



ELIZ. TODD GRIMSLEY

Front Cover Illustration: Carte de visite of Elizabeth Jane Todd Grimsley. *Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

Back Cover Illustration: Telegram dated April 15, 1865, from J. B. S. Todd to John Todd Stuart stating that Mary Todd Lincoln wishes Elizabeth Todd Grimsley to come to Washington. *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.*

Elizabeth Jane Todd Grimsley Brown was a Todd. She was Mary Todd Lincoln's favorite cousin. They were childhood friends and Elizabeth was a bridesmaid at Mary's wedding in 1842. She was present at every important life event of Mary and Abraham Lincoln and they affectionately referred to her as "Cousin Lizze."

Stephen Berry, author of *House of Abraham*, argues that Abraham Lincoln was, in fact, a Todd more than a Lincoln. Lincoln's entire adult life was "awash in a sea of Todds." He married a Todd, dated a different Todd, loafed with Todds, confided in Todds, benefited from Todds, and benefited Todds in return. Indeed, Lincoln's adult life was permeated so much by his wife's family, argues Berry, that Lincoln had a deeper relationship with his wife's family than with his own. The result, as Berry shows, is that one cannot truly understand Abraham Lincoln's personal, professional, and political lives without understanding his relationship to the Todd family.

Lincoln's Springfield: Elizabeth Jane Todd Grimsley Brown 'Cousin Lizzie' (1825-1895)
Spring Creek Series.
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Contact information for Richard E. Hart:
One North Old State Capitol Plaza Suite 501
Springfield, Illinois 62701
(217) 553-0055
rhart1213@aol.com

Todd Ancestral Chart

Elizabeth Jane Todd's Paternal Todd Ancestral Chart

David Todd-----Ireland-----Hannah Owen

Levi Todd-----Jane Briggs
(1756-1807) (1761-1850)

John Todd-----1813-----Elizabeth Fisher Blair Smith
(4-27-1787 – 1-7-1865) (doctor) (4-16-1793 – 3-11-1865)
(Home: Todd Square and later East Side of South Sixth Street, between Monroe and Capitol (Market))
Mary Lincoln's Uncle and Aunt and Elizabeth Jane Todd Grimsley Brown's parents.

1. John Blair Smith Todd-----
(4-4-1814 – 1-5-1872)

2. Francis Walton "Walter" Todd-----L. M. Jackson.
(4-17-1816 – 8-5-1898)

-----Louisana Bullitt
(1818 - 1883)

3. William Levi Todd-----
(4-14-1818 – 1876, Italy)

4. Elizabeth Jane Todd-----7-21-1846-----Harrison J. Grimsley
(1-1825 – 9-23-1895) (Circa 1818-1865)

a. John Todd Grimsley-----1871-----Cornelia Messler
(1848-1920) (1841-1891)

i. Mary

-----1896-----Alethia T. Fuller

b. William L. Grimsley-----
(1852-1887)

1/29/1867-----Rev. John Brown

5. Lockwood Marcus Todd-----Emily H. Husbands
(6-17-1826 – 1876) (1834-1894)

6. Laura Todd
(1828-10/6/1832)

7. Francis Stuart Todd-----Thomas Shelby 12-18-1849
(1-19-1832 – 2-1-1851)

Smith Ancestral Chart

Elizabeth Jane Todd's Maternal Smith Ancestral Chart

Robert Smith-88-----Elizabeth Blair
(1728 Ireland-1793 Salisbury, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania) (1727-1777)

John Blair Smith*-----Elizabeth Fisher Nash
(1756-1799) (1758-1843 Jacksonville, Illinois)

John Todd-----1813-----Elizabeth Fisher Blair Smith
(4-27-1787 - 1-7-1865) (doctor) (4-16-1793 - 3-11-1865)
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6. Laura Todd
(1828-10/6/1832)

7. Francis Stuart Todd----- Thomas Shelby 12-18-1849
(1-19-1832 - 2-1-1851)

*Samuel Stanhope Smith-----Ann Witherspoon
(1751-1819)

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Introduction

Elizabeth Jane Todd was a Todd with all of the advantages and cache of that proud and established family. She was the fourth American generation of the family that originated with David and Hannah Owen Todd who immigrated to America from Northern Ireland before the American Revolution. David and Hannah settled at Pequea, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where they had three sons, John, Robert and Levi.

