Lincolns remembered that she “dared me once or twice to Kiss her.”³³⁸

Similarly, Lincoln was “a Man of strong passions for woman,” according to his good friend David Davis, who said that Lincoln’s “Conscience Kept him from seduction” and “saved many a woman.”³³⁹ (As president, Lincoln allegedly told a friend: “I believe there is even a system of female brokerage in offices here in Washington, for I am constantly beset by women of all sorts, high and low, pretty and ugly, modest and the other sort. Here, yesterday, a very handsome young lady called; she would not take a denial, was admitted, and went straight to work soliciting a certain office for somebody supposed to be her husband. She pled her cause dexterously, eloquently, and at times was almost successful by her importunate entreaties. By degrees she came closer and closer to me as

³³⁵ Herndon told this to Caroline Dall in the fall of 1866, according to Dall’s “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College. Helen R. Deese, who is editing Dall’s journal for publication, believes that its entries are not contemporary but were written three decades later, based on notes taken in 1866 and no longer extant. Douglas L. Wilson, “Keeping Lincoln’s Secrets,” The Atlantic Monthly, May 2000, 84.

³³⁶ William Jayne to Herndon, Springfield, 17 August 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 624-25.

³³⁷ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 84.

³³⁸ James Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 452. As this reminiscence suggests, it is possible that Mary Lincoln was unfaithful to her husband. In 1866 Caroline Dall apparently saw evidence in Herndon’s memorandum books (no longer extant) that indicated as much. Wilson, “Keeping Lincoln’s Secrets,” 88. See also Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 291-92.

³³⁹ David Davis, interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 350. No credible contemporary evidence suggests that Lincoln was homosexual or bisexual. On that subject, see David Herbert Donald, “We Are Lincoln Men”: Abraham Lincoln and His Friends (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 35-38, 140-46.

I sat in my chair, until really her face was so near my own that I thought she wanted me to kiss her; when my indignation came to my relief, and drawing myself back and straightening myself up, I gave her the proper sort of a look and said: ‘Mrs. —, you are very pretty, and it’s very tempting, BUT I WON’T.’”³⁴⁰ Herndon recollected that Lincoln was “a man of terribly strong passions for women,” that he “could scarcely keep his hands off them,” and that he “had no appetites, but women must get out of his way.” Lincoln once confessed to Herndon that in the mid-1830s he had succumbed to “a devilish passion” for a girl in Beardstown.³⁴¹ Long after his wedding, Lincoln while on the circuit made improper advances to a young woman sleeping in a bed near his. Lincoln told Milton Hay, James H. Matheny, and Herndon that while spending the night at the home of a friend, he was awakened by the foot of his host’s grown daughter, which inadvertently “fell on Lincoln’s pillow. This put the devil into Lincoln at once, thinking that the girl did this of a purpose. Lincoln reached up his hand and put it where it ought not to be. The girl awoke, got up, and went to her mother’s bed and told what had

³⁴⁰ Lincoln told this to James A. Briggs, a Cleveland attorney and businessman who served as the Ohio state agent in New York and was a Republican party leader and orator. Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Belleville, Illinois, Advocate, 8 June 1866, copied in the card catalogue of Lincolniana, microform division, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. It was reprinted with the wrong date (8 July 1866, a day on which the weekly paper was not published) in The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 32 (1939): 399. Lincoln commended Briggs to the attention William Henry Seward, saying “I know James A. Briggs, and believe him to be an excellent man.” Lincoln to Seward, Washington, 11 August 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:367.

³⁴¹ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 23 January 1890 and January 1891, and Herndon to James H. Wilson, n.p., 23 September 1889, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Herndon went on to say that Lincoln suspected that he had contracted syphilis. Some writers have speculated that Mary Todd Lincoln contracted that disease from her husband and died of it. The best evidence suggests, however, that she died of diabetes. Norbert Hirschhorn and Robert G. Feldman, “Mary Lincoln’s Final Illness: A Medical and Historical Reappraisal,” Journal of the History of Medicine 54 (1999): 511-42.

happened.” Fortunately for Lincoln, who hurriedly departed the next morning, the mother urged her daughter to keep quiet.³⁴²

Lincoln reportedly told a similar tale to James Short: while surveying in Sangamon County, “he was put to bed in the same room with two girls, the head of his bed being next to the foot of the girls’ bed. In the night he commenced tickling the feet of one of the girls with his fingers. As she seemed to enjoy it as much as he did he then tickled a little higher up; and as he would tickle higher the girl would shove down lower and the higher he tickled the lower she moved.” Lincoln “would tell the story with evident enjoyment” but “never told how the thing ended.”³⁴³ Lincoln said repeatedly “about sexual contact, ‘It is the harp of a thousand strings.’” A colleague at the bar, Oliver L. Davis, thought that Lincoln’s “mind run on sexual [matters?].”³⁴⁴ He liked sexual jokes and stories; in 1859, he asked the newlywed Christopher Columbus Brown, “why is a woman like a barrel?” When Brown admitted his ignorance, Lincoln replied: “You have to raise the hoops before you put the head in.”³⁴⁵ That same year, he delivered a lecture on “Discoveries and Inventions” in which he speculated about the first human invention, the fig-leaf apron, remarking with a sly sexual innuendo that “it is very probable she [Eve]

³⁴² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 5 January 1889, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Douglas L. Wilson sensibly observed that these “stories of overnight encounters on the road with young women” were “probably based on real incidents,” though they “may have been colored by the familiar genre of stories about

‘the farmer’s daughter.’” Wilson, “Keeping Lincoln’s Secrets,” 81.

³⁴³ N. W. Branson to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 3 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 90.

³⁴⁴ Oliver L. Davis thought this. Henry C. Whitney to Herndon, 23 June 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 617.

³⁴⁵ C. C. Brown, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 438. Lincoln had attended Brown’s wedding. “Autobiography of Christopher C. Brown,” in [Brown], Rewarding Years Recalled, 14.

took the leading part; he [Adam], perhaps, doing no more than to stand by and thread the needle.”³⁴⁶

Lincoln had a voyeuristic streak. A New Salem farmer named Joe Watkins kept a stud horse, and “Lincoln requested him that when ever a mare come he would be sure to let him know it, as he wanted to see it. Watkins did so, and Lincoln always attended.”³⁴⁷ Lincoln once offered Mentor Graham’s son Simpson “a new jack Knife if he would Kiss a certain pretty girl as she went to school. Simpson agreed to do it.” Lincoln “and some other boys hid behind a clump of trees along the road to see the work done.” Simpson “met the girl – stepped up put both hands on her cheeks and made the attempt to kiss her – but the girl was equal to the occasion” and broke a milk jug over the lad’s head.³⁴⁸

In early adulthood, Lincoln may have availed himself of the services of prostitutes. In 1866, Herndon allegedly showed a visitor “affidavits from prostitutes” who apparently had been patronized by Lincoln.³⁴⁹ As already noted, during the Black Hawk War Lincoln and other militiamen visited a whorehouse in Galena.³⁵⁰ Herndon told Caroline Dall that “Up to the time of Anne Rutledge’s death Lincoln was a pure perfectly chaste man. Afterwards in his misery – he fell into the habits of his neighborhood.”³⁵¹ Herndon alleged that from 1837 to 1842, Lincoln and Joshua Speed, “a lady’s man,”

³⁴⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:360.

³⁴⁷ John Hill to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 6 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 23. Hill asserted that “I have this from W. G. Green & others as the truth.”

³⁴⁸ Elizabeth Herndon Bell, interview with Jesse W. Weik, Petersburg, Illinois, 24 August 1883, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 591.

³⁴⁹ Caroline Dall, “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 30 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

³⁵⁰ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 481.

³⁵¹ Herndon’s account in Caroline Dall, “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

were “quite familiar – to go no further [–] with the women.”³⁵² On at least one occasion Lincoln shared Speed’s taste in fancy women – in fact, the very same woman. Speed said that around 1839 or 1840, he “was keeping a pretty woman” in Springfield, and Lincoln, “desirous to have a little,” asked his bunkmate, “do you know where I can get some.” Speed replied, “Yes I do, & if you will wait a moment or so I’ll send you to the place with a note. You can[’]t get it without a note or by my appearance.” Armed with the note from Speed, Lincoln “went to see the girl – handed her the note after a short ‘how do you do &c.’ Lincoln told his business and the girl, after some protestations, agreed to satisfy him. Things went on right – Lincoln and the girl stript off and went to bed. Before any thing was done Lincoln said to the girl – ‘How much do you charge’. ‘Five dollars, Mr. Lincoln’. Mr. Lincoln said – ‘I’ve only got \$3.’ Well said the girl – ‘I’ll trust you, Mr. Lincoln, for \$2. Lincoln thought a moment or so and said – ‘I do not wish to go on credit – I’m poor & I don’t know where my next dollar will come from and I cannot afford to cheat you.’ Lincoln after some words of encouragement from the girl got up out of bed, – buttoned up his pants and offered the girl the \$3.00, which she would not take, saying – Mr Lincoln – ‘You are the most conscientious man I ever saw.’”³⁵³

³⁵² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 10 December 1885, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Abner Y. Ellis said that Lincoln “had no desire for strange women[.] I never heard him speak of any particular Woman with disrespect though he had Many opportunities for doing so while in Company with J[oshua] F. S[peed] and Wm B[utler] two old rats in that way.” A. Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 171.

³⁵³ Speed, interview with Herndon, 5 January 1889, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 719; Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 5 January 1889, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Herndon added, “Lincoln went out of the house, bidding the girl good evening and went to the store of Speed, saying nothing. Speed asked no questions and so the matter rested a day or so. Speed had occasion to go and see the girl in a few days, and she told him just what was said and done between herself & Lincoln; and Speed told me the story and I have no doubt of its truthfulness.”

In New Salem, improbable rumors had circulated about Lincoln’s sexual adventures. He reportedly sired a daughter with Mrs. Bennett Abell.³⁵⁴ Similar stories were spread about Lincoln and another of his surrogate mothers, Hannah Armstrong, whose husband “used to plague Abe a great deal about his – Abe’s son, which he had by Mrs Armstrong; it was a joke – plagued Abe terribly.”³⁵⁵ As a widow, Hannah Armstrong was joshed about her alleged trysts with Lincoln. She recalled that early in 1861, as she was about to visit him in Springfield, “the boys got up a story on me that I went to get to sleep with Abe &c –.” She replied “that it was not every woman who had the good fortune & high honor of sleeping with a President.”³⁵⁶ It was also whispered that Jason Duncan’s wife bore Lincoln’s child.³⁵⁷

As a married man, Lincoln continued to show signs of a robust sexuality, though Herndon insisted that he “was true as steel to his wife, during his whole married life.”³⁵⁸ Schuyler Colfax, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives during the Civil War, recalled that he and Lincoln “often went to Ford’s opera house to regale ourselves of an evening, for we felt the strain on mind and body was often intolerable.” They found “real relaxation” in watching “those southern girls with their well rounded forms, lustrous hair and sparkling voices. We thought it a veritable treat to see them dance and hear their

³⁵⁴ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 3 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 69.

³⁵⁵ James Taylor, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 482.

³⁵⁶ Hannah Armstrong, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 527.

