

***Mrs. Lincoln's Sisters* by Jennifer Chiaverini**
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Mrs. Lincoln...

Mary Ann Todd (1818-1882): As a young woman, Mary Ann Todd sparkled in society as a belle in Lexington, Kentucky, and in Springfield, Illinois—pretty, clever, charming, and graceful, a proud daughter of an illustrious and politically well-connected family. She declined several proposals before marrying poor but up-and-coming lawyer and politician Abraham Lincoln after a fraught on-again, off-again courtship. Well-educated, politically savvy, and ambitious, Mary had yearned to be the president's wife and live in the White House since childhood, but her years as First Lady were beset by conflict, controversy, and personal tragedy. Traumatized by the loss of three young sons to illness and the assassination of her beloved husband, as the years passed Mary suffered from depression, irrational fears of poverty, and increasingly erratic behavior. Her son Robert's efforts to have her tried for insanity and committed to an asylum for her own safety compelled her to attempt suicide.

Her Sisters...

Elizabeth Porter Todd (1813-1888): The eldest of the Todd sisters, Elizabeth had watched over her younger siblings from the tender age of twelve, after their mother died in childbirth. Even after their father remarried a year later, Elizabeth continued in the role of caregiver and counselor to her younger siblings, especially to her bright, high-strung sister Mary, whom their new stepmother strongly disliked. At age nineteen, Elizabeth married aspiring lawyer and politician Ninian Wirt Edwards and moved from the family home in Lexington, Kentucky to Springfield, Illinois. She often invited her two next-oldest sisters to come for extended visits, and to join in the lively social whirl of dances, parties, and courtship. In later years, Elizabeth continued to tend to Mary in times of sorrow and distress—until an estrangement threatened to sever their sisterly bond forever.

Frances Jane Todd (1816-1899): Studious and observant, as a young girl Frances envied Mary's brilliance and often joined ranks with younger sister Ann, who envied Mary even more intensely, to put Mary in her place. Unlike Ann, Frances eventually outgrew their sibling rivalry and tried to mediate disputes between the fractious sisters, as well as those between Mary and their disapproving stepmother. Her kindhearted, peacemaker's nature made her the natural confidante of the other Todd sisters, but the burden of their secrets was often difficult to bear.

Ann Maria Todd (1824-1891): From childhood, Ann was Mary's fiercest rival among the Todd sisters, perhaps because they were so alike in ambition and temperament. Unlike Frances, Ann did not outgrow the jealous conflict but remained Mary's harshest critic in the family, second only to their stepmother. When Mary became First Lady, Ann resented her sister's grandiose airs but endeavored to mend fences, hoping to take advantage of her new presidential ties to benefit herself and her family.

Margaret Todd (1828-1904): The eldest of Mary's half-siblings, Margaret was fond of her accomplished elder sister, and was dear enough to her to be invited to join Mary's entourage aboard the Inaugural Express as they traveled from Springfield to Washington for Abraham Lincoln's inauguration. Although Margaret supported the Union, her physician husband joined the Confederates, traveling with the rebel army and treating wounded soldiers at Shiloh. When news broke that he had informed the Confederate military command about weaknesses he had observed in the Union defenses around Washington, Margaret was suspected of being a southern sympathizer and was obliged to leave her home in Cincinnati and move South for the duration of the war.

Martha K. Todd (1833-1868): Eight years before secession, Martha married a doctor and settled in Selma, Alabama, but she returned to the North to join Mary's entourage aboard the Inaugural Express. A staunch secessionist, she attended Confederate President Jefferson Davis's inauguration as well as her brother-in-law's. She was publicly outspoken in her opposition to Lincoln's government, and yet in her letters to Mary and Abraham at the White House, she remained as warm and cordial as ever. In 1863, she created an embarrassing scandal for the Lincolns when she smuggled several trunks of contraband goods through the lines at Fortress Monroe using a pass Abraham had granted her so she could visit family in the North.

Emilie Paret Todd (1836-1930): The most beautiful and beloved of the Todd sisters, Emilie adored her witty, charming, and confident sister Mary and greatly admired her brother-in-law Abraham. The Lincolns loved her dearly, and from the time of their first meeting they called her by the affectionate nickname Little Sister. Early in the Civil War, Emilie's husband, Benjamin Hardin Helm, declined the commission Abraham personally offered him—the role of paymaster in the Union Army with the rank of major, a wonderful opportunity for a young man ten years out of West Point—and instead accepted an appointment as colonel with the Confederate First Kentucky Brigade. Emilie parted tearfully from Mary, knowing they were unlikely to see each other again for the duration of the war.

Elodie Breck Todd (1840-1877): In 1862, Elodie was living with her elder sister Martha in Selma, Alabama when she met and married Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson, a colonel in the 4th Alabama Infantry. She was a steadfast companion and comfort to her elder sister Emilie in the early days of her widowhood when Emilie was stranded in the South with her young children, longing to return to her childhood home in Kentucky, where she had left her infant son in the care of her mother and her youngest sister.

Katherine Bodley Todd (1841-1875): Known to the family endearingly as Kitty, the youngest of Mary's half-siblings lived with her mother in Lexington throughout the war. When her recently widowed elder sister Emilie joined them there, Kitty and Emilie visited Confederate prisoners of war held in Lexington and advocated for their needs—inadvertently giving Mary's vocal critics more reason to question her loyalty to the Union. In 1866 Kitty married William Wallace Herr, a former sergeant major with the First Kentucky Cavalry and aide-de-camp to her late brother-in-law, General Benjamin Hardin Helm.

