

Chapter Four

Her Life: Back Home From the White House

September 29, 1861

Mary Todd Lincoln Writes to Elizabeth Todd Grimsley

On September 29, 1861, Mary Todd Lincoln wrote to her cousin Elizabeth Todd Grimsley who by then had returned to Springfield.

Executive Mansion

My Dear Lizzie:

I have been intending writing you for some days. I have been quite sick with chills for some days, this is my day of rest so I am sitting up. I am beginning to feel very weak* If they cannot be broken in a few days, Mr. Lincoln wants me to go North and remain until cold weather. Where so much is demanded of me I cannot afford to be delicate, if a different climate will restore my health. If at the close of this week I am still sick, I expect I will go up to Boston, take quarters at the Revere House for two or three weeks and return here in November. I trust however, I may not be under the necessity, yet I am feeling very far from well. September & early in October are always considered unhealthy months here, my racked frame certainly bears evidence to the fact. Have just received a note from Willis, with all his weaknesses he is kind hearted. Gov. Newell & Halstead are frequently here as who is not? **I presume you are aware your brother is elected to Congress.** I received a letter from Elizabeth E. the other day. Very kind & aff • yet very characteristic* Said if rents and means permitted, she would like to make us a visit, I believe for a season. I am weary of intrigue, when she is by herself she can be very agreeable, especially when her mind is not dwelling on the merits of fair daughters and a talented son-in-law. Such personages always speak for themselves. I often regret E.P.E. little weaknesses, after all, since my the election she is the only one of my sisters who has appeared to be pleased with our advancement you know this to be so. Notwithstanding Dr. Wallace has received his portion in life from the Administration, yet Frances always remains quiet. E. in her letter said Frances often spoke of Mr. L's kindness in giving him his place. She little knows what a hard battle I had for it, and how near he came getting nothing.

Poor unfortunate Ann, inasmuch as she possesses such a miserable disposition and so false a tongue. How far dear Lizzie are we removed from such a person. Even if Smith succeeds in being a rich man, what advantage will it be to him, who has gained it in some cases most unjustly, and with such a woman, whom no one respects, whose tongue for so many years, has been considered "no slander" and as a child and young girl could not be outdone in falsehood, "Truly the Leopard cannot change his spots". She is so seldom in my thoughts I have so much more, that is attractive, both in bodily presence, and my minds eye, to interest me. I grieve for those who have to come in contact with her malice, yet even that is so well understood, the object of her wrath, generally rises, with good people, in proportion to her vindictiveness. What will you name the hill on which I must be placed. Her, putting it on that ground with Mrs. Brown, was only to hide her envious feeling toward you. Tell Ann for me, to quote her own expression. She is becoming still further removed from "Queen Victoria's Court"

How foolish between us to be discussing, such a person. Yet really it is amusing, in how many forms, human nature can appear before us. Nicolay told me, that Caleb Smith, said to him, a few days since that he had just received a letter from Kellogg, of Cin. that he did not know why he had not received his appointment as Consul. Is not the idea preposterous? Did I tell you that **Hollis* has been here, came to see me frequently, and always enquired with much interest, after you. The "Cap" also dined here a few days since, still as refined and elegant as ever. I have so much to tell you, I do not know, what first to write about. Wykoff, the "Chevalier," enlightened me about Baker's and Julia's proceedings in New York in Feb. Looked a little quizzical, about her not remaining in W. as she expected a long stay and much gayety. Did you say, she only numbered _5 months. I thoughts he had gently insinuated, when she was here. Hill Lamon, I believe is now in Ill. mustering recruits. I know you will be sorry to hear,

that our colored Mantuamaker, Elizabeth, lost her only son and child in the battle of Lex, Mo. She is heartbroken. She is a very remarkable woman herself. The weather is so beautiful, why is it, that we cannot feel well. The air feels very much like the early days when I used to have chills in Ill., those days have passed, and I know I have no cause to grieve over my lot. If the country was only peaceful, all would be well. If I thought, sending your Father [Dr. John Todd], a pass, would bring him here, I would do so with pleasure. Give my best love to them both. Mrs. Don Piatt, calls here in an hour's time. I must mount my white Cachemere and receive her. We now occupy the stately guest room. She spoke last winter of the miserably furnished rooms. I think she will be astonished at the change. I am not well enough to go down. Write very soon and very often to,