³⁵⁷ Johnson Gaines Greene, interview with Herndon, 5 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 365. William G. Greene denied the rumor emphatically. Greene, interview with Herndon, 9 October 1866, ibid., 367-68.

³⁵⁸ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, January 1891, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

song.”³⁵⁹ Also at Ford’s Theatre, Lincoln and his assistant personal secretary John Hay one night “occupied [a] private box” where both men “carried on a hefty flirtation with the Monk Girls in the flies.”³⁶⁰ At a White House reception, Lincoln shook hands with a beautiful woman as she passed through the receiving line; when she prepared to leave, he offered to shake her hand once more. When she remarked that he had already done so, he smilingly replied: “Yes, but madame, you are so good looking that I would like to shake hands with you again.”³⁶¹

Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that if Mary Todd did try to seduce Lincoln in November 1842, he was in all likelihood receptive. Twenty-three years later, she indicated publicly her belief that he was seducible. On March 26, 1865, while the Lincolns were visiting General Grant’s headquarters at City Point, Virginia, Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant traveled to the front, escorted by Grant’s aide Adam Badeau. That officer, to make conversation on the long carriage ride, speculated that a battle would soon occur, for officers’ wives had been ordered to the rear; the only exception had been Mrs. Charles Griffin, to whom the president had issued a special permit. Mrs. Lincoln bristled at the news: “What do you mean by that, sir? . . . Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?”³⁶²

It is possible that Lincoln knew that Mary Todd would make his life a “domestic hell” when he married her, but Herndon believed that she changed dramatically after the

³⁵⁹ Colfax told this story to Franz Mueller. “Lincoln and Colfax,” reminiscences by Mueller, enclosed in Mueller to Ida Tarbell, Spokane, 13 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

³⁶⁰ John Hay to John G. Nicolay, Washington, 20 June 1864, Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 85.

³⁶¹ Reminiscences of a Dr. Hatch, Washington correspondence by Frank G. Carpenter, 8 April, Cleveland Leader, 9 April 1884.

³⁶² Adam Badeau, Grant in Peace: From Appomattox to Mount McGregor; A Personal Memoir (Hartford: S. S. Scranton, 1887), 356-57.

wedding; he asserted that before marriage, she was “rather pleasant – polite – civil – rather graceful in her movements – intelligent, [and] witty.” Indeed, she could be “affable and even charming in her manners.” But “after she got married she became soured – got gross – became material – avaricious – insolent – mean – insulting – imperious; and a she wolf.” Herndon thought that the wolf “was in her when young and unmarried, but she unchained it . . . when she got married. Discretion when young kept the wolf back for a while, but when there was no more necessity for chaining it was unchained to growl – snap & bite at all.”³⁶³ A cousin of hers, Presley Judson Edwards, noticed a similar transformation. Before her marriage, she seemed to be “lovely in disposition” with “a natural kindness of heart.” But in 1848, he found her “changed from the pleasant woman I remembered to one rather sour of aspect and sharp of tongue, especially when addressing her husband, who seemed to take it as a matter of course when she berated him.”³⁶⁴

Much evidence supports Herndon’s characterization of Mary Lincoln as a “tigress,” a “she-wolf,” and the “female wild cat of the age.”³⁶⁵ (When she was First Lady, the two main presidential secretaries referred to her as “the Hell-Cat” and “her Satanic Majesty,” and the presidential physician, Dr. Robert K. Stone, called her “a perfect devil.” The commissioner of public buildings, who had frequent contact with her,

³⁶³ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 16 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 134.

³⁶⁴ Presley Judson Edwards, “Autobiography,” typescript dated Hillsboro, Illinois, 1898, Chicago History Museum.

³⁶⁵ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8, 15, 16 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

likened Mary Lincoln to a hyena.)³⁶⁶ James Matheny told Herndon that “Mrs. Lincoln often gave L Hell in general – . . . Ferocity – describes Mrs. L’s conduct to L.”³⁶⁷ A neighbor of the Lincolns in Springfield, James Gourley, reported that they “got along tolerably well, unless Mrs. L got the devil in her.” According to Gourley, she “was gifted with an unusually high temper” that “invariably got the better of her.” If “she became excited or troublesome, as she sometimes did when Mr. Lincoln was at home, . . . he would apparently pay no attention to her. Frequently he would laugh at her, which is a risky thing to do in the face of an infuriated wife; but generally, if her impatience continued, he would pick up one of the children and deliberately leave home as if to take a walk. After he had gone, the storm usually subsided, but sometimes it would break out again when he returned.”³⁶⁸ Mary Lincoln’s half-sister Emilie said that sometimes she “would get into a temper when things did not go just right.”³⁶⁹ She “had an ungovernable temper,” which Mrs. John A. Logan described as “really a species of madness.”³⁷⁰ John G. Stewart, a Springfield photographer, also reported that she “had an ungovernable

³⁶⁶ John Hay to John G. Nicolay, Washington, 5 and 9 April 1862, in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 19-20; John G. Nicolay to John Hay, Washington, 29 January 1864, in Michael Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 125; Dr. Stone paraphrased in the manuscript diary of General John Meredith Read, Jr., quoted in Old Hickory Book Shop (New York) catalogue, n.d., clipping in the Lincoln files, “Wife” folder, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee; Benjamin Brown French to his son Frank, Washington, 9 July 1865, French Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁶⁷ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 251. Matheny had heard stories about Mrs. Lincoln from the “Butler girls,” presumably the daughters of William Butler, at whose Springfield home Lincoln had boarded for years before his wedding. Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Undated statement by Gourley in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 121-22; Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 453. A Pennsylvania-born boot and shoe maker, Gourley (1810?-76) lived for several years at the corner of Jackson and Ninth Streets, one block from the Lincolns’ house.

³⁶⁹ Emilie Todd Helm, interview with William H. Townsend, 27 December 1922, Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. On another occasion, Mrs. Helm said that Mary “had a high temper, and perhaps did not always have it under control.” Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 110.

³⁷⁰ Harriet Hanks Chapman in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 94; Mrs. John A. Logan, Thirty Years in Washington; or, Life and Scenes in Our National Capital (Hartford: A. D. Worthington, 1901), 646.

temper.”³⁷¹ Martinette Hardin and her friends “didn’t like” her cousin Mary Todd “very well” because “she had such a bad temper.”³⁷² A carpenter who worked on the Lincolns’ house, Page Eaton, recalled that she “was rather quick-tempered” and “used to fret and scold about a great deal.”³⁷³ A woman who interviewed Mary Lincoln’s “personal and intimate friends” said they depicted her as a person “of violent temper, ungovernable and willful beyond all reason and when her will was defied she indulged in a series of outrageous tantrums, which so tormented her patient husband that he was well nigh distracted.”³⁷⁴ Another woman who spoke with Springfield friends of the Lincolns reported that “Mrs. Lincoln was sharp and shrewish with an uncontrolled temper,” and “every one I met could give me some example of it.” One instance concerned a young man who danced with Mary Todd in 1839. When she used a French phrase, he replied: “I don’t understand dog Latin.” She lashed out, saying: “Strange for a puppy not to understand his native language.”³⁷⁵ Peter Van Bergen once heard her “yelling &

³⁷¹ Ezra Prince to Truman H. Bartlett, Bloomington, Illinois, 18 August 1907, Bartlett Papers, Boston University. Stewart’s reminiscences of Lincoln appeared in the Bloomington High School Aegis, February 1906, 71-73, and the Bloomington Pantagraph, 20 November 1901. In 1855, Stewart advertised in the Springfield Register that he had opened a photographer’s studio. In 1859, he bought out Preston Butler’s studio on the south side of the square. As First Lady, Mrs. Lincoln sent Stewart’s mother-in-law photos of her children. Ezra Prince to Truman H. Bartlett, Bloomington, Illinois, 2 October 1907, Bartlett Papers, Boston University.

³⁷² Interview with Mrs. Alexander R. McKee (née Martinette Hardin), Marietta Holdstock Brown, “A Romance of Lincoln,” clipping identified as “Indianapolis, January 1896,” Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁷³ Reminiscences of Page Eaton, Utica Herald, n.d., copied in the Belvedere, Illinois, Standard, 14 April 1868. Eaton’s life is summarized in Wayne C. Temple, “Builder of Lincoln’s Home: Page Eaton” (pamphlet; Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University Press, 1962), 1-3. Eaton lived at the south end of Fifth Street in 1855.

³⁷⁴ Eleanor Gridley to Honore Morrow, n.p., 30 January 1932, copy, Gridley Papers, Chicago History Museum.

³⁷⁵ Corneau, “Road of Remembrance,” 118; Octavia Roberts, Lincoln in Illinois (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 53.

screaming at L as if in hysterics.”³⁷⁶ A woman who lived in Springfield in the 1850s recalled that Mary Lincoln had “attacks of what we called in those days, hysteria.”³⁷⁷ William Herndon frequently saw her in “spells of frenzy.”³⁷⁸ When Lincoln was approached by a farmer selling apples door-to-door, “Mrs. Lincoln came out and demanded of her husband why he was purchasing apples and set upon him with such violence that he feared Lincoln was in actual physical danger from his wife.”³⁷⁹

The farmer’s anxiety was justified, for Mary Lincoln abused her husband physically as well as verbally.³⁸⁰ He got a taste of her temper shortly after their wedding. One morning at the Globe Tavern she arrived late for breakfast, as usual, inconveniencing the other guests. Boardinghouse etiquette dictated that in the morning, no one could eat until all guests were seated at the table. Lincoln “was rather rasped at having the others wait for his wife,” so he “somewhat whimsically chided her as she entered and took her place at the table. Whereupon she took a cup of hot coffee from a service tray and threw it at

³⁷⁶ Judge Anthony Thornton heard Peter Van Bergen state this. Judge Thornton interviewed by Jesse W. Weik, Shelbyville, 18 June 1895, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 374-75.

³⁷⁷ Reminiscences of Mrs. Cecelia McConnell, who in 1856, at the age of eighteen, went to Springfield to live with her aunt and uncle. Buffalo Courier-Express, 11 August 1929, section 9, p. 2.