...And the Men They Loved

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865): Born the son of a poor Kentucky frontiersman, Abraham Lincoln strove tirelessly from an early age to better his condition, working as a farmer, rail splitter, and storekeeper, all the while educating himself through solitary study. After serving as a captain in the Black Hawk War, he moved to Springfield, Illinois and resolved to become a lawyer. He married Mary Ann Todd in 1842, and as the years passed, he worked on the state circuit court, served eight years in the Illinois State Legislature, and was elected to a single term in the United States Congress. In 1860, Lincoln was elected President of the United States amid rising tensions between North and South and increasingly vehement threats of secession from slave states. As president he abolished slavery and preserved the Union through a long, terrible, and bloody civil war, and is widely regarded as one of the greatest presidents in United States history. Tragically, just as the war was drawing to a close and peace was within reach, Lincoln was shot by the actor John Wilkes Booth in the State Box of Ford's Theater while watching a play with his wife and two friends. He died early the next morning, on April 15, 1865.

Ninian Wirt Edwards (1809-1889): A son of the former governor of Illinois, Ninian Wirt Edwards was a law student at Lexington's Transylvania University with great political expectations when he met and married the lovely Elizabeth Todd. Ninian and Abraham Lincoln became friends and political allies when they served in the Illinois State Legislature together in the 1830s, but, concerned about Abraham's humble origins and poverty, Ninian and Elizabeth strongly objected when he began to court Mary. The Edwardses eventually reconciled themselves to the marriage and the men remained friends, but Ninian greatly disappointed Abraham when he switched to a rival political party in 1851, wrongly believing it would assure him election to Congress. As president, Abraham appointed Ninian Commissary of Subsistence, but after numerous accusations that Ninian was using his post to enrich himself, Abraham eventually bowed to political pressure and replaced him. When Elizabeth and Mary each defended her own husband and accused her brother-in-law of disloyalty and wrongdoing, their dispute led to a prolonged, heartbreaking estrangement between the two once devoted sisters.

William S. Wallace (1802-1867): A native of Pennsylvania who had studied at Philadelphia's Jefferson Medical College, Dr. William S. Wallace came West intending to embark on a new career in land speculation, but after he settled in Springfield, the need for doctors was so great that the citizens prevailed upon him to resume the practice of medicine. He willingly did so, and opened a drugstore for good measure. The Golden Mortar was located on the first floor of an office building just below the law firm of the Todd sisters' first cousin John Todd Stuart and his partner, Abraham Lincoln. It was through their acquaintance that William met Frances Todd, whom he married in 1839. He was the personal physician of the Lincoln family during their Springfield years, and was the namesake of Mary and Abraham's third eldest son.

Clark Moulton Smith (1820-1885): Tennessee native Clark Moulton Smith moved west to Illinois at the age of fifteen with his elder brother and opened a dry goods store in the small town of Carlinville. A decade later, he settled in Springfield, where he met and married Ann Todd and opened a larger dry good store on the courthouse square. In early 1861, in a back room on the third floor of Clark's thriving shop, the brother-in-law he idolized escaped the throngs of well-wishers and job seekers to write his inaugural address undisturbed. While Elizabeth's and Frances's husbands accepted appointments in the Lincoln administration, Clark, by then a prosperous merchant who had purchased a fine home for his growing family on the same block as the Governor's Mansion, made his business his priority—and yet, he and Ann still contrived ways to profit from their presidential connections.

Benjamin Hardin Helm (1831-1863): A son of a former governor of Kentucky, Benjamin Hardin Helm was a West Point graduate and lawyer when he fell in love with the beautiful, sweet Emilie Todd, whom he married less than a year later. Much like Abraham Lincoln, the elder brother-in-law he greatly admired and who was very fond of him in return, Benjamin traveled on the circuit court and served in the state legislature. Although his father was a staunch Union man, Benjamin was influenced in favor of the Confederacy by several former West Point instructors, including the future Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Benjamin declined a prestigious commission in the Union Army personally offered to him by Abraham Lincoln, and instead joined the Confederate First Kentucky Brigade as a colonel. He soon rose to the rank of Brigadier General with the famed First Kentucky "Orphan Brigade," but in 1863, he was killed by friendly fire at the Battle of Chickamauga.

Robert Todd Lincoln (1843-1926): The firstborn child of Abraham and Mary Lincoln, Robert Todd Lincoln was the only one of their four sons to survive them. A student at Harvard for most of the war, he prevailed unsuccessfully upon his parents to give him their blessing to leave school to join the Union Army. After graduation and over his mother's strenuous objections, he enlisted and served on the staff of General Ulysses S. Grant during the final months of the war. After his father was assassinated and his mother and younger brother Tad moved out of the White House, Robert sacrificed his own aspirations to accompany them to Chicago. In the years that followed, he became a successful lawyer, the Secretary of

War in the Garfield and Arthur administrations, and the United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom during the presidency of Benjamin Harrison. When fears for his mother's health and safety compelled him to have her committed to an asylum, she vehemently despised him, publicly denounced him, and made threats upon his life, but he remained steadfast in his duty to look after her interests.

Edward Lewis Baker, Jr. (1858-1923): Lewis was a grandson of Ninian and Elizabeth Edwards and an aspiring journalist. Although Mary despised his mother, her niece Julia Edwards Baker, she adored her grandnephew, who charmed her with his solicitous attention and sincere interest in her stories of the White House and of the years, glorious in memory, when she reigned there as First Lady. Mary corresponded regularly with Lewis during her travels abroad and relied upon him for emotional support and companionship after her return to Springfield, lonely and in declining health.