



**South Bay Civil War Roundtable
Meeting Minutes March 30, 2021**

Meeting Location: Online via ZOOM Meeting Application

Special Activities & Events:

None

Officer Reports

President

No Report

Vice President

No Report

Treasurer

- Bank Account: \$2,885

Secretary

- February meeting minutes posted on SBCWRT web site
- Civil War Quiz: What Do You Know about the American Civil War in the Movies II and TV? by Mark Costin
- Book Raffle: Suspended
- Meeting Attendance: Total: 15

Preservation

No Report

Historian

Vacant

This Day in the Civil War: March 30th

1861: Mississippi ratifies the Confederate Constitution. In Texas, Fort Bliss is yielded by the Federals to the Confederates

1862: Flag Officer Foote directs commander Henry Walke of the USS Carondelet to sail past batteries on the Tennessee shore of the Mississippi River, past Island No 10, to cover General Pope's army crossing to the Tenn shore and Island No 10 to attack the rebels. Federals descend on Union City Tenn. Skirmishing near Clinton MO, fighting on Whitemarsh Island, GA

1863: Lt Maffitt CSS Florida, writes that the crew of the Florida are "living like lords" off provisions seized from USS MJ Colcord. The crew of the MJ Colcord are transferred to the Danish brig Christian; the Colcord is destroyed. Skirmishing at Dutton's Hill Kentucky, Zoar Church Virginia, Point Pleasant, WV, Cross Hollow, AR, and Tahlequah Indian Territory.

1864: Federals scout Woodville and Athens Alabama, and in Kentucky from the town of Columbus to the towns of Clinton and Moscow. Federal reconnaissance from Lookout Valley Tennessee to McLemore's Cove Georgia. Federals capture the Confederate outpost at Cherry Grove Virginia.

1865: On the Petersburg Virginia front, skirmishing at Hatcher's Run, Gravelly Run, and near Five Forks. Confederates consolidate forces near Five Forks and repulse Sheridan's cavalry. President Lincoln at City Point, says he'd like to stay to see the progress of General Grant's movement, but he must return to Washington. In Alabama, Union cavalry skirmish at Montevallo, with troops under Nathan Bedford Forrest's command.

Person of the Month: Mary Lincoln

Background

- American history has not been kind to Mary Lincoln. But to define her solely by her temper tantrums and compulsive spending during wartime, is as shortsighted as condemning George Washington solely because he was a slaveholder.
- There was so much more to Mary Lincoln than her behavior that antagonized people. From the time Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln met and married in Springfield, Illinois, she was in fact a great asset to him in his rise to success in law and politics.
- During Lincoln's Presidency, it's true Mary created controversy. But in many ways Mary Lincoln had the toughest job of any First Lady ever. A job that would've tried the strength of the strongest sanest woman, let alone one who suffered from Mary's mental health problems.
- In 1818 Mary was born in Lexington Kentucky into the wealthy prominent Todd family.
- Kentucky privileged classes patterned their lives on that of their cultural ideal, the Virginia Tidewater aristocracy. Mary grew up in the company

of house slaves. She was well educated in the way thought appropriate for girls: She learned French, polite literature, and above all, training in the social graces.

Abraham Lincoln

- In 1839 Mary went to live in Springfield Illinois with her sister Elizabeth and brother-in-law Ninian Edwards. She was drawn to a young man beginning his legal career in Springfield: Abraham Lincoln. They married in 1842 and had four sons, only one of whom, Robert Todd, would survive to adulthood.
- Mary was intensely loyal to her husband as he rose to become President. Mary eventually broke off relations with most of her family, over her loyalty to antislavery husband who came to wage war on the seceded slave states.
- Lincoln came to Springfield to practice law as junior partner to John Todd Stuart, Mary's cousin. Stuart and Lincoln had served together as militiamen in the Black Hawk War. Lincoln was unkempt in appearance, awkward in manner, with little formal education. Stuart realized Lincoln's intelligence, friendliness and ambition made him a promising law partner. Stuart became the first in a series of mentors that enabled Lincoln's rise to the top.
- Mary Todd was also attracted, for much the same reasons. And unlike many men in her world, Lincoln did not drink, use tobacco, curse, hunt, or gamble.
- Since childhood, Mary had been fascinated by the discussions her father had at home with his politician friends. All male friends, since politics was off limits to women.
- Abraham was one of the few men Mary met, who actually liked her interest in politics, and respected what she had to say. Mary and Abraham were both ardent Whigs. At this time, Mary was by all accounts quite pretty and charming and attracted much male attention. But she chose the one man who was attracted by her intelligence.
- The Todd family looked askance at Lincoln's lack of refinement, with the exception of Mary's father who wholeheartedly approved of Mary's choice. Robert Todd would help sustain them financially in the first years of their marriage while Lincoln built his law practice.
- But Abraham Lincoln and Mary were both susceptible lifelong to emotional disorders, which can be treated with medications today, but back then all doctors could do, was to declare a patient was suffering from "a cerebral disease."
- Lincoln suffered bouts of severe depression, which fortunately he was able to somehow manage. By nature he was a sympathetic, forgiving person, which is what no doubt enabled him to stick by Mary and her

emotional difficulties. Difficulties which mental health professionals today are convinced, meant she suffered from bipolar disorder: Unpredictable sudden mood swings, violent temper tantrums and tearful, inconsolable depression.