³⁷⁸ Herndon to Horace White, Springfield, 13 February 1891, White Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁷⁹ Statement of Robert Williams, Bloomington, Illinois, 9 February 1923, William E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

³⁸⁰ Many wives physically abuse their spouses. Of the 495 couples identified in the 1985 National Family Violence Survey as abusive (so reported by the women respondents), the wife alone was violent in 25.5% of the cases; the husband alone was violent in 25.9% of the cases; and both were violent in 48.6% of the cases. According to the women respondents, men initiated the violence 42.3% of the time; women initiated the violence 53.1% of the time; and in 3.1% of the cases, the women could not recall or determine who started the violence. The husbands averaged 7.2 assaults per year, the wives 6.0. Thirty other studies yielded similar results. Murray A. Straus, “Physical Assaults by Wives: A Major Social Problem,” in Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke, eds., Current Controversies on Family Violence (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1993), 67-87. See also Philip W. Cook, Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997); Suzanne K. Steinmetz, “The Battered Husband Syndrome,” Victimology 2 (1977): 499-509; and Murray A. Straus, Richard Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1980), 31-50.

her husband and ran hysterically from the room.”³⁸¹ Lincoln “sat there in humiliation and silence” while Mrs. Jacob Early helped clean him up.³⁸² A similar event that took place at dinner one night in December 1860; Lincoln “cracked a joke which displeased Mrs. Lincoln because she erroneously imagined it to be at her expense. Quicker than a flash she picked up a cup of hot tea and flung it clear across the table at Mr. Lincoln’s head, then jumped up in great fury and rushed out of the room.”³⁸³

One day when her husband, absorbed in his newspaper, permitted the fire in the parlor to die down, Mary Lincoln left the kitchen and asked him to add some wood to the fire. When he failed to heed her, she once again asked him, but in vain. Out of patience, she returned, armed with a piece of stove wood, and declared: “Mr. Lincoln, I have told you now three times to mend the fire and you have pretended that you did not hear me. I’ll make you hear me this time.” She then attacked him with the stick of wood; the next day he appeared in court with a bandaged nose.³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Mrs. Jacob M. Early observed this scene. Judith Peterson, “Secret of an Unhappy Incident,” Illinois Junior Historian 5 (February 1952): 91. The author heard this story from her grandmother’s cousin, Beulah Miles Wood. Miss Peterson was the great-great-great granddaughter of George U. Miles, who married Catherine Rickard Early after her first husband, Jacob Early, was murdered. Mrs. Early was the sister of Mrs. William Butler, at whose home Lincoln boarded from 1837 to 1842. In 1840, Lincoln became guardian ad litem of Mrs. Early’s two young sons. Seven years later he represented her in a chancery suit. Harry E. Pratt, “Abraham Lincoln’s First Murder Trial,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 37 (1944): 248-49.

³⁸² Mrs. Early often told this story to her nephew Jimmy Miles, who in turn related it to Dale Carnegie. Carnegie, Lincoln the Unknown (New York: Perma Giants, 1932), 71–72. Louis A. Warren, commenting on Mary Lincoln’s reputation for having “a quick temper and a sharp tongue,” said that “[p]ossibly she threw coffee at Lincoln and drove him out of the house with a broom and probably he deserved it.” Lincoln Lore, no. 15 February 1937.

³⁸³ Thurlow Weed observed this outburst. Alvan F. Sanborn, ed., Reminiscences of Richard Lathers: Sixty Years of a Busy Life in South Carolina, Massachusetts and New York (New York: Grafton Press, 1907), 184.

³⁸⁴ Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 597; Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 23 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

A similar outburst occurred when Lincoln one day delivered some breakfast meat to his wife. Jesse K. Dubois accompanied him from the butcher shop to the house on Eighth Street, where “some aristocratic company” from Kentucky was visiting. After unwrapping the meat, Mary Lincoln “became enraged at the Kind L[incoln] had bought” and “abused L[incoln] outrageously and finally was so mad she struck him in the face.” He wiped off the blood and returned to his office with Dubois.³⁸⁵ As the Civil War drew to a close, a White House steward observed Mary Lincoln assault her husband; she allegedly “Struck him hard – damned him – cursed him.”³⁸⁶

Mary Lincoln also attacked her husband with cleaning implements, cutlery, and vegetables. The daughter of James Leaton, Springfield’s Methodist minister in the late 1850s, heard her mother say that the Lincolns “were very unhappy in their domestic life” and that Mary Lincoln “was seen frequently to drive him from the house with a broomstick.”³⁸⁷ Neither Mrs. Leaton nor Mrs. Noah Matheny “regarded Mrs. Lincoln very highly – that is her temper and disposition generally was not at all commendable.”³⁸⁸ One day in the mid-1850s, a knife-wielding Mary Lincoln chased her husband through their yard. When he realized that they were being observed, he suddenly turned about, grabbed his wife, and marched her back, saying: “There d—n it, now Stay in the house

³⁸⁵ Dubois, undated interview with Jesse W. Weik, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 692.

³⁸⁶ Thomas Stackpole, the White House steward, told this to Ward Hill Lamon. Lamon, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 467.

³⁸⁷ Mrs. Hillary A. Gobin (née Clara Leaton [1854-1941]) to Albert J. Beveridge, South Bend, Indiana, 17 May 1923, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Mrs. Gobin’s father, James Leaton, pastor of the Methodist Church in Springfield (1858-59), lived with his family at Fifth and Monroe Streets, five blocks from the Lincolns’ house. In 1895, she became the second wife of Dr. Gobin, president of DePauw University and a Methodist minister. She had previously been married to Harry Lincoln Beals (1864-93). Material on her can be found in the Hillary A. Gobin Papers, folder 8, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

³⁸⁸ Ida M. Andrews to Jesse W. Weik, Indianapolis, 8 January 1917, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 317-18. Mrs. Andrews was a daughter of Leaton and a niece of Matheny. See also her letter to Weik, Springfield, 23 August 1916, ibid., 317.

and don't disgrace us before the Eyes of the world."³⁸⁹ On another occasion, Lincoln fled the house as his wife vented her anger with "very poorly pitched potatoes."³⁹⁰ Other neighbors occasionally saw "the front door of the Lincoln home . . . fly open and papers, books, [and] small articles would literally be hurled out."³⁹¹ One day, as Lincoln prepared to depart Springfield for a nearby town, his "wife ran him out [of the house] half dressed – as she followed him with [a] broom." Lincoln told the serving girl "not to get scared" but to bring him some clothing, which he donned and then "went up town through [the] woodhouse & alley."³⁹² Thus Turner R. King, a political ally of Lincoln, had good reason to characterize Mary Lincoln as "a hellion—a she devil" who "vexed – & harrowed the soul out of that good man" and "drove him from home & c – often & often."³⁹³ Similarly, in 1862 Herndon was fully justified in exclaiming: "Poor Lincoln! He is domestically a desolate man – has been for years to my own knowledge" because of his marriage to "a very curious – excentric – wicked woman."³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Stephen Whitehurst, interview with Herndon, [1885-89], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 722-23. Whitehurst had heard this story from a man named Barrett, who allegedly observed the episode in 1856 or 1857. This Barrett was probably John H. Barrett, deputy assessor of Sangamon County, who lived on Jackson Street, between Third and Fourth Streets, near the Lincolns.

³⁹⁰ Mrs. George Carleton Beal (née Lizzie De Crastos in 1856) quoted in the New York Times, 6 February 1938; Commonweal, 2 March 1932, 494.

³⁹¹ In 1950, Christiana Bertram said that "many years ago I met two people who had been neighbors of the Lincolns in Springfield" who shared this story with her. Christiana Bertram, letter to the editor of the New York Times Sunday Magazine, Tenafly, N.J., n.d., issue of 5 March 1950.

³⁹² Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 597. For a similar story about Mary Lincoln in the White House, see an unidentified artist's account, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Scrapbooks, vol. 2, Judd Stewart Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³⁹³ Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, McLain Station, Illinois, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 465. As a congressman, Lincoln helped King obtain the post of register of the Springfield land office. As president, he appointed him collector of internal revenue for the Eighth District of Illinois. Ibid., 758.

³⁹⁴ Herndon to Caroline H. Dall, Springfield, 28 January 1862, Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Herndon had just returned from a visit to Washington, where he saw Lincoln.

Lincoln was not the only target of his wife's violence, for she "often struck" servant girls.³⁹⁵ She "couldn't keep a hired girl because she was tyrannical."³⁹⁶ One day when a servant displeased Mrs. Lincoln, she "promptly had the girl's trunk carried out into the middle of the street."³⁹⁷ Similarly, she ordered a servant boy, Phillip Dinkel, "to get out, and threw his suit case out the window after him." On another occasion, she hired a servant girl to help the two she already had, "but fired them all the next day."³⁹⁸ After being hit, one servant complained to her uncle, a miller named Jacob Tiger. When Tiger asked Mary Lincoln for an explanation, she struck him with a broom. Tiger then demanded satisfaction of Lincoln, who mournfully replied: "can't you endure this one wrong done you by a mad woman without much complaint for old friendship's sake while I have had to bear it without complaint and without a murmur for lo these last fifteen years[?]"³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 597. Ryan was a servant in the Lincolns' house.

³⁹⁶ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 19 November 1885, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁹⁷ Octavia Roberts Corneau, "My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln," typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, 14, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, "Reminiscences," folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁹⁸ Paul M. Angle, "Notes of Interview with Mrs. Fanny Grimsley, July 27, 1926," enclosed in Angle to William E. Barton, Springfield, 10 January 1927, William E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago. A life-long resident of Springfield, Mary Frances Burch Grimsley (1846-1927) was the wife of William P. Grimsley and the daughter of William S. Burch, who lived across Eighth Street from the Lincolns. "Philip Dingle," age five, appears in the 1850 census of Sangamon County. The 1860 census for Sangamon County lists Phillip Dinkell living in the Lincoln household as a servant. Military records show German-born Philip Dinkle, age 18, on the rolls of the Union Army in 1862-63. He died of consumption in 1865. Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 27 October 1865. His widowed mother, Barbara Dinkel, lived a block and a half from the Lincolns, on Edwards Street between Eighth and Ninth, according to the 1860-61 Springfield City Directory. Temple, Lincoln's Home, 66.

³⁹⁹ James H. Matheny, undated interview with Jesse W. Weik, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 667n.; Matheny, interview with Herndon, January 1887, ibid., 713-14; Herndon to Weik, Springfield, January 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Roland W. Diller's recollections of Matheny's story, in Paul Hull, "Lincoln in Springfield," New York Mail and Express, 8 February 1896, p. 15. There is some confusion about the miller's last name. In the 1850 Sangamon County census, a miller named Jacob Tiger is listed. He was twenty-seven and born in Ohio. In the files of the Sangamon Valley Collection at Springfield's Lincoln Library is a patent deed dated 4 December 1865 showing that Jacob

In dealing with her sons, Mary Lincoln behaved similarly. Neighbors recalled that she was “turbulent – loud – always yelling at children” and that “was prone to excitability and rather impulsive, saying many things that were sharp and caustic, and which she afterward usually regretted.”⁴⁰⁰ She lashed out at her offspring corporally as well as verbally. One day she brought home a new clock, which she warned her sons not to touch. “A short time afterward she went into the room and found that two of them had taken the clock to pieces. She whipped them.”⁴⁰¹ Describing the conduct of his wayward young son Robert, Lincoln in 1846 told Joshua Speed that “by the time I reached the house, his mother had found him, and had him whip[p]ed.”⁴⁰² She did not always rely on others to punish the lad; in fact, she “would whip Bob a good deal.”⁴⁰³ She once “held a private-strapping party” with her youngest son, Tad, after he had fallen into a mud

Tiger of Springfield purchased an interest in a patent for certain improvements in hominy mills. An advertisement in the 1866 Springfield City Directory identifies Jacob Tiger as the proprietor of Phoenix Mills, formerly Grimsley’s Mills, corner Tenth and Madison. Jesse W. Weik claimed that the miller’s name was actually Taggart. Weik, memorandum book, Weik Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. No such person is listed in the Springfield census or city directory. Giving no reasons for his conclusion or any evidence to support it, David Donald dismissed this story as both a “malicious rumor” and “a joke.” David Donald, Lincoln’s Herndon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 304.