Your attached Cousin,

Mary Lincoln

P. S. William has given me \$3.00 to hand you. I will have it in bill shape, to send you in a few days, when I write next. Strange he called upon you.³⁰⁹

Of all Mary Lincoln's letters, this is among the most revealing of her character at this specific point in time—unconsciously revealing, as if she were thinking aloud with no fear of what impression her thoughts might have on anyone else. Commenting on a recent letter from her sister Elizabeth [Edwards], she launches into a critique of family members in which she succeeds, ironically, in projecting her own flaws upon others. She calls Elizabeth's letter "very characteristic—said if rents and means permitted, she would like to make us a visit I believe for a season—I am weary of intrigue," she complains of her sister's angling, which was hardly in the same league as her own intrigues with John Watt. She grants that Elizabeth "can be very agreeable" when not singing the praises of her children—as if Mary Lincoln never stole a conversation by praising her own, "Such personages" she says, loftily—referring to her sister—"always speak for themselves."

Elizabeth's [Edwards] relationship with her sister was rocky. During the White House years, Mary came to despise Elizabeth's daughter, Julia Edwards Baker, who was mentally unstable. Elizabeth recalled that the First Lady "opened a private letter of mine after I left Washington & because in that letter my Daughter gave me her opinion of Mrs L[.] She became Enraged at me. I tried to Explain – She would Send back my letters with insulting remarks."³¹⁰

Mary writes that she regrets Elizabeth's "little weaknesses, after all, since the election she is the only one of my sisters who has appeared to be pleased with our advancement." Mrs. Lincoln is angry with her sister Frances [Wallace] for showing insufficient gratitude. Lincoln appointed her husband [Dr. William Wallace] a paymaster of volunteers; and while Frances had spoken to Elizabeth of Mr. Lincoln's kindness, "She little knows, what a hard battle, I had for it—and how near, he came getting nothing."

Mary Lincoln reserves the brunt of her fury for "poor unfortunate Ann" Marie Todd Smith, wife of the ambitious merchant Clark Smith who had guided Mrs. Lincoln through the clothing racks of Broadway. The devoted mother of five children—including a boy name Lincoln, and another who had died recently at age ten—Ann inspires a tirade of more than two hundred words. Describing her younger sister's personality, she uses such phrases as a "miserable disposition & so false a tongue," a woman whom no one respects, "a woman of malice" and one whose "wrath generally rises, with good people, in proportion to her

³⁰⁹ <http://www.archive.org/details/lettertohercousiOOlinc>

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vindictiveness.” Mrs. Lincoln only pauses to catch her breath midway and claim, “She is so seldom in my thoughts I have so much more, that is attractive, both in bodily presence, & my mind’s eye to interest me.”

**October 21, 1861
Death of Edward D. Baker**



1862

The Todds During the Civil War

During the Civil War years, the Todds were literally fighting brother against brother. With eight members on one side and six on the other, the Todds were, as Berry writes, “Stretched between the federal White House and the Confederate trenches ... a national catastrophe.” Events such as Emilie Todd Helm’s visit to the White House in 1863 are well known, but Berry offers up the more obscure: the despicable Confederate careers of David and George Todd—one a surgeon and one a prison superintendent—and both sadistic in their treatment of Union prisoners; the treachery of Martha Todd White and Ninian (and thereby Elizabeth) Edwards, whose outright treason caused brother-in-law Lincoln much embarrassment and headache; and the familial plights of the Todd women—Betsy, Elodie, Margaret, and Kitty—who stayed home and watched and wondered, wed, and worried.