Levi Todd, a Revolutionary War hero, was one of the earliest settlers and political powers of Kentucky and the founder of Lexington. He was the grandfather of Elizabeth Todd Grimsley and Mary Todd Lincoln and, thus, Elizabeth and Mary were first cousins.

Elizabeth's father, John Todd, was one of Levi's eleven children. John and his siblings included Mary Lincoln's father, Robert Todd. They grew up tended by slaves at Ellersley, Levi's 21 room Lexington, Kentucky mansion. John was educated at Lexington's Transylvania University and the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. He served in the War of 1812 with great honor. He married Elizabeth Fisher Blair Smith, whose family accomplishments overshadowed those of the Lexington Todds.

In _____, Dr. John Todd left the Lexington Todd cocoon at the age of 28 to pursue his career as a physician. He first moved to Bardstown, Kentucky. After a few years, he moved to Edwardsville, Illinois, and became the first Lexington Todd to reside in Illinois. Edwardsville was the home of Ninian Edwards, John's fellow Kentuckian, friend and son of Illinois' first governor. In 1825 at their cabin home there, John and Elizabeth had a child named Elizabeth, their only daughter.

In 1827, Dr. John Todd was appointed Registrar of the Land Office at Springfield, Illinois, and he immediately moved there with his family and African American slave Phoebe. John and his family were the first Todds to reside in Springfield. Their residence was the town's only two-story house and was situated on a square city block known as Todd Square. It was here that Elizabeth and her three brothers were raised.

In 1828, Dr. Todd's 21-year-old nephew, John Todd Stuart, moved to Springfield to practice law. He was the first of the Lexington Todd clan to follow Dr. John Todd's footsteps from Kentucky to Springfield. In the years that followed, Elizabeth's four cousins, Mary (Mrs. Abraham Lincoln), Elizabeth Porter (Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards), Ann Maria (Mrs. Clark M. Smith) and Frances (Mrs. Dr. William S. Wallace), moved from Lexington to Springfield where they all married and lived out their lives.

The greater part of Elizabeth's life revolved around the various members of the proud and aristocratic Todd family. But there were indeed differences between the Kentucky Todd's and the Illinois Todds. The Kentucky Todds remained in or close to their Lexington cocoon, with

each generation enjoying the social and economic benefits accumulated by prior generations of Lexington Todds. These are the Todds well described in Stephen Berry's book *Father Abraham*.¹

The Illinois Todds were different. Yes, they were descendants of the Kentucky Todds, but they shook off the need to live on the accumulation of favors and accolades bestowed upon their Lexington Todd relatives. They struck out into new lands along the moving edge of the American frontier. By marriage they brought new blood to the Todd clan. In the diverse, hard scrabble culture of the American frontier, they established their own identities. Without the benefit of the Lexington Todd imprimatur, they personally achieved and added to the long, distinguished list of American Todd family accomplishments.

The Dr. John Todd branch of the Todd Family was refreshed by his marriage to Elizabeth Fisher Blair Smith Todd. Elizabeth Smith brought a remarkable American pedigree into the Todd Family. Her ancestors were early American educators, ministers and close friends of Presidents. They were closely connected to the founding of New Jersey University, later Princeton University, where Elizabeth's grandfather was valedictorian of his class and her uncle was President for many years. Her grandfather, Reverend Samuel Blair, was Chaplin of the House of Representatives in 1790.

The Springfield patriarch of the Todd family, Dr. John Todd, was Mary Todd Lincoln's uncle. Mary did not share the distinguished Smith lineage attached to the Dr. John Todd branch of the Illinois Todd family.

Elizabeth Todd Grimsley was Mary Todd Lincoln's first cousin and very close friend. It was through Mary that Elizabeth became "Cousin Lizzie" to Abraham Lincoln. It was in Abraham Lincoln's world, otherwise largely dominated by males, that Elizabeth became a conspicuous female participant.