⁴⁰⁰ Josiah P. Kent, interview with Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 21 November 1916, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 362-63; reminiscences of Olivia Leidig Whiteman (Mrs. James M.), Vandalia, Illinois, correspondence, 4 February, New York Herald, 10 February 1929, section 3, p. 4. Josiah Kent is listed as a thirteen-year-old in the 1860 federal census of Sangamon County. His father Jesse was a carriage maker and carpenter. The Kents lived five houses north of the Lincolns on the same side of Eighth Street in the same block. Mrs. Whiteman was born in Vandalia; after her parents died when she was young, she was raised by her aunt, Julia Ann Sprigg (Mrs. John C.), who lived on Eighth Street between Jackson and Edwards Streets, half a block from the Lincoln house. Mary Lincoln was quite fond of Mrs. Sprigg. See her letter of 29 May [1862] to Mrs. Sprigg in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 127-28. Olivia Leidig said she was “in the Lincoln home often.” Interview with William E. Barton, Vandalia, 10 April 1923, Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁰¹ Mrs. Benjamin S. Edwards in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 162.

⁴⁰² Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 22 October 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:391 Ruth Painter Randall’s claim that “the Lincolns did not spank their children” is clearly wrong. Lincoln’s Animal Friends (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), 89. Also wrong is Jean Baker’s similar assertion. Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln, 122.

⁴⁰³ Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 597.

puddle.⁴⁰⁴ Elizabeth Edwards said her sister Mary had a “high temper and after her outbursts normally was penitent. If she punished [the] children [she] would seek to make amends by presents and affectionate treatment.”⁴⁰⁵

Occasionally Lincoln would intervene to protect his children from their mother’s wrath. One summer afternoon she accused one of her sons of stealing a dime, flew into a rage when he denied it, and beat his legs with a switch. The punishment ceased as Lincoln entered the room, where the boy cringed in fright as his mother stood over him. When Lincoln asked what had happened, she replied incoherently. Lincoln solved the crisis by having the boy empty his pockets, then turned to his wife and said tenderly, “Mary! Mary!”⁴⁰⁶

Occasionally Lincoln would use corporal punishment and his wife would object. Once he found young Robert and his friends putting on a play with dogs. The boys fastened a rope around one canine’s neck, tossed the rope over a beam, and tugged hard to make the dog rise up. When Lincoln beheld the scene, he grabbed a barrel stave “and immediately began plying it indiscriminately on the persons of such boys as were within

⁴⁰⁴ Frank Edwards, “A Few Facts along the Lincoln Way,” typescript enclosed in Mrs. Jacob H. Stoner to William E. Barton, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, 21 July 1930, uncatalogued material, box 10, folder 180, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. A six-month-old Francis Edwards is listed in the 1850 Sangamon County census. His father was William Edwards.

⁴⁰⁵ Undated interview with Elizabeth Edwards by Jesse W. Weik, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 355. Many children endured corporal punishment in mid-nineteenth-century Illinois. George Perrin Davis, son of David Davis, recalled that when he was eight years old, he once amused himself by heating and bending a poker in the fireplace. “Whether or not my mother whipped me afterwards I don’t remember, but it was very likely, as it was the custom in those days.” George Perrin Davis to [Jesse W. Weik], n.p., n.d., ibid., 350.

⁴⁰⁶ Anna Eastman Jackson, quoted in A. Longfellow Fiske, “A Neighbor of Lincoln,” Commonweal, 2 March 1932, 494. In 1860, Anna H. Eastman (1842-1920) appears in the Sangamon County federal census as living with her sister, mother, and father, Asa Eastman (1804-88), a prosperous miller and native of Maine. He was known as “the grain and flour king” of central Illinois. Wallace, Past and Present of Sangamon County, 823; Faragher, Sugar Creek, 175-76. The Springfield City Directory for 1855 gives the Eastmans’ address as the corner of Eighth and Edwards, one block from the Lincolns’ house. Anna Eastman married James M. Johnson of St. Louis. After his death, she returned to Springfield.

reach.” Mary Lincoln “was very angry, and reproached her husband in language that was not at all adapted to Sunday School.”⁴⁰⁷ Harriet Hanks once observed Lincoln as he “undertook to correct his Child” corporally. His wife, “determined that he Should not,” tried to take from him whatever implement he was using to administer discipline, but “in this She failed,” whereupon she “tried tongue lashing but met with the Same fate, for Mr Lincoln corrected his Child as a Father ought to do, in the face of his Wife[’]s anger and that too without even Changing his Countenance, or making enny reply to his wife.”⁴⁰⁸

Mary Lincoln continued to practice harsh parental discipline during her husband’s presidency. One day during the Civil War, the youngest son, Tad, mutilated a new pair of copper-toed shoes which he disliked because they reminded him of the so-called “Copperheads” (Democratic opponents of his father’s administration). According to the White House steward, when Mrs. Lincoln “was about to whip him, he rushed to his father’s office and complained that, because it was against his principles to patronize ‘the copperheads,’ even with his toes, he was about to suffer. The President caught him in his arms and said, ‘I guess I must exercise my Executive clemency a little, and pardon you, my patriotic boy; you shall not be whipped for this offence. Go and explain your case to your mother as it now stands.’”⁴⁰⁹ A young girl named Mary Pinkerton, who frequently

visited the White House to play with the Lincoln children, recalled how Tad would

⁴⁰⁷ Walter Graves to Ida M. Tarbell, Salina, Kansas, 18 August 1929, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁴⁰⁸ Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 21 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 407.

⁴⁰⁹ Reminiscences of Thomas Stackpole, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 20 June 1865. Mary Lincoln denied this story, claiming that her children never had such shoes. “It is a new story – that in my life I have ever whipped a child – In the first place they, never required it, a gentle, loving word, was all sufficient with them – and if I have erred, it has been, in being too indulgent.” Mary Lincoln to Alexander Williamson, Chicago, 15 June 1865, Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 251. In light of other evidence of her violent temper and child-beating, this denial is unconvincing. Moreover, mothers have traditionally been more likely to abuse their children than their fathers have been. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, Behind Closed Doors, 65-72, 212-18.

sometimes tease her and pull her hair. When she complained to the president, he “would dry my tears and tell Tad he should be ashamed for teasing such a little girl – and then maybe for a whole hour Tad and I would be good friends again.” But, she noted, things were “different when Mrs. Lincoln was the judge. She had a terrible temper – and when I would go to her with my stories about Tad, she would punish him severely.” Although the president “was always so kind and gentle,” his wife “was often short-tempered and bitter-tongued.”⁴¹⁰

Lincoln would seek refuge in his office when Mary grew angry. According to Josiah P. Kent, it “was never difficult to locate” her. “It mattered not who was present when she fell into a rage, for nothing would restrain her. . . . Her voice was shrill and at times so penetrating, especially when summoning the children or railing at some one whose actions had awakened her temper, she could easily be heard over the neighborhood.” Whenever she exploded, Kent thought it was “little wonder that Mr. Lincoln would suddenly think of an engagement he had downtown, grasp his hat, and start for his office.”⁴¹¹ Herndon recalled that Lincoln, after marital squabbles, often would come to their law office early, accompanied by his young son Robert. There Lincoln, “full of sadness,” would sit quietly. Realizing that he “was driven from home, by a club – knife or tongue,” Herndon discreetly left so that his melancholy partner could regain his composure.⁴¹² Herndon said that Lincoln once lived in the office “for three days at a time

⁴¹⁰ Reminiscences of Mrs. Mary Virginia Pinkerton Thompson, in Frazier Hunt, “The Little Girl Who Sat on Lincoln’s Lap,” Good Housekeeping, February 1931, 17.

⁴¹¹ Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 126.

⁴¹² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

on cracker[s] & cheese.”⁴¹³ To enable him to sleep over at the office “on nights of domestic discord,” Lincoln purchased a couch six and a half feet long.⁴¹⁴ One morning, after Lincoln and Robert finished breakfast at a restaurant, the father remarked: “Well, Robby, this ain’t so very bad after all, is it? If ma don’t conclude to let us come back we will board here all summer.”⁴¹⁵ (Turner R. King alleged that sometimes Mary Lincoln refused to cook for her husband.)⁴¹⁶

At times Lincoln sought refuge with a fellow lawyer. A visitor to a Springfield attorney one morning observed a tall gentleman silently enter the office and proceed to the back room. After lunch, the lawyer said, “Why, Mr. Lincoln, I had forgotten your coming in here. I did n’t remember that you were in the back room, or I would have asked you to go home to dinner with me. Folks away?” Lincoln “looked very serious. ‘No, folks are not away, I’m away.’” The attorney later explained to a friend that “this has happened before. Sometimes Mr. Lincoln’s home is not very agreeable, though he has never been known to speak of it, but I know that he takes it very much to heart and that it breaks him up when anything occurs. He has his own office near here with a partner and clerks, but he has come in to find a quiet place. I supposed when he went in

⁴¹³ Herndon told this to Caroline Dall in the fall of 1866, according to Dall’s “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

⁴¹⁴ Victor Kutchin to the editor of the New York Times, Green Lake, Wisconsin, 21 August, New York Times, 26 August 1934; see also ibid., 29 July 1934. Kutchin was a close friend of Mason Brayman, to whom Lincoln entrusted the couch when he left Springfield in 1861. Brayman in turn gave it to Kutchin.

⁴¹⁵ Reminiscences of Page Eaton, Utica Herald, n.d., copied in the Belvidere, Illinois, Standard, 14 April 1868.

⁴¹⁶ Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, McLean Station, Illinois, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 465.

that he had come to consult some law book that I had in the other room, but he has probably sat silently there all this time.”⁴¹⁷

After dinner parties, Mary Lincoln often berated her husband. Herndon, who thought the “suppers were very fine indeed,” reported that she would invite members of the Springfield elite, while Lincoln would “choose a few of his boon companions to make things lively” and swap stories with them. After the guests had departed, the hostess “would be as mad as a disturbed hornet” and “lecture L[incoln] all night, till he got up out of bed in despair and went whistling through the streets & alleys till day &c. &c. It would take a ream of paper to write it all out just as it did often happen.”⁴¹⁸ Mary Lincoln’s nephew, Albert S. Edwards, confirmed part of Herndon’s story when he told a journalist: “I can remember that when I was a boy the trouble Mr. Lincoln used to cause at social gatherings. He would get a crowd around him in the gentlemen’s room and start a conversation, with the result that the ladies would be left alone downstairs, and would have to send some one to break up Mr. Lincoln’s party, in order to get the gentlemen downstairs.”⁴¹⁹

Sometimes Lincoln would leave Springfield to avoid his wife. According to Anna Eastman Johnson, a neighbor during the 1850s, one evening Lincoln, carrying “a prodigious carpet-bag,” appealed to her father: “Mary is having one of her spells, and I think I had better leave her for a few days. I didn’t want to bother her, and I thought as you and I are about the same size, you might be kind enough to let me take one of your

⁴¹⁷ In the mid-to-late 1880s, David Bigelow Parker was told this by “an elderly man” who was a fellow passenger aboard a train. That gentleman heard the story from an old friend in Ohio. David Bigelow Parker, A Chautauqua Boy in '61 (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1912), 47-48.