- Those who knew Mary at times doubted her sanity. But no one ever doubted her loyalty to Lincoln. When not in the grip of mood swings or migraine headaches, Mary was fervently supportive of her husband's ambitions, first in law, then in politics. She was Lincoln's social mentor. She knew that in the legal profession and politics, appearances count. She had him dress like a gentleman, and practice good table manners.
- (Don't eat with your knife, then wipe the knife on the tablecloth.) She trained him in speaking standard English, toning down his rural Kentucky twang. In short, she enabled Lincoln to move with grace at all levels of society. And when they purchased their house in Springfield, Mary furnished and managed their home to create a look of comfort and success, acting as gracious hostess to Lincoln's expanding circle of professional associates.
- It did take courage at times for Mary to stick by him. When Lincoln was elected to serve his one and only term in the US House of Representatives, he attacked President Polk's policy of waging war on Mexico. Which many in Lincoln's Congressional district did not appreciate. Some had lost family members who'd fought in the Mexican-American War.
- After his Congressional term, Lincoln temporarily retired from politics to his law practice, which flourished. When he re-entered politics as antislavery Republican, Mary defended him against accusations that he was an abolitionist (abolitionists sometimes got death threats and some were actually murdered).
- Mary helped Lincoln develop his political skills and effectiveness as a public speaker. He'd read his prepared speeches to her, for her inputs. Small wonder that when he found he was elected President, he excitedly told her, "Mary, WE are elected!" Followed by, "We are public property now."
- They were both in for quite a shock upon arrival in the City of Washington. Mary Lincoln's whole world had been Lexington Ky and Springfield Ill, where she had always lived at the apex of the social pyramid. It was a cruel blow to her to find that even though she was now First Lady, the social elite in Washington looked down on her and her husband as "hicks from the sticks".
- Worse, Kate Chase, daughter of Salmon Chase, Lincoln's rival for the Republican Presidential nomination, had never forgiven Lincoln for "stealing" the election from her father. Beautiful, refined, the perfect

hostess, Kate now upstaged Mary at every opportunity. When Mary said, “Miss Chase, you may call on me any time,” Kate replied, Mrs Lincoln, you may call on ME anytime!” (A breach of etiquette. The President and First Lady are hosts, never guests. She is always addressed as Mrs President.)

During Civil War and Presidency

- Once war broke out, Mary had to deal with vicious rumors that, coming from a slaveholding family, she was a rebel sympathizer; she was even suspected by some as possibly spying for the Confederacy.
- Worst of all, Lincoln continually received death threats, and was informed of plots against his life. Lincoln was fatalistic about this; Mary was in a more or less chronic state of fear for him.
- So, Mary Lincoln embraced two soothing distractions that would come to cause real trouble: Amassing a wardrobe fit for a First Lady, and refurbishing the White House.
- The White House, with peeling paint, stained threadbare carpets, mice and mildew, did badly need renovating. Recall that Mary’s cultural heritage was that of the Tidewater Virginia aristocracy, that insisted on keeping up an elegant appearance regardless of cost (resulting in perpetual mountains of debt).
- After enduring what she did in Washington, Mary escaped to the finest stores in New York City and Philadelphia, where merchants extended unlimited credit to America’s First Lady. She bought only the finest, costliest materials and furnishings, which quickly exceeded the \$20,000 allotted by Congress to upgrade the White House.
- When the Commissioner of Public Buildings approached Lincoln to ask for more money, Lincoln lost his temper (one of the few times he ever did) yelling, “Poor soldiers are freezing for lack of blankets! I WILL NOT ask for money for FLUB DUBS for that damned house!”
- While stories of Mary’s extravagant spending were widely publicized, what was not publicized (as she wished) was some admirable work she did during the Civil War. Which we know of indirectly, from letters and diaries then.
- She spent hundreds of hours visiting soldiers’ hospitals, when the sights, sounds and smells in hospitals could be horrifying. She sat at the bedsides of sick and wounded soldiers, soothing them, praying with them, writing letters home for them. She had food brought to the hospitals from the White House, and prevailed upon Lincoln and others to donate food, money and support.
- Elizabeth Keckly was a former slave who had become dressmaker to Mary Lincoln. At Elizabeth’s encouragement, she and Mary together visited the refugee slave camps around Washington. Mary distributed

food and blankets, and listened to the former slaves' stories. These visits made Mary vehemently antislavery, and a supporter of the Contraband Relief Society. Again, Mary's relief efforts were not publicized at her request.

Post Civil War

- After 1865, Mary's life did not go well. To the end of her life, she never entirely gave up shopping as therapy; she was continually hounded by creditors to pay debts. She attended health spas and seances, in a vain effort to find relief from constant emotional pain.
- And Elizabeth Keckly had published Behind The Scenes, what Elizabeth intended as a memoir sympathetic to Mary Lincoln. But the publisher edited Elizabeth's manuscript, and promoted the book as tell-all tabloid sensationalism. Mary and her son Robert Todd were shocked; they never spoke to Elizabeth again.
- In 1870, Congress granted Mary Lincoln a pension as widow of a former President, making her the first First Lady to receive such a pension.
- In 1875 after a much publicized trial, Robert Todd Lincoln had his mother committed to an insane asylum. She was released shortly thereafter to live with her sister Elizabeth in Springfield, where Mary died in 1882.
- In conclusion, I hope you're persuaded to regard Mary Lincoln as I do, as a deeply flawed person in American history who nevertheless should be acknowledged for the good things she did accomplish, in spite of everything.

Other Topics

No Report

March Presentation

Speaker: Tom Roza

Topic: 1868 Impeachment Trial of President Andrew Johnson

April Presentation

Speaker: Dana Lombardy

Topic: Defending the Arteries of Rebellion

May Presentation

Speaker: Bob O'Connor

Topic: Mrs. Slater - Missing Lincoln Conspirator