

For the People

A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association
Volume 2, Number 1 Spring, 2000 Springfield, Illinois

Mary Lincoln and the Swings

by Ann Ricker

The decline of Mary Lincoln's mental condition is a major theme of her life during the period from 1866 until her commitment for insanity in 1875. The elusive question of the exact nature of her illness includes a topic that is perhaps easier to grasp—the amount of social isolation that she experienced, or conversely, of her associations and friendships.

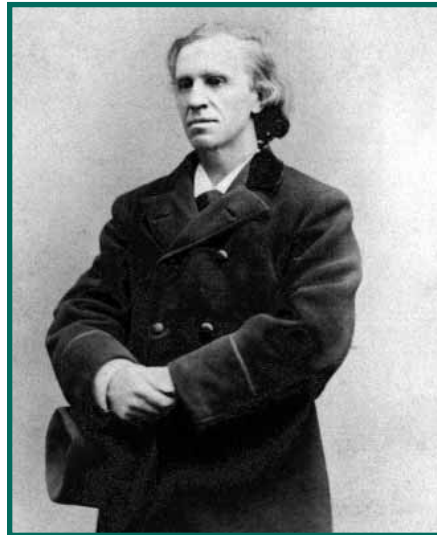
In these years, Mary often visited Chicago. In her letters from 1874 that are owned by the Illinois State Historical Library, which will be described more fully later, she mentions her friendship with prominent Chicago minister David Swing, my great-great-grandfather.

Swing was the minister of the Westminster Presbyterian Church from 1866 to 1871 and of the Fourth Presbyterian Church from 1871 to 1875. In 1874, accused of not conforming to the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, he was tried for heresy. Though the Church Presbytery acquitted him, he resigned from the denomination. In December of 1875 he founded the Central Church, where he preached for nineteen more years.

Two documents owned by my family serve to expand the story of Mary Lincoln and the Swing family. One is a letter written in 1874 by Mary to Elizabeth Swing, David's wife. The other is a speech written by David's grandson, Jewett E. Ricker, Jr., "The Other Side of Mary Lincoln," delivered in February of 1937 to the Joliet Illinois Women of Rotary. The speech is a defense of Mary against what Ricker calls the "criminally libelous" statements of some authors

depicting her mental state. A major part of Ricker's argument rests on recollections of Mary's behavior as noted by the Swing family.

These two items, along with several books and objects given by Mary Lincoln to the family, form a picture of a woman who had close, even lively, contact with David and Elizabeth Swing, and with their elder daughter, Mary Swing (Jewett E. Ricker, Jr.'s mother).

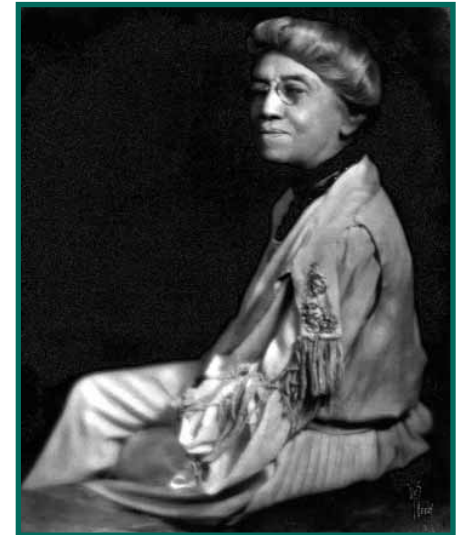


David Swing

(photo courtesy of the author)

The letter to Elizabeth Swing, dated March 12, 1874, apparently accompanied a gift of "chains and lockets" to the Swing daughters, Mary and Helen, given in a "spirit of love." She then expresses her grief over the death of United States Senator Charles Sumner. She says that he was "good and illustrious," and her "dearest and best friend," and opines that the country could have used him for many more years, the country now being "in such a demoralized condition," a refer-

ence to the scandals marking President Ulysses S. Grant's administrations. Her grief from the assassination is brought to the surface as she calls Sumner the "well beloved friend of my idolized husband." In a moving final paragraph, she describes her state of mind: her ties to the world are "rapidly being severed"; she feels she has "no right to remain upon earth"; and that "in God's own time, all that is so very dark now will be made clear to us."