⁴¹⁸ Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 24 October [18]83, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

⁴¹⁹ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 119.

clean shirts! I have found that when Mrs. Lincoln gets one of these nervous spells, it is better for me to go away for a day or two.”⁴²⁰ Other neighbors recalled “that they always knew when Mrs. Lincoln was having a tantrum, for Mr. Lincoln would appear at their home with a small desk and say, ‘May I leave these papers with you? Mrs. Lincoln is not well today.’”⁴²¹ Lincoln’s step-nephew John J. Hall alleged that during the summer of 1846 or 1847 his uncle Abraham visited Coles County evidently to escape his wife.⁴²² One evening Abner Y. Ellis, postmaster of Springfield, swapped stories with Lincoln at the post office until nearly midnight. Finally Lincoln sighed, “Well I hate to go home.” When Ellis invited him to stay at his house, he accepted.⁴²³

On Sundays, Herndon sometimes heard Mrs. Lincoln loudly berate her husband. While she attended worship services, he watched after their children. Once, upon emerging from church, she observed Lincoln conversing with a friend; indignantly she screamed at him and chased him home. On another occasion, she yelled at him on the street when he failed to notice that one of their boys had fallen from the wagon he had absently-mindedly been pulling.⁴²⁴

Such episodes took place indoors as well as outdoors. One day while Mary Lincoln was running errands, her husband stayed home to supervise a carpenter. When that craftsman summoned Lincoln to ask his advice, Mary returned home to discover her

⁴²⁰ Fiske, “A Neighbor of Lincoln,” 494.

⁴²¹ In 1950, Christiana Bertram said that “many years ago I met two people who had been neighbors of the Lincolns in Springfield” who shared this story with her. Christiana Bertram, letter to the editor of the New York Times Sunday Magazine, Tenafly, N.J., n.d., issue of 5 March 1950.

⁴²² Eleanor Gridley, The Story of Abraham Lincoln; or, The Journey from the Log Cabin to the White House (Chicago: Monarch, 1902), 167.

⁴²³ Pascal P. Enos, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 449. Ellis was postmaster of Springfield from 1849 to 1853.

⁴²⁴ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 19 November 1885, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Emilie Todd Helm’s reminiscences in Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 113.

youngest son howling. The carpenter reported that she “had rather a hasty temper and at once she sought her husband and berated him soundly for letting the child sit on the floor and cry.” Lincoln replied, “Why, Mary, he’s just been there a minute,” and picked up the lad and cuddled him.⁴²⁵ It is little wonder that some observers likened the Lincolns’ marriage to that of Socrates and Xanthippe.⁴²⁶

When in widowhood Mary Lincoln applied for a pension, many witnesses testified before a congressional committee that she “had been a curse to her husband.”⁴²⁷ Sarah Corneau, a neighbor of the Lincolns, said that her family and others living near the house at Eighth and Jackson Streets thought “the most wonderful thing” about the tall lawyer “was the patience and forbearance which Lincoln seemed to have with his wife, who . . . had locally established the name of being almost a shrew.”⁴²⁸ Mrs. Charlotte Rodrigues DeSouza, who made dresses for Mary Lincoln, described her as a nervous, highly-strung woman who sometimes tried the unusually mild and gentle temperament of her husband.⁴²⁹ In June 1865, a visitor reported from Springfield that “I have not heard

⁴²⁵ The carpenter’s story was reported by Mary Todd Melvin Dewing (b. 1861), a neighbor whose family was close to the Lincolns. “A Child Neighbor’s Memories of Springfield,” Christian Science Monitor, 12 February 1925. Samuel Houston Melvin, who lived with his family one block from the Lincolns at Eighth and Market Streets, evidently became Lincoln’s druggist in late 1860. Temple, From Skeptic to Prophet, 97-101.

⁴²⁶ Reminiscences of Mary Scott Uda, New York Herald Tribune, 7 February 1926. The writer stated that her Kentucky-born father, an old-line Whig and a prominent physician, was friendly with Lincoln.

⁴²⁷ John B. Brownlow to Henry B. Rankin, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2 September 1920, Rankin Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. As a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Pensions, Brownlow’s father, William G. Brownlow, heard the testimony, which was never published.

⁴²⁸ Decatur, Illinois, Herald, 7 February 1909. In 1860, Sarah B. Corneau, age 37, is listed in the Federal census for Sangamon County. The 1855 Springfield City Directory indicates that her household, headed by Stephen A. Corneau, deputy clerk of the county court, resided at the corner of Eighth and Adams Streets, three blocks from the Lincolns’ house.

⁴²⁹ Photocopy of an unidentified clipping from a Springfield newspaper, [ca. April 1930], in the author’s possession. Mrs. DeSouza (1840-1932) lived in Springfield from 1856 till her death. According to her obituary, she “was employed by the Lincolns for several months. After Lincoln received the nomination for president, Mrs. DeSouza was kept busy making beautiful clothes for Mrs. Lincoln.” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 31 August 1932. Charlotte K. Rodrigues married Manuel DeSouza on 26 March 1860.

one person speak well of Mrs. Lincoln since I came here.”⁴³⁰ Jane King, a playmate of Tad Lincoln, felt “actual hatred” for Mary Lincoln, whom she considered a “horrid woman.”⁴³¹ A journalist stationed in Springfield in 1860 wrote that “the curse of Lincoln’s life” was “his unhappy mad wife.”⁴³²

In Springfield, men like William Herndon and Milton Hay called Lincoln “woman whipt,” “woman cowed,” and “hen pecked.”⁴³³ Ordinarily Lincoln submitted to spousal tirades quietly, believing that “it is better at times to let a woman have her way.”⁴³⁴ Mary Lincoln regularly shouted at her husband when she needed firewood. According to a historian of Springfield, from “the kitchen door would issue the loud exclamation of ‘Fire! Fire! Fire!’ The neighborhood understood that there was need for wood in the kitchen and his [Lincoln’s] acknowledgment was contained in the simple, mild reply, ‘Yes Mary, yes Mary.’”⁴³⁵ On a train trip, Mary Lincoln “was almost

Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 27 March 1860. Mrs. De Souza told Octavia Roberts Corneau that Mrs. Lincoln would “stand no sassy talk.” Octavia Roberts Corneau, “My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, 14, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, “Reminiscences,” folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴³⁰ Sarah Sleeper to her mother, Springfield, June, 1865 (no day of the month indicated), Sleeper Papers, Small Collection 1405, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴³¹ William E. Walter to Carl Sandburg, New York, 11 January 1940, Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois. Born in England in 1847, Jane King was the daughter of the merchant William King (b. 1818), who settled in Springfield in the 1850s, residing at Seventh and Jackson Streets, one block from the Lincolns. Her son said her hatred of Mrs. Lincoln “lived with her until her death” in 1917. She is referred to in the 1860 census as Jennie.

⁴³² Edward H. House to Edmund C. Stedman, Tokyo, 10 July 1883, Stedman Papers, Columbia University (courtesy of Jennifer Lee). On House, see James L. Huffman, A Yankee in Meiji Japan: The Crusading Journalist Edward H. House (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁴³³ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Milton Hay to his wife, Springfield, 6 April [1862], Stuart-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴³⁴ John Jay Janney, “Talking with the President: Four Interviews with Abraham Lincoln,” Civil War Times Illustrated 26 (1987): 35.

⁴³⁵ Archibald L. Bowen, “A. Lincoln: His House,” Lincoln Centennial Association Papers, 1925, 63.

hysterical about the baggage and fairly forced Mr. Lincoln to walk back three-quarters of a mile . . . to see that it was safe – which he did uncomplainingly.”⁴³⁶

Mary Lincoln took a dim view of her in-laws. When Eleanor Gridley interviewed “old neighbors, acquaintances and relatives” of Lincoln, she “found verified evidence that Mrs. Lincoln would neither permit her children to see the old stepmother, of whom Mr. Lincoln was fond, nor allow her to visit them at her home. But, Mr. Lincoln never spoke disparagingly of his wife. ‘Mary is so busy,’ or ‘she cannot be parted from her children for a day.’ None of them, however, believed his excuses, but forgave him for the act.”⁴³⁷ According to Herndon, “Mrs. Lincoln held the Hanks tribe in contempt and the Lincoln family generally – the old folks – Thomas Lincoln & his good old wife. Mrs. Lincoln was terribly aristocratic and as haughty & as imperious as she was autocratic: she was as cold as a chunk of ice. Thomas Lincoln and his good old wife were never in this city [Springfield].”⁴³⁸ Mary Lincoln “refused furiously” her husband’s request to let the adolescent son of his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, live at their home and attend Springfield schools.⁴³⁹

Mary Lincoln treated some of her own relations with equal disdain. Dr. Albert A. North of Springfield once hired a relative of hers to conduct some business for him.

⁴³⁶ Reminiscences of Mary Scott Uda, recounting a story told by her mother, New York Herald Tribune, 7 February 1926. The trip could well have been the one taken by the Lincolns to Washington in 1847 or to New York a decade later.

⁴³⁷ Eleanor Gridley to W. A. Evans, n.p., 4 June 1932, copy, Gridley Papers, Chicago History Museum.

⁴³⁸ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 1 December 1885, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴³⁹ Thomas L. D. Johnston, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 532. In 1851, Lincoln told his stepbrother that Johnston’s adolescent son Abraham was welcome to stay at his house in Springfield: “I understand he wants to live with me so that he can go to school, and get a fair start in the world, which I very much wish him to have.” He promised that “when I reach home, if I can make it convenient to take him, I will take him.” Lincoln to John D. Johnston, Shelbyville, 9 November 1851, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:112. See also Charles H. Coleman, Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois (New Brunswick: Scarecrow Press, 1955), 70-71.

When the young man arrived in the Illinois capital, he called to pay his respects to Mary Lincoln, who “told the young gentleman in coarse, cruel, and brutish language that she did not wish her poor relatives to pile themselves on her and eat her up.” He then “tried to explain to her that out of respect he had called to see her, said he had plenty of money and had a good position and did not need her charity and did not deserve her coarse, savage, and brutal language; he quickly left the house, deeply mortified, leaving Mrs. Lincoln in one of her haughty, imperious, and angry states.” After Lincoln apologized to the young man and offered to help him out, he allegedly called Lincoln “one of the noblest of men” and his wife “a savage.”⁴⁴⁰ Another relative who offended Mary Lincoln was the daughter of her cousin Dr. Lyman Beecher Todd. According to Harriet Chapman, who was living with the Lincolns at the time, Mrs. Lincoln excluded the young woman when inviting guests to a party because Dr. Todd “had intimated that Robert L. who was baby was a sweet child but not good looking.”⁴⁴¹

Mary Lincoln was angry at her husband in part because he made comparatively little money. Charles Arnold, a Springfield neighbor of the Lincolns, said Elizabeth Edwards “was the social leader of Springfield and she gave fine parties. Mrs. Lincoln was poor and she resented the way people passed her by. She was hurt and envious.”⁴⁴² In

⁴⁴⁰ Albert A. North, paraphrased in Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 9 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Born in 1825 in Pennsylvania, North was a physician who served as justice of the peace in Capitol Township, Sangamon County, from 1885 to 1889. I am grateful to Dr. Wayne C. Temple of the Illinois State Archives for information about North. Herndon thought the young man’s name was Charles Lewis. He was, Herndon thought, “somehow a nephew of Mrs. Lincoln or probably other relative.”