Elizabeth witnessed most all of Mary and Abraham Lincoln's important life events. She was a bridesmaid at their wedding, witness to Lincoln's Springfield Farewell Address and passenger on the inaugural train from Springfield to Washington. She heard Lincoln deliver the First Inaugural address. She was a guest of the Lincolns in the White House for the defining first six months, and was First Lady Mary's companion on shopping and vacation trips. She was present in Washington and heard Lincoln deliver the Second Inaugural Address. Shortly thereafter she was the first Springfield person Mary contacted after Lincoln's death. She was a confidant and friend of Robert Todd Lincoln and was his escort at his father's funeral. She was a distant observer of Mary's insanity trial, a grieving aunt at Tad Lincoln's funeral, Mary's comforter after Tad's death and, finally, Robert Todd Lincoln's escort at Mary's funeral.

Elizabeth was indeed a commanding and continuing presence in the Lincoln family circle. But despite her closeness to the Lincoln family, she appears only briefly in most Mary Lincoln biographies and even less in biographies of Abraham Lincoln. To a large extent she has been slighted, if not ignored, by historians.

1

At Abraham Lincoln's death, Elizabeth's brother and Mary Lincoln's cousin, John Blair Smith Todd, a recently retired member of Congress, was in Washington, D. C. By telegram from the White House, he conveyed Mary's wish that his sister, Elizabeth, come immediately from Springfield to Washington. The telegraphed summons was directed to John Todd Stuart, the common uncle of Elizabeth, John Blair Smith and Mary. Written at the most traumatic moment in Mary Todd Lincoln's life, this telegram evidences the cohesiveness of the Springfield Todd family in time of utmost distress and the unique closeness of Mary Lincoln and Elizabeth Grimsley.

Who was this woman who was one of the few constants in the lives of both Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln? There were other Springfield Todds, but they failed to achieve the trust and indeed the love of the Lincolns to the extent of that achieved by Elizabeth. What were Elizabeth's personal characteristics that distinguished her from Mary's Springfield sisters who were castigated and ignored by Mary?

In appearance as shown in her photograph on the cover, she was a tall lady with a commanding presence and a somewhat patrician air. Like her cousin Mary, she was always very stylish and put together. Despite her meager personal finances during most of her adult life, she had class that was clearly an innate part of her persona.

In certain periods during her life, one might judge her as aggressive and manipulative, and, on several occasions, financially desperate. Her obituary described her as _____.

In the final analysis, however, Elizabeth like all humans was a combination of often conflicting characteristics. In an age when wives locked into an unhappy marriage often silently endured the relationship without protest, Elizabeth at age ___ divorced her husband Harry. This was a sharp deviation from the social norm of her family and of the time. But she did not flout her divorce as a woman liberated from the social norm. Instead, she shied away from being known as a divorcee and instead was erroneously called a "widow" – the widow Grimsley.

In 1861, she did something that still mystifies and remains inexplicable. She left her two young children in Springfield and traveled to Washington, D. C. where she lived and thrived for six months with the Lincolns in the White House. She embraced the social events of the early Lincoln administration and was Mary's companion in travels to New York, Boston and Cambridge and the New Jersey shore. She lovingly served as a nanny to the Lincoln boys. Meanwhile, her two sons remained in Springfield alone with only their ageing grandparents, but neither parent.

At the end of six months, with no success in obtaining the Springfield post mastership, Elizabeth returned to Springfield. On January 29, 1867, she married the Reverend Dr. John Brown—the well-respected, widowed minister of the First Presbyterian Church. Thereafter, she appears to have been a good minister's wife and a good church lady. For the first time in her adult life, she was freed from financial want. Rev. Brown had a substantial estate being larger than any of the husbands of the Springfield Todd wives. He also had a respected position in the community as a minister. Elizabeth's ship finally came in.

That is the brief summary of Elizabeth's life. The story is inextricably tied to the story of her ancestors – Todds and others – and it is there that her story begins.

Thank You

The 19th century records of the Sangamon County Clerk are housed at the University of Illinois Springfield IRAD facility under the eye of Tom Wood and he and the records have been most helpful. The Sangamon Valley Collection at Springfield's Lincoln Library contains a vast archive of information about Lincoln's Springfield and its librarians, Curtis Mann, Linda Garvert and Beth Shetter and Stephanie Martin have been most helpful in finding material on Elizabeth and her family. Cheryl Schnirring, Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein and Debbie Hamm, Librarians at the Manuscripts Division of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library have been most helpful in providing direction to the relevant sources in that vast collection. I thank you all for your friendly and professional assistance.