Mary Swing Ricker circa 1923

(photo courtesy of the author)

This letter shows that, though Mary Lincoln had feelings of disconnection to the world, she still perceived a tie with the Swing family—a tie that perhaps was strengthened for her by her gifts to the daughters.

The association between the Swings and Mary Lincoln had actually begun as early as 1859. In Ricker's speech, he states that circa 1859 David Swing, then still living in Ohio as a professor of Latin and Greek at Miami

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President's Column

by Donald R. Tracy

Lincoln in Springfield 2000. Another great celebration of the life, work, and legacy of Abraham Lincoln. Both the symposium and banquet were well attended. With 450 in attendance and a waiting list of almost one hundred, the banquet was the hottest ticket in town, and the evening lived up to its lofty expectations. While those of you who attended are the best judges, I have had the pleasure of receiving much praise about the evening and very little criticism. Next year our speaker will be Michael R. Beschloss. The date is Monday, February 12, 2001. I hope you can join us.

We, the Abraham Lincoln Association, had a good year in 1999; not a perfect year, but a good year. In the past twelve months, we have increased membership by 217 to 665 (a 48 percent increase). We made progress in putting the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* and *Lincoln Day By Day* on the Internet in searchable form, but not nearly enough. We launched our first newsletter (you are reading the fifth issue). Thanks to Tom Schwartz and Bill Tubbs, the newsletter has been a complete and popular success. We initiated an endowment, which is gathering momentum thanks to Bob Eckley. Thanks to Molly Becker and R-Lou Barker, we have added a fall membership meeting, which has increased members and interest. We are planning to improve our website, to celebrate in proper form the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, and to update the *Collected Works*, among other good and noteworthy new projects. Moreover, we will continue our first-rate *Journal*, banquet and symposium, and our support for the

Lincoln Legal Papers and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

All of this takes time and money. We are finding people—busy people—who are making the time, but finances are always an issue. We do not exist to make money, but some money is necessary in order to exist. This year the symposium cost \$5,000 and the newsletter costs \$9,648 per year. In most years, we make a little money on the banquet. This year, however, because of our unique and elegant banquet venue, there was no banquet profit. At present, our base dues of \$25 is less than the cost of membership benefits (the *Journal* costs \$20.85 per member; the newsletter costs approximately \$10 per member). As a result, the one-third of you who contribute at higher levels keep us whole and functioning. Although our mission is to support and subsidize Lincoln activities and publications, no organization can survive long without a positive cash flow.

Raising the minimum dues is an option, but one that may lead to a loss of membership. We have received a very substantial gift from one of our directors, but that is needed to help jumpstart our endowment. If you can help us avoid a dues increase by a donation or by increasing your membership level, we will see to it that your investment in the Abraham Lincoln Association is put to good use.

As always, your thoughts, suggestions, criticisms, and encouragement are welcome. Please write to me at Brown, Hay & Stephens, 205 S. Fifth, Suite 700, Springfield, IL 62701. You can also e-mail me at dtracy@bhslaw.com.

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University, had met Abraham and Mary Lincoln.

By 1865, Swing had chosen the ministry as a profession. His post-assassination sermon, "The Death of the President," delivered on April 16, 1865, at the Presbyterian Church of Hamilton, Ohio, was circulated in pamphlet form. Ricker says that Mary Lincoln read this sermon and admired it. In May of 1865, Ricker continues, Mary Lincoln and Swing, both visiting in Chicago, were reintroduced, possibly by lawyer Abram Pence.

In 1866, Swing moved his family to Chicago when he accepted the Westminster Presbyterian Church position. From 1866 to 1875, Ricker states that Mary Lincoln "invariably" visited the Swings when she came to Chicago. Journalist Jane Grey Swisshelm alludes to this in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 5, 1879. She writes: "I first knew Mrs. Swing in her own home, where I called with our mutual friend, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln."