Emerson review of Berry

**February 20, 1862
Death of William Wallace “Willie” Lincoln
(1850-1862)**

Elizabeth Todd Edwards Goes to Washington to Console Mary Lincoln

Elizabeth Todd Edwards was asked by Robert Lincoln to console his mother after Willie’s death in February 1862. Elizabeth arrived in late February and was picked up at the train station by Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning. He urged her to stay in Washington saying, “you have such a power & control, such an influence over Mary.” “Beneath what the world saw lurked a nature as tended and poetic as any I ever knew. The death of his son Willie...made a deep impression on him,” she later told William Herndon. “On the evening we strolled through [Lafayette Park] he spoke of it with deep feeling, and he frequently afterward referred to it. When I announced my intention of leaving Washington, he was much affected at the news of my departure. We were strolling through the White House grounds, when he begged me with tears in his eyes to remain longer.” Mrs. Edwards left in April and army nurse Rebecca Pomroy was engaged as a companion for Mary Lincoln.

The President, on the other hand, teared-up when she left in 1862. He said to her: “do Stay with me – you have Such a power & control[.] Such an influence over Mary – Come do Stay and Console me.”³¹¹

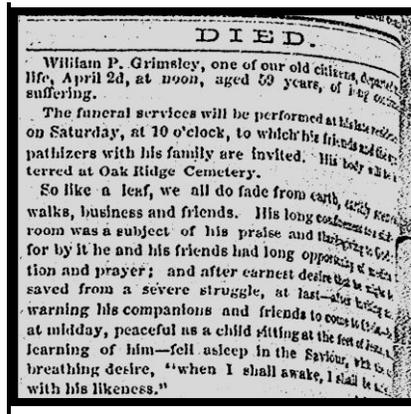
Death of Phoebe Todd
(1799-1862)

Phoebe Todd, Dr. John Todd’s servant, died in 1862.

1863

April 2, 1863

Death of William P. Grimsley
(1804-1863)



Journal, Friday, April 3, 1863.³¹²



Grave of William P. Grimsley,
Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois

June 6, 1863

Orville Hickman Browning Takes Tea and Dinner at Elizabeth Grimsley’s

Saturday June 6 [1863]...Took tea this evening at Mrs. Grimsley’s with Dr. & Mrs Brown.

Sunday June 7. Went with Mrs Grimsley to 3rd Presbyterian Church in morning and home with her to dinner. Attended Dr. Brown’s Church at night.

Orville Hickman Browning³¹³

**Process Leading to President Lincoln’s Appointment
of John Todd Grimsley to the Naval Academy**

On June 6, 1863, President Lincoln wrote to Elizabeth J. Grimsley asking if her son, John Todd Grimsley, was ready to enter the Naval Academy, and if so telegraph him his full name.

Washington, D.C.

³¹¹ Relatives and Residents: Elizabeth Todd Edwards <http://www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org/residents-visitors/relatives-and-residents/relatives-residents-elizabeth-todd-edwards/>

³¹² *Journal*, Friday, April 3, 1863, p. 2.

³¹³ *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, Vol. 1, 1850-1864, Pease and Randall, Illinois Historical Collections, Volume XX, p. 633.

Mrs. Elizabeth J. Grimsley
Springfield, Illinois
June 6. 1863

Is your John ready to enter the Naval-School? If he is, telegraph me his full name.

A. LINCOLN³¹⁴

July 1, 1863

Dr. John and Elizabeth Todd Celebrate Golden Wedding Anniversary

On July 1, 1863, Dr. John and Elizabeth Todd celebrated their golden wedding anniversary.