⁴⁴¹ Harriet Chapman, interview with Jesse W. Weik, [1886-87], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 646.

⁴⁴² Charles Arnold told this to Benjamin Franklin Stoneberger, who in turn told it to Dr. W. A. Evans. Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, 130. Charles E. Arnold (1808-88), who lived across the street from the Lincolns’ house from 1849 to 1869, served as treasurer of Sangamon County and later as its sheriff. Stoneberger (1853-1939), who had conversations with Lincoln’s neighbors, was the son of William and Josephine Stoneberger. The family appears in the Springfield City Directory for the first time in 1863. They

1857, Mary Lincoln complained to her half-sister Emilie that when in New York she saw passenger steamers about to sail for Europe, “I felt in my heart, inclined to sigh, that poverty was my portion, how I long to go to Europe.”⁴⁴³ J. G. McCoy recalled that Mary Lincoln “was ambitious to shine in a social way, beyond Mr. Lincoln’s inclination or financial ability to sustain, and was given to scolding and complaining of Mr. Lincoln in a manner and to a[n] extent exceedingly unpleasant to him.”⁴⁴⁴ William T. Baker described her as “a woman whose tastes and desires demanded larger finances than Mr. Lincoln could arrange for” and was therefore “dissatisfied with the progress that Mr. Lincoln was making.”⁴⁴⁵ Preston H. Bailhache, a physician in practice with Mary Lincoln’s brother-in-law, said she “was very desirous of having a carriage to take herself and packages home, but was unable to persuade Mr. Lincoln to purchase one.” She therefore, “with a view of shaming him,” one day “mounted the steps of his office and announced that she had a conveyance at the door to take him home.” Manifesting “no surprise,” he “quietly started with her down the stairs.” On the street “stood an old fashioned one-horse dray,” to which Mrs. Lincoln pointed and said, “There is your

lived on North Fifth Street through the 1870s and 1880s. B. F. Stoneberger, who was in the candy business in Springfield, died in Chicago. Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 18 April 1939. His sister married Osborn Oldroyd (1842-1930), who lived in the Lincoln home from 1883 to 1893.

⁴⁴³ Mary Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, Springfield, 20 Sept. [1857], in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 50.

⁴⁴⁴ Reminiscences of McCoy in an unidentified newspaper clipping, dated 12 February 1901, Lincoln Scrapbooks, 3:40, Judd Stewart Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This McCoy was perhaps Joseph Geiting McCoy (1837-1915), a prominent cattle dealer who was born in Sangamon County on Spring Creek, ten miles west of Springfield. He attended Knox College (1857-58) and married Sarah Epler of Pleasant Plains in 1861. They lived for a time near Springfield. After the Civil War, he moved to Kansas, where he achieved prominence in business and politics. See the introduction to Ralph P. Bieber’s edition of McCoy’s Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest (1874; Glendale, California: A. H. Clark, 1940), 17-68.

⁴⁴⁵ Reminiscences of William T. Baker (b. 1828), Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 18 January 1909. Baker was born in Kentucky in 1828; shortly thereafter his family moved to central Illinois, where his father, James Baker, served in the Black Hawk War with Lincoln in Captain Jacob Early’s company. The Baker family settled in Mt. Pulaski. See Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 123-27.

carriage.” Her spouse, “smiling in his quaint way, climbed on to the dray and invited his wife to join him; she failed to see the joke, and Mr. Lincoln then told Jake, the driver, to take him home.”⁴⁴⁶

To his spouse, Lincoln ceded control of the household. He once said, “I myself manage all important matters. In little things I have got along through life by letting my wife run her end of the machine pretty much in her own way.”⁴⁴⁷ When a workman hesitated to chop down a shade tree before the house on Eighth Street, Lincoln asked: “Have you seen Mrs. L?” Told that it was her idea, he exclaimed: “Then in God’s name cut it down clean to the roots!”⁴⁴⁸ On another occasion she “drove off a crowd of painters and decorators with a broom.” As they were about to depart, Lincoln returned home, told them a story “that placated them and they returned to work.”⁴⁴⁹ One day Mary Lincoln “casually observed at the breakfast table that she was without a cook.” Although she “did not ask him to procure her a cook,” Lincoln did so anyway, whereupon his wife, “having assumed to attend to her part of her husband’s domestic affairs,” refused “to accept the cook of her husband’s selection, and thereby early in her married life established a precedent which to the lawyer-husband in subsequent life was a relief from any burdens about household affairs.”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ Preston H. Bailhache, “Recollections of a Springfield Doctor,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 47 (1954): 60. Bailhache (1835-1919) lived in Springfield from 1857 to 1861 and cared for the Lincolns’ children when his partner, Dr. William S. Wallace, was unavailable.

⁴⁴⁷ Henry B. Stanton, Random Recollections (3rd ed.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 221.

⁴⁴⁸ Pascal P. Enos, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 448-49.

⁴⁴⁹ Reminiscences of Mrs. B. C. McQuesten, in a clipping datelined Ottawa, Kansas, 12 February (no year indicated, but probably 1920), William E. Barton Scrapbooks, University of Chicago, “Abraham Lincoln,” vol. 1.

⁴⁵⁰ Mrs. John A. Logan in the New York Evening Sun, 12 February 1912.

As her niece observed, “Mary was not noted for her skill as a cook because in her father’s home in Kentucky there had been no necessity for her to learn that branch of domestic science.” A slave called Aunt Chaney, “well trained by Mrs. Todd’s mother,” was “an autocrat in the kitchen, resenting any intrusion into her domain.”⁴⁵¹ Dennis Hanks’s daughter Harriet, who spent a year and a half in the Lincoln home during the mid-1840s, recalled that the family table “was usually set vary Sparingly. Mrs. Lincoln was vary economical. So much so that by Some She might have been pronounced Stingy.”⁴⁵² Elizabeth Edwards said that her sister Mary “loved fine clothes and was so close or economical at the kitchen [so] that she might have money for luxuries” and was “economical even requiring Robert to wash dishes.”⁴⁵³ According to Herndon, “Mrs. Lincoln was a very stingy woman” whose “table at home generally was economized to the smallest amount.” Lincoln “never dared as a general thing to invite his friends to his house.” David Davis told Herndon “that Lincoln never invited him to his house,” and Herndon “heard many others of Lincoln’s best friends say the same thing.” Lincoln did not mind that she “set a poor table,” for, as Herndon put it, he “ate mechanically” and “filled up and this is all: he never complained of bad food nor praised the good.”⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Fragment of the manuscript of Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. This passage was not included in the published version of the biography.

⁴⁵² Harriet A. Chapman to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 10 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 512. Milton Hay reported that Mary Lincoln “was of very saving habits.” Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 91.

⁴⁵³ Undated interview with Elizabeth Edwards by Jesse W. Weik, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 355. Paraphrasing what James H. Matheny told him about Mrs. Lincoln, Weik wrote that she “loved fine clothes, but in other respects she was close and in no sense extravagant.” Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵⁴ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 5 February 1887 and 10 October 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Isaac N. Arnold of Chicago alleged that “Mrs. Lincoln often entertained small numbers of friends at dinner, and somewhat larger numbers at evening parties. In his modest and simple home, everything was orderly and refined, and there was always on the part of both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, a cordial, hearty western welcome, which put every guest perfectly at ease. Her table was famed for the excellence of its rare Kentucky dishes . . . Yet it was the genial manner and ever kind welcome of the hostess, and the wit and humor, anecdote, and unrivalled conversation of the host, which formed the chief

Mary Lincoln's stinginess contrasted sharply with her husband's generosity. Herndon maintained that "Lincoln wouldn't have a dollar to bless himself with if some one else didn't look out for him. He can never say 'No' to any one who puts up a poor mouth, but will hand out the last dollar he has, sometimes when he needs it himself, and needs it badly."⁴⁵⁵ The Lincolns occasionally quarreled about money, notably concerning the wages of servants. Mary's sister Elizabeth described such a row about a young woman in their employ: "one day the girl threatened to leave unless She Could get \$1.50 per week. Mrs. L. Could [-] rather would [-] not give the Extra 25 c: the girl Said [s]he would leave. Mrs L. Said Leave. Mr L. heard the Conversation – didn[']t want the girl to leave – told his wife so – asked – begged her to pay the \$1.50. Mrs L remained incorrigible[.] Mr L slipt round to the backdoor and Said – 'Don't leave – Tell Mrs Lincoln you have Concluded to Stay at \$1.25 and I[']ll pay the odd 25 c to you.['] Mrs Lincoln overheard the Conversation and Said to the girl & Mr L: [']What are you doing – I heard Some Conversation – Couldn't understand it – I'm not going to be deceived – Miss[,] you Can leave[,] and as for you Mr L[,] I'd be ashamed of myself."⁴⁵⁶ Lincoln himself hired Margaret Ryan, promising her a 75¢ bonus and instructing her "not to fuss with Mrs. L."⁴⁵⁷ Another domestic dust-up occurred when young John F. Mendosa and his father were selling blackberries to Mrs. Lincoln, who balked at the asking price of

attraction, and made a dinner at the Lincoln's cottage an event to be remembered." Arnold, Life of Lincoln, 82-83. As a resident of Chicago, Arnold was not in a position to know much first-hand about Mary Lincoln's hospitality in Springfield, though he did attend court in the capital occasionally.

⁴⁵⁵ Gibson William Harris, "My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," Woman's Home Companion, January 1904, 15.

⁴⁵⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 445. This servant may have been Mariah Drake. See Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 100, and Josiah Kent, interview with Weik, 21 November 1916, ibid., 363.

⁴⁵⁷ Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 597; interview with [Margaret Ryan], Jesse W. Weik, "More Stories of Lincoln," Decatur, 19 August [no year indicated], Indianapolis Times, n.d., Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

15¢ per pint. She “started to run them down because they were so small” and refused to pay more than 10¢ per pint. When Lincoln observed this haggling, he gave the lad a quarter for a pint, much to his spouse’s dismay. According to Mendosa, she “scolded Mr. Lincoln for taking them. Mr. Lincoln spoke up and told me to tell father that it was cheap enough, that he had earned every cent of it, and more too.”⁴⁵⁸

Mrs. Lincoln would alienate tradesmen as well as her husband and their neighbors. When she accused the ice man of “swindling her in weight,” that gentleman “got mad – cursed – and vowed she should never get ice again.” After he “refused to come in her part of town,” Mary Lincoln offered Josiah Kent 25¢ if he would induce him to sell her ice once again. On another occasion, she offered to pay Kent a quarter to drive her in the family carriage while Lincoln was away. She evidently gave the money to her son Bob to pay Kent, who alleged that he had not received the cash from the boy. She then “became angry and shouted ‘Don’t you tell me Bob didn’t pay up.’”⁴⁵⁹

Sometimes Lincoln used guile rather direct confrontation in coping with his wife’s penuriousness. A young man once asked him to contribute to the fund drive of the local fire department. “Well,” replied he, “I’ll go home to supper and ask Mrs. Lincoln what she has to say. After supper she will be in good humor, and I will ask her if we shall give fifty dollars. She will say, ‘Abe, when will you learn some sense? Twenty dollars is enough.’ Come around in the morning and get your money.” This approach worked.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ John F. Mendosa to James R. B. Van Cleve, Springfield, 2 July 1908, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Reminiscences,” folder 3, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁵⁹ Statement of Josiah P. Kent, 21 November 1916, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 362-63.

⁴⁶⁰ Henry Haynie in “Success,” n.d., Youth’s Companion, 1 September 1898.

If “the pleasures of the table had few attractions for him,” Lincoln did relish jokes about hen-pecked husbands.⁴⁶¹ He probably identified with the hapless Mr. Jones whom he described as “one of your meek men” with “the reputation of being badly henpecked.” A few days after his wife “was seen switching him out of the house,” a friend told him, a “man who will stand quietly and take a switching from his wife, deserves to be horsewhipped.” Jones responded, “why, it didn’t hurt me any; and you’ve no idea what a power of good it did Sarah Ann!”⁴⁶²

He was “much amused” when Henry C. Whitney read him a story about two fellows who met after a long separation.

“Where have you been, Jim?”

“Oh! It was so quiet at home, I ’listed and have been in the war since I saw you – and where have you been?”

“Oh! Susie made so much war on me at home that I went out timbering in the woods to get a little peace.”⁴⁶³

During the Civil War, when asked if Clement L. Vallandigham, a banished Democratic critic of the administration, should be captured and tried if he returned from exile, Lincoln responded: “Perhaps the best way to treat him would be to do as the man did who had been annoyed with a very troublesome wife, and who had been relieved by her absconding, and who by no means desired her return, and who therefore advertised

⁴⁶¹ John Hay, “Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln,” 1890, in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 134; Harry E. Pratt, “Lincoln Liked ‘Nothing to Wear,’” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 2 (March 1942): 5–12.

⁴⁶² Carpenter, Six Months in the White House, 273–74. See also Margarita Spalding Gerry, ed., Through Five Administrations: Reminiscences of Colonel William H. Crook, Body-Guard to President Lincoln (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1910), 16.

⁴⁶³ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 184.

one cent for her return.”⁴⁶⁴ Lincoln told Chauncey Depew the story of a farmer who consulted him about obtaining a divorce after he and his wife had quarreled over the color to paint their new house. His client explained, “I wanted it painted white like our neighbors’, but my wife preferred brown. Our disputes finally became quarrels. She has broken crockery, throwing it at my head, and poured scalding tea down my back and I want a divorce.” Lincoln urged the couple to compromise their differences for the sake of their children. A month later, the farmer reported that he and his wife had reached a compromise: “we are going to paint the house brown.”⁴⁶⁵ Lincoln was fond of quoting from his favorite poet, Robert Burns, these lines:

Sic a wife as Willie had,

I would no gie a button for her.⁴⁶⁶

Milton Hay pitied Lincoln. In 1862, he said of the president: “Poor man! I think some woman ought to talk kindly to him, and I suppose he has got to go from home to hear it.”⁴⁶⁷ Lincoln regarded that home with understandable misgivings. When he came back to Eighth Street from work, he usually entered the kitchen, inquired about his wife’s mood, and only then passed through the front door.⁴⁶⁸

Herndon alleged that Lincoln usually paid his wife no heed when she was enraged, but that “sometimes he would rise and cut up the very devil for a while – make thing[s]

⁴⁶⁴ Isaac N. Arnold, The History of Abraham Lincoln, and the Overthrow of Slavery (Chicago: Clarke, 1866), 503.

⁴⁶⁵ Emanuel Hertz, ed., Lincoln Talks: An Oral Biography (New York: Viking, 1939), 60-61.

⁴⁶⁶ John McNamar, paraphrased in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874.

⁴⁶⁷ Hay to his wife, Springfield, 9 April 1862, Stuart-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁶⁸ Margaret Ryan, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 27 October 1886, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 596-97.

more lively and ‘get.’”⁴⁶⁹ One Monday, Lincoln remorsefully admitted to Herndon that the previous day, when Mary “had annoyed him to the point of exasperation,” he “lost his habitual self-control.” She “was in a tirade so fierce” that he grabbed her, “pushed her through the door,” and exclaimed: “If you can’t stop this abuse, damn you, get out.” Lincoln “told Mr. Herndon that he was deeply sorry for this act. He was not accustomed to lose his temper Lincoln thought it possible that some people on their way to church had seen the incident, and he was greatly depressed that he had permitted himself to do and say what he had done and said.”⁴⁷⁰ On another occasion, when she angrily interrupted a discussion he was having with colleagues, he snapped: “Mary, if you will attend to your business, I will attend to mine.”⁴⁷¹

Mary Lincoln may have suffered from what a Springfield neighbor called “monthly derangements” (what later came to be known as pre-menstrual stress). Frederick I. Dean, whose family lived directly across Eighth Street from the Lincolns, said that as a boy he “noticed strange vagaries on the part of Mrs. Lincoln.” He informed a historian that “as I

⁴⁶⁹ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷⁰ Judge George W. Murray heard this story from Herndon, his law partner during the year 1884. Murray’s statement for William E. Barton, 21 April 1920, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. See also G. W. Murray to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 9 June 1923, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. A similar account of this event can be found in Sandburg and Angle, Mary Lincoln, 70–71. Born in 1839 in Ohio, Murray moved to Springfield in 1874 and was elected a judge of Sangamon County in 1890, after having served in the lower house of the Illinois General Assembly. It is not surprising that Lincoln seldom turned on his wife. Social scientists have interviewed battered husbands who do not retaliate against their spouses and report that there are several reasons for their passivity: “The first, based on chivalry, considers any man who would stoop to hit a woman to be a bully. The second, usually based on experience, is a recognition of the severe damage which a man could do to a woman. . . . A final reason expressed by these beaten men is perhaps a self-serving one. The combination of crying out in pain during the beating and having the wife see the injuries, which often take several weeks to heal, raise the wife’s level of guilt which the husbands consider to be a form of punishment.” Steinmetz, “Battered Husbands,” 507.

⁴⁷¹ Judge Charles J. Searle, recalling what his father, Elhanan J. Searle, heard Lincoln say, as recounted in an interview Joseph B. Oakleaf conducted with Charles Searle, memo dated 14 February 1925, Oakleaf Papers, Indiana University. Elhanan J. Searle (b. 1835) was a law student in the Lincoln-Herndon law office in 1860. He served in the First Arkansas Cavalry in the Civil War and later became an associate justice of the Arkansas state supreme court.

grew older, I heard conversations between my mother and neighboring ladies touching upon that subject, and I formed the idea from that source that the vagaries arose from a functional derangement common alone to women, and that they occurred only semi occasionally, but regularly at stated times, & were of but brief duration, and as I grew older these facts were very plainly to be seen by myself.” Shortly after Lincoln’s assassination, when Dean spoke to William Herndon about these matters, the attorney “said they corresponded exactly with his own ideas, and exactly in line with what Mr Lincoln had frequently himself told him, with broken tearful voice.”⁴⁷²

Mary Lincoln’s hysterics were triggered not only by her husband and children. At the first sign of a thunderstorm, she panicked, prompting Lincoln to leave his office “to quiet her fears and comfort her until the storm was over.”⁴⁷³ When he was out of town, she would, when frightened, turn to neighbors. James Gourley recalled one such occasion: “Mrs Lincoln had a bad girl living with her: the boys & men used to Come to her house in L[incoln]’s absence and scare her: She was crying & wailing one night – Called me and said – ‘Mr Gourly – Come – do Come & Stay with me all night – you can Sleep in the bed with Bob and I.’”⁴⁷⁴ While her husband was away, she hired neighborhood boys to spend the night in her house. Fred I. Dean recalled that Mrs. Lincoln “had me, young

⁴⁷² Fred I. Dean to Ida M. Tarbell, Washington, 7 January 1900, Tarbell Papers, Smith College. Dean claimed that he had “several talks” with Herndon “upon the subject, & he fully agreed with my views.” Dean to Tarbell, 19 December 1899, *ibid.* Dean’s parents, Frederick S. and Harriet Dean, moved from Bloomington to Springfield in 1841. Eight years later, they purchased from Peter Van Bergen a lot across from the Lincoln house and the following year bought part of an adjacent lot from Lincoln. Dean’s father either died or abandoned the family in the early 1850s, and his wife ran a school until she, at the age of 56, was committed by her son, Frederick Irwin Dean (b. 1832), to the Jacksonville insane asylum in 1860. She died three days after entering that institution. Dean to Tarbell, Washington, 7 January 1900, *ibid.*; Fischer-Wisnosky Architects, Inc., Historical Structure Report, Dean House (HS-13) (draft, 1990, Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Library, Springfield), pp. 2.1-2.5.

⁴⁷³ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 120.

⁴⁷⁴ James Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 452.

as I was, to sleep in the house, with some of the other neighbors' boys."⁴⁷⁵ After Robert Todd Lincoln went off to boarding school in 1859, Josiah Kent stayed with Mary Lincoln while her spouse was away. "I spent many a night at the house, sleeping usually in the same room which Robert had occupied," Kent recollected.⁴⁷⁶ While on similar duty in the early 1850s, Howard M. Powel noticed that "Mrs. Lincoln was very nervous and subsequently easily scared." One night "some miscreant came and made a hideous noise against the weatherboarding of the house and Mrs. Lincoln promptly fainted."⁴⁷⁷

Another Springfield neighbor, Elizabeth A. Capps, reported that "Mrs. Lincoln was a bright woman, well educated, but so nervous and crazy acting she was the laughingstock of the neighborhood."⁴⁷⁸ Mrs. Capps recalled that one day "Mrs. Lincoln cried, 'Fire, Fire!' When the neighbors ran in they found just a little fat burning in a frying pan on the cook stove." Mrs. Capps also described an occasion when Mary Lincoln "screamed 'Murder!'" A neighbor came to her assistance "and found an old umbrella fixer sitting on the back porch, waiting for 'Mrs.' to come back, as he had seen her go thru the house to the front and supposed she would be right back." The neighbor "took the man by the arm and led him off the porch and told him how he had frightened the woman." The umbrella repairman mumbled as he departed, "I wouldn't have such a fool for my wife!"

⁴⁷⁵ Fred I. Dean to Ida M. Tarbell, Washington, D.C., 7 January 1900, Tarbell Papers, Smith College.

⁴⁷⁶ Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 123.

⁴⁷⁷ Taylorville Semi-Weekly Breeze, 12 February 1909.

⁴⁷⁸ Elizabeth Lushbaugh Capps, interview with Hannah Hinsdale, clipping dated Yakima, Washington, 2 February [1929?], Lincoln Shrine, A. K. Smiley Library, Redlands, California. Mrs. Capps's father, Thomas P. Lushbaugh, a merchant in partnership with David Spear, had built a house directly across Eighth Street from the one that the Lincolns bought. Soon after the Lushbauhs took up residence in their new home, the Lincolns moved into the house opposite them. In 1840, Lushbaugh helped organize the first Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows in Springfield. In 1862, his daughter Elizabeth married Charles R. Capps, who had been born in Springfield in 1841. The Lushbaugh family lived in Springfield for approximately six years before moving to Mt. Pulaski (Logan County) in 1846. History of Sangamon County (Chicago: Interstate Publishing, 1881), 622; John Carroll Power, History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois (Springfield: Edwin A. Wilson, 1876), 186.

Evidently, the “cause of her fright was the man’s heavy beard, which was a rare sig[h]t in those days.”⁴⁷⁹ A peddler one day “knocked at Mrs. Lincoln’s door, as at any door, and had stepped in when she answered the knock and had started to open his pack.” Mary Lincoln began “to scream and carry on” and repeatedly yelled “for him ‘to leave, to leave, to leave.’” The peddler sought out Lincoln and told him: “If you have any influence over your wife in God’s world, go home and teach her some sense.”⁴⁸⁰ To her neighbor John B. Weber, Mary Lincoln once screamed: “Keep this little dog from biting me.” Weber described the canine as “a little thing” that was “too small and good natured to do anything.”⁴⁸¹

For all the misery she caused Lincoln, creating for him what his law partner aptly called “a domestic hell on earth,” a “burning – scorching hell,” “as terrible as death and as gloomy as the grave,” Mary Todd proved a useful goad to his ambition.⁴⁸² John Todd Stuart told an interviewer that she “had the fire – will and ambition – Lincoln[’]s talent & his wife[’]s Ambition did the deed.” Stuart heard Joshua Speed say that “Lincoln needed driving – (well he got that.)”⁴⁸³ Mary Lincoln’s friend James Bradwell thought that she

⁴⁷⁹ Elizabeth A. Capps, “My Early Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Reminiscences,” folder 1, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁸⁰ Reminiscences of Mrs. Cecelia McConnell, who in 1856, at the age of eighteen, went to Springfield to live with her aunt and uncle. Buffalo Courier-Express, 11 August 1929, section 9, p. 2. Her uncle witnessed the peddler telling the story to Lincoln.

⁴⁸¹ John B. Weber, interview with Herndon, Pawnee, Illinois, [ca. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 389. Weber (1810-89) was a cabinetmaker who in 1841 became copyist of land records for the state of Illinois, a post he held till 1849. Sheriff of the county from 1854 to 1856, he lived on Eighth Street between Jackson and Edwards Streets, less than a block from the Lincolns’ house.

⁴⁸² Herndon to Truman H. Bartlett, Springfield, 22 September 1887, Bartlett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Herndon’s lecture, “Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln,” delivered in Springfield, 26 December 1865, Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (December 1941), 419n; Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 5, 8, 15, 16 January 1886, 22 September 1887, and Herndon to C. O. Poole, Springfield, 5 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸³ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [late June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 63.

“made Mr. L. by constantly pushing him on in his ambition.”⁴⁸⁴ Charles Arnold, who lived across the street from the Lincolns, declared that she was “very ambitious for her husband” and “kept nagging her husband on.”⁴⁸⁵ Her sister Elizabeth testified that “Mrs. Lincoln was an ambitious woman – the most ambitious woman I ever saw – spurred up Mr. Lincoln, pushed him along and upward – made him struggle and seize his opportunities.”⁴⁸⁶ A law student in the Lincoln and Herndon office stated that “there is no doubt that she was constantly spurring him on for she was very ambitious.”⁴⁸⁷ Herndon likened her to a toothache which “kept one awake night and day.”⁴⁸⁸ During her courtship, Mary allegedly described “the man of her choice, mentioning his unprepossessing appearance and awkwardness, and with a merry appreciation of the humor of the prediction, again said: ‘But I mean to make him the President of the United States all the same. You will see that, as I always told you, I will yet be the President’s wife.’”⁴⁸⁹ In the late 1840s, she predicted to Ward Hill Lamon that Lincoln “is to be

⁴⁸⁴ Bradwell’s statement to Ida Tarbell, memo marked “Lincoln – Items,” folder “Mary Todd Lincoln,” Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Bradwell (1828-97), a county judge in Chicago, was the husband of Myra Bradwell, an attorney who represented Mary Lincoln in her successful attempt to win release from a mental hospital in 1875.

⁴⁸⁵ Charles Arnold, quoted by B. F. Stoneberger, in Evans, Mrs. Lincoln, 155.

⁴⁸⁶ Elizabeth Todd Edwards, interview with Herndon, 27 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 623.

⁴⁸⁷ John H. Littlefield interviewed by C. D. B., Brooklyn Eagle, 16 October 1887.

⁴⁸⁸ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 12 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸⁹ Letter by Mary Todd quoted from memory by Mrs. William Preston (née Mary Wickliffe) in a dispatch to the Philadelphia Times from White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, [ca. 1882], copy, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington. In an undated clipping in the William H. Townsend Papers in the Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, it is alleged that the “story of Mrs. Lincoln writing, when a young girl, a letter in which she expressed a determination to become the wife of a President, is confirmed by the production of the document, now in the possession of General Preston, of Lexington, Ky. It was addressed to a daughter of Governor Wickliffe, and contained a playful description of the gawky young Lincoln, to whom she was betrothed.” Townsend Papers, box 1½, folder marked “May-Aug. 1954,” Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Lincoln wrote Mrs. Preston in 1862, saying: “Your despatch to Mrs. L. received yesterday. She is not well. Owing to her early and strong friendship for you, I would gladly oblige you, but I can not absolutely do it.” Lincoln to Mrs. Margaret Preston, Washington, 21 August 1862, Basler, Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:386.

President of the United States some day; if I had not thought so I never would have married him, for you can see he is not pretty.”⁴⁹⁰

Mary Lincoln’s ambition for her husband became something of a byword in central Illinois. In 1856, when friends urged Lincoln to seek the gubernatorial nomination, Democratic Congressman Thomas L. Harris of Petersburg remarked that he “never will be dunce enough to run for governor – (unless his wife makes him.)”⁴⁹¹ She “made no effort to conceal her belief that her gifted husband would some day be President. At social functions she would talk confidently of his future, predicting his nomination and election. Lincoln always objected to this.”⁴⁹²

In another way Mary Lincoln indirectly helped stimulate her husband’s interest in a political career. According to Milton Hay, she made “his home tolerably disagreeable and hence he took to politics and public matters for occupation. If his domestic life had been entirely happy, I dare say he would have stayed at home and not busied himself with distant concerns.”⁴⁹³ Joshua Speed believed that “if Mr Lincoln had married another woman – for instance Speed[’]s wife [–] he Lincoln would have been a devoted husband

While growing up in Lexington, she told a friend: “I am going to the president’s wife some day.” Mary’s childhood friend Frances Dallam told this to her daughter Joanna, who in turn told Elizabeth Norton. Mary regularly made a similar prediction to her sisters Elizabeth and Emilie. Elizabeth Norton to William E. Barton, Lexington, 16 April 1920, Barton Papers, University of Chicago; statement to Herndon by Elizabeth Todd Edwards, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 443; Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 3; Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (New York: G. W. Carlton, 1868), 228-29.

⁴⁹⁰ Ward Hill Lamon, Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (2nd ed.; Washington, D.C.: Privately published, 1911), 21. Cf. John Bittinger’s similar account in Mahlon T. Dolman, “With Lincoln Every Night,” National Magazine 29 (February 1909): 524.

⁴⁹¹ Thomas J. Pickett in the Peoria Weekly Republican, 22 February 1856; Thomas L. Harris to Charles Lanphier, Washington, 7 March [1856], Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁹² Reminiscences of Olivia Leidig Whiteman, Vandalia, Illinois, correspondence, 4 February, New York Herald, 10 February 1929, section 3, p. 4.

⁴⁹³ Milton Hay, interview with George Alfred Townsend, Cincinnati Inquirer, 26 August 1883; Hay, quoted in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 91.

and a very – very domestic man.”⁴⁹⁴ An unidentified close friend of Lincoln (perhaps Speed) maintained that “Mary Lincoln, by her turbulent nature and unfortunate manner, prevented her husband from becoming a domestic man.” This domestic misery, he maintained, “operated largely in his favor; for he was thereby kept out in the world of business and politics. Instead of spending his evenings at home, reading the papers and warming his toes at his own fireside, he was constantly out with the common people, was mingling with the politicians, discussing public questions with the farmers who thronged the offices in the courthouse and state house, and exchanging views with the loungers who surrounded the stove of winter evenings in the village store. The result of this continuous contact with the world was, that he was more thoroughly known than any other man in his community. His wife, therefore, was one of the unintentional means of his promotion.” If Lincoln had married Ann Rutledge or some other woman more agreeable than Mary Todd, he would probably have spent more time “buried in the pleasures of a loving home” and thus “the country would never have had Abraham Lincoln for its President.”⁴⁹⁵ Herndon said that if “Lincoln had been happy in his marital relation he never would have been known or heard of outside of his acquaintance as a lawyer. He was by nature a domestic man, a lover of home and children.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Speed told this to John Todd Stuart. Stuart, interview with Herndon, [late June 1865], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 63.

⁴⁹⁵ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 262-63. Herndon, David Davis and James Matheny agreed that if had Lincoln married a more amiable woman, in all probability “he would have been satisfied with the modest emoluments of a country lawyer’s practice . . . and buried in the delights of an inviting and happy home.” Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 89-90. See also Herndon quoted by Hardin W. Masters, Portland, Maine, Sunday Telegram, 16 July 1922, p. 30, and Le Grand Cannon to Herndon, near Burlington, Vermont, 7 October [1889], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 678-79.

⁴⁹⁶ Hardin W. Masters, “Lincoln’s Last Law Partner, William H. Herndon, As I Knew Him,” typescript, 7, Albert J. Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

Mary Lincoln was, according to the Pennsylvania Republican leader Alexander K. McClure, a constant trial to her spouse. He bluntly stated that Lincoln “had a crazy wife when he entered the presidency, and many as were his sorrows because of the war and bloody struggle for the preservation of the union, the crowning sorrow to one of his domestic taste and love of home and family, was the dark shadow that Mrs. Lincoln cast upon his life.” Lincoln’s friends “all knew the situation and her failings were overlooked, although few, if any, of Mr. Lincoln’s close political friends entertained the respect for Mrs. Lincoln that should have been accorded the Mistress of the White House.”⁴⁹⁷

One of those political friends was Carl Schurz, who spent time with Mary Lincoln during the Civil War. He wrote of her husband: “it was no secret to those who knew the family well, that his domestic life was full of trials. The erratic temper of his wife not seldom put the gentleness of his nature to the severest tests; and these troubles and struggles, which accompanied him through all the vicissitudes of his life from the modest home in Springfield to the White House at Washington, adding untold private heartburnings to his public cares, and sometimes precipitating upon him incredible embarrassments in the discharge of his public duties, form one of the most pathetic features of his career.”⁴⁹⁸ In an interview, Schurz put it even more strongly, calling the marriage “the greatest tragedy of Mr. Lincoln’s existence.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ A. K. McClure to Alonzo Rothschild, Philadelphia, 9 May 1907, Lincoln Contemporaries Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

The New York Herald reported that “Mrs. Lincoln’s agitation nearly discovered [i.e., revealed] the whole secret.” Harrisburg correspondence 23 February, New York Herald, 24 February 1861.

⁴⁹⁸ Carl Schurz, Abraham Lincoln: An Essay (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 19.

⁴⁹⁹ Carl Schurz, interview with Ida Tarbell, 6 November 1897, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.