Ricker relates that, during Mary Lincoln's visits, the Swings "marveled at her quick changes of mood—and at the way in which her mind would clear." Depressed, she would sometimes "do exceedingly strange things," and display an obsession that she was bankrupt; but she was, at other times, "her old self," with an alert mind. Above all, she "never lost her fighting spirit." Ricker adds: "She was always trying to prod herself; always trying to get a fresh grip on life."

Her ability to do this was tested in July of 1871, when her son, Tad, died while with her in Chicago. This devastating event could have totally destroyed Mary Lincoln, but she apparently found a safety net in the Swing family. For after Tad's death, Ricker states that Mary Lincoln "seemed to transfer her affections" to the fifteen-year-old Mary Swing. Several times a week, she would pick Mary up at the Swing's Ohio Street residence, and take her out for a carriage ride. She also gave Mary a number of mementos. One of these,

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Happy 191st Birthday Mr. Lincoln!

The atmosphere surrounding the various board meetings of the Lincoln Legal Papers, the Abraham Lincoln Association, the symposium, and the banquet was simply electric. Everyone sensed that a new era had arrived for Lincoln studies. The much awaited Lincoln Legal Papers DVD-ROM edition was released to the public on February 12. The project now turns their attention to publishing a four-volume printed edition of select cases. The Abraham

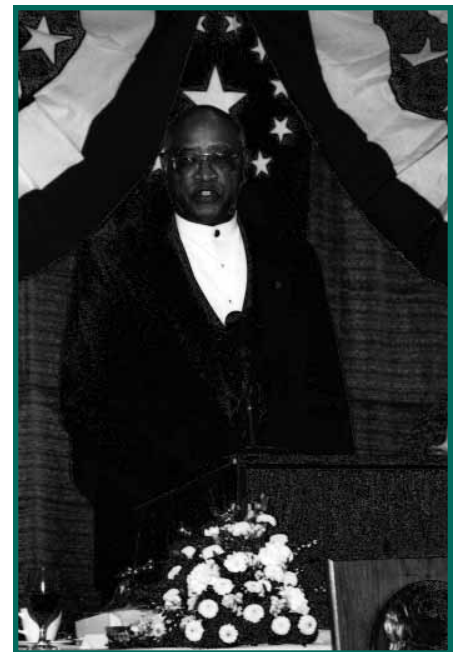


Doris Kearns Goodwin

Lincoln Association continues to provide the best in Lincoln scholarship and an ambitious agenda for future research, publications, and programs. The symposium drew a full house as the audience heard exciting new research from Hans Trefousse, Bruce Tap, and Bryon Andreasen. Kim Bauer expertly moderated the symposium. Dr. John Sellers from the Library of Congress entertained and enlightened the audience with his comments on the three papers. The roundtable discussion featuring Mark Reinhart, Allen Guelzo, and Michael Burlingame was another highlight of

the day. The panel addressed the recent argument advanced by Lerone Bennett, Jr., claiming that Abraham Lincoln as emancipator is a lie. Guelzo and Burlingame offered examples countering Bennett. Both agreed, however, that Lincoln scholars have refrained from taking Bennett and other critics of Lincoln's emancipation policies seriously. As a result, Lincoln supporters and critics have addressed separate constituencies and not one another.

The main attraction at the banquet was speaker Doris Kearns Goodwin. Those who expected a first-class presentation were not disappointed. She described how she became interested in history, how she under-



*Deputy Librarian of Congress
General Donald Scott*

takes research for a project, and described her current research on Abraham Lincoln. Those who could not attend the banquet can catch Doris Kearns Goodwin's address on C-SPAN or go to the C-SPAN website at www.c-span.org and order a videotape of the talk. The Association was also

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honored by the attendance of General Donald Scott, Deputy Librarian of Congress, who spoke of the Library of Congress's efforts to digitize their Lincoln materials. Susan Mogerman,