The Golden Wedding -- We noticed a few days ago, that the fiftieth return of the wedding day of Doctor and Mrs. John Todd, of this city, would occur "on Wednesday, the first of July, and that the interesting occasion would on the evening of that day be becomingly celebrated at the residence of the venerable couple on Sixth street. As may well be supposed, an anniversary, so rare and so blended with happy domestic memories and cherished household associations, drew together a large company of relatives, connections and old-time friends, who united in paying their respects to the gray-haired pair, who had thus far traveled together the journey of life, so loving, so lovely and so beloved. The house was crowded from an early hour in the evening; and as fast as one group retired it was succeeded by another, each as joyful as the last in hearty congratulations, and tangible good wishes. It was on occasion which will be treasured by all who witnessed, it, as a bright and unfading life-memory and must altogether have been a most gratifying and touching assurance to Doctor and Mrs. Todd of neighborly love and affection.

There they sat, __the aged and devoted pair, in their own homestead, and graciously received the congratulations of their guests. Although furrowed with age and somewhat bowed with the weight of years upon them, yet time has dealt gently with them and has preserved them with most affectionate care. The same beaming and benignant faces, studious though so many years of the comfort of others more than of themselves, still brightened upon all, and told more significantly than words could, the mutual love and forbearance which had the characterized them through their long life

*Journal, Saturday, July 4, 1863.*³¹⁵

³¹⁴ ALS, RPB. No reply has been located. John T. Grimsley, son of Harrison J. and Elizabeth J. Todd Grimsley, is not of record as appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy.

³¹⁵ *Journal, Saturday, July 4, 1863, p. 3.*

After this, the company repaired to the supper room, where an acceptable, and inviting repast had been spread, over which the Rev. Dr. Bergen, their pastor of their former years, offered a blessing, as eloquent as it was appropriate and impressive. Upon one side of Dr. and Mrs. Todd, stood their grand-nephew, Mr. Albert S. Edwards, with his new bride, who was arrayed in her flowing and elegant wedding dress, while upon the other side stood another grand-nephew, Mr. John T. Stuart, jr., with Miss Mary Remann, robed in the identical dress which Mrs. Todd wore upon the occasion of her own marriage, fifty years ago, and which contrasted amusingly and strikingly enough in its meagre proportions and odd cut with the elaborate style of the present day. The remainder of the evening passed away cheerfully and even mirthfully, Mrs. Todd enlivening the company by executing upon the piano a number of old fashioned pieces of music, which were performed by her at her own wedding. So closed the evening; and each one of the guests carried away pleasing impressions of the serene and loving companionship which had thus been manifested; and all left behind fervent blessings and benedictions upon those in whose honor they had assembled.

August 10, 1863

**President Lincoln States His First Naval Academy Appointment
Will Be John Todd Grimsley**

In an August 10, 1863 memorandum, President Lincoln observed that he would give the first appointment to the Naval Academy to John Todd Grimsley, Elizabeth's son. He also asked that another lad, Robert J. Sperry, who has been dismissed, be given a second chance.

Memorandum:
Appointment of Robert J. Sperry
August 10, 1863

At this date, I am under obligation to give the first appointment to the Naval School in my power, to John T. Grimsley, of Illinois, and no other committal must supersede this obligation. After saying this much, I add that I would be glad for the boy within named, to have another chance, if at all consistent with the service.

Aug. 10. 1863. A. LINCOLN³¹⁶

³¹⁶ AES, ICH. Lincoln's endorsement is written on the back of a letter from Gideon Welles to Robert J. Sperry, January 8, 1863, dismissing Sperry from the Naval Academy "for insubordination, neglect of studies and having in your possession a most obscene book." John T. Grimsley was appointed (see Lincoln's telegram to Mrs. Grimsley, August 24, *infra*), but there is no record of his entrance. Robert J. Sperry is listed as mate in the Navy, May 13, 1864.

President Lincoln Explains His Naval Academy Appointment Options to Elizabeth Grimsley

Executive Mansion, Washington, August 14, 1863.

My dear Cousin Lizzie I have, by the law, two classes of appointments to make to the Naval-School---ten of each, to the year.

The first class, according to the law, must be of families of the meritorious Naval-Officers; while the other class does not have such restriction. You see at once that if I have a vacancy in the first class, I cannot appoint Johnny to it; and I have intended for months, and still intend, to appoint him to the very first vacancy I can get in the other class

Yours very truly

A. LINCOLN³¹⁷

President Lincoln Appoints John Todd Grimsley to Naval Academy

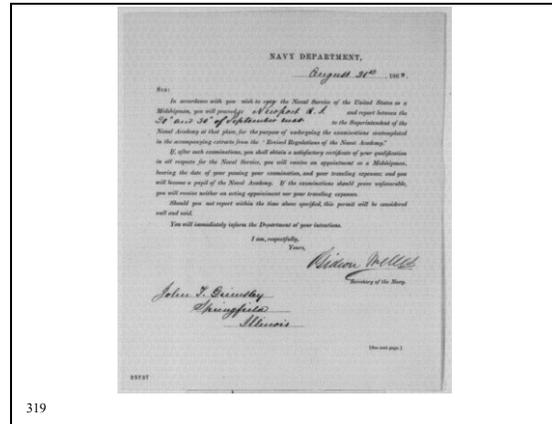
In late August 1863, President Lincoln appointed John Todd Grimsley to the Naval Academy.

Washington, D.C.,

Mrs. Elizabeth J. Grimsley
Springfield, Illinois.
August 24 1863

I mail the papers to you to-day appointing Johnny to the Naval-School.

LINCOLN³¹⁸



John Todd Grimsley Fails Entrance Requirements at Naval Academy

Thursday, October 1, 1863. John Todd Grimsley, the son of Harrison J. and Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, failed to meet the entrance requirements at the Naval Academy.³²⁰

Harrison J. Grimsley Reenlists in Union Army

On December 23, 1863, Harrison J. Grimsley, Elizabeth's former husband, reenlisted in Company E. 16th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, at Kelly Ferry, Tennessee for a term of three years. He listed his marital status as single and his occupation as farmer.³²¹

³¹⁷ ALS, CSMH.

³¹⁸ ALS, RPB. *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 91.

³¹⁹ The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916. Gideon Welles to John T. Grimsley, Friday, August 21, 1863 (Permission to attend examinations for the Naval Academy)

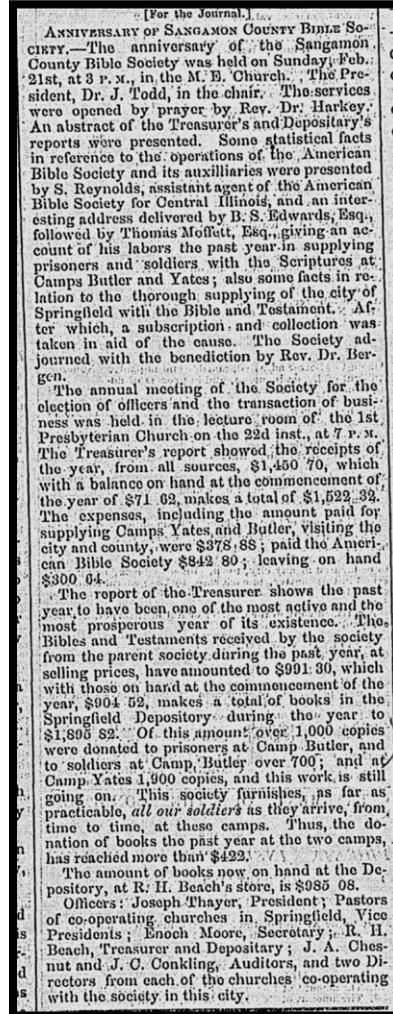
³²⁰ *Washington Chronicle*, October 2, 1863.

³²¹ Illinois State Archives, Civil War Service Report.

1864

Sangamon County Bible Society Anniversary

In his later years, Dr. John Todd was an earnest and devoted Christian, and for some years was a ruling elder in the First Presbyterian Church in Springfield.³²²



Journal, Thursday, February 25, 1864.³²³

Lockwood M. Todd Appointed Commissary by President Lincoln

He was only one, but the most demanding one, of Mrs. Lincoln's relatives to ask and receive. In 1864, the President appointed her cousin Lockwood M. Todd commissary with rank of captain approximately three years after Todd's request for appointment in the customhouse at San Francisco had been protested by "a large number of the Republicans of Solano County [California], where Mr. T. has resided, representing that he has been a most bitter and violent opponent of the Republican party."³²⁴

³²² 1881 *History*, p. 522. *Barringer*, p. 33 (52). *Power*, p. 715. *Here I Have Lived*, pp. 33(2) & 42. *Ten Ministers: A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois 1828-1953*, Roger E. Chapin, p. 3. 1891 *History*, p. 419. *Enos*, p. 197. *Genealogy: Todd, Malcolm*: EZG, T633T.

³²³ *Journal*, Thursday, February 25, 1864, p. 3.

³²⁴ *President Lincoln helps his old friends*, Roy P. Basler, Lincoln Monographs, Abraham Lincoln Association.

November 22, 1864
Elizabeth Todd Grimsley Renews Request to be Springfield Postmaster

On November 22, 1864, Elizabeth Todd Grimsley wrote to President Lincoln renewing her request to be appointed postmaster of Springfield. This letter is almost a desperate plea for help by Elizabeth. “Dear Mr. Lincoln, you know my necessities...” Elizabeth has no income and is living at her father’s who provides room and board for her and her two sons. She suggests a contrived scheme whereby an acceptable non-Todd male be named postmaster but that she collects the pay! What was Lincoln’s endorsement?



From Elizabeth J. Grimsley to Abraham Lincoln [With Endorsement by Lincoln]

Springfield Nov. 22d. 1864

My dear Mr Lincoln.

It is generally supposed there is to be a change in the Post-Office here, and again I am an applicant for it, and write thus early to you, hoping you have not committed yourself to any one before you hear my arrangements. I write unreservedly to you, feeling and believing you will be willing to give me the office if you can consistently, and feeling also, that arrangements can be made which will be satisfactory not only to yourself but to the Republican friends.

Your objection before was, that a Post-Mistress in a place the size of Springfield would produce dissatisfaction, whereupon I immediately gave up all effort as you will remember. Perhaps your views on the subject have changed, and if so I should be very glad if you would so assist me, but if not, I could make an arrangement with some one of our good, reliable Republican friends, whereby I could receive benefit, and yet the office be given to him. I could get the names of hundreds of warm friends who would be happy to help me in either way, if you should think necessary so to do. I feel secure in saying, most of the leading Republicans would give me their countenance and names.

I thought of suggesting Father’s name, but know that would again raise the cry about the Todd family and therefore rather prefer not embarrassing you in that way.

Dear Mr Lincoln, you know my necessities, and I think, I know your disposition to assist me, so will not press the subject further upon you,

With much love to Mary and the boys, and in full hope of a favorable answer to my application I am truly

Your affectionate cousin
E. J. Grimsley.

P. S. Please, Mr. Lincoln, let me know your views at an early day—³²⁵

³²⁵ Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. Elizabeth J. Grimsley to Abraham Lincoln, Tuesday, November 22, 1864.

Dr. John H. Brown Resigns as Minister of First Presbyterian Church

In 1864, failing health led to Dr. John H. Brown's resignation as minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois. A contemporary appraisal of Dr. Brown's ministry is found in a letter by Mrs. John T. Stuart to her daughter Bettie in December 1864: "It will be unfortunate for any (minister) coming just after Dr. Brown but we do not need to expect to find his place filled. I don't find any such East or West."³²⁶

³²⁶ *Chapin*, p. 30.