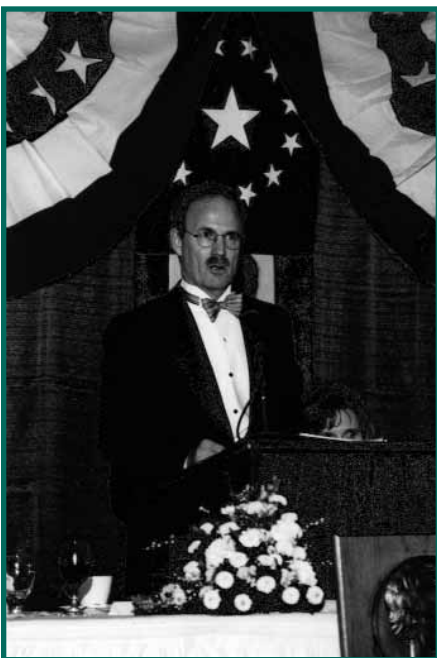
*Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
Director Susan Mogerman*

Director of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, gave an update on the progress toward building the Lincoln Presidential Library. Cullom Davis was given the Logan Hay Medal, the highest honor bestowed on

an individual by the Abraham Lincoln Association for his work as director of the Lincoln Legal Papers electronic edition. Clearly the theme of the evening was *Carpe Diem!* (Seize the day!)



Member News



*Abraham Lincoln Association
President Donald R. Tracy*

Congratulations go out to Allen Guelzo who shared first honors of the Lincoln Prize with John Hope Franklin. Guelzo was awarded \$20,000 for his book, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*. Daniel Stowell gave a presentation of the Lincoln Legal Papers DVD-ROM edition in Washington, D.C., for Dr. James Billington and the Library of Congress staff on February 11. Cullom Davis spoke before the Lincoln Group of Delaware. Duke Russell continues his efforts to keep the memory of Lincoln alive in California with his annual birthday remembrance, at which writer and comic Steve Allen read the Gettysburg Address this year. The University of Tennessee Press has reissued Charles Hubbard's *Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* in paperback. Other new books by members are Harold Holzer's *Lincoln Seen and Heard*, Lucas Morel's *Lincoln's Sacred Effort*:

Defining Religion's Role in American Self-Government, and Michael Burlingame's new edition of William O. Stoddard's *Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*. The late Don Fehrenbacher's magnum opus on slavery, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, is scheduled for release by Oxford University Press in April of 2001. Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson are seeking information on the letters of William H. Herndon for a new book. Anyone owning such letters should contact the Lincoln Studies Center at 309.341.7158. Louise Taper and Lewis Lehrman are part of a committee to study making Anderson Cottage a historic Lincoln site. Thomas E. Schwartz appeared on *Today Show* to argue against efforts to transform President's Day into solely the celebration of George Washington.

Advice to Lincoln on Obtaining Ethnic Voters

by Thomas E. Schwartz

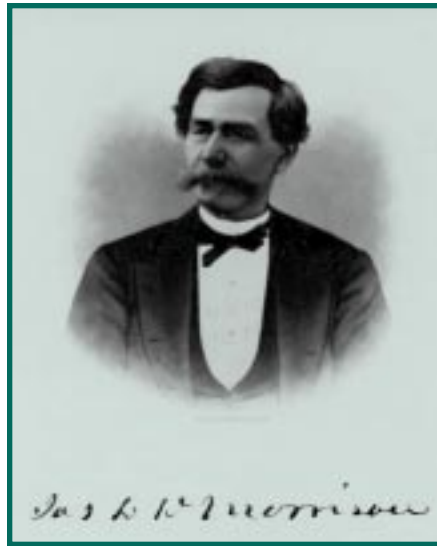
James Lowery Donaldson Morrison was born in Kaskaskia, Illinois, on April 12, 1816. He served as a midshipman in the Navy from 1832 until 1839, when he left the service to study law. Morrison engaged in a successful legal practice in Belleville, Illinois, from where he was elected to the state legislature in 1844. When war broke out with Mexico, Morrison quickly volunteered for service and distinguished himself at the Battle of Buena Vista. In the following letter to Abraham Lincoln, Morrison outlines how he was successful in being elected to the Illinois Senate in 1848. The secret was securing the ethnic German vote.

The Whig Party in Illinois was not blind to the need to befriend recently arrived ethnic groups such as the Irish and the Germans. As early as 1838, Chicago campaign pamphlets were printed in German. John J. Hardin was urged to print German translations of his congressional speeches for distribution in the heavily ethnic downstate counties of St. Clair, Monroe, and Randolph during the 1840 campaign. German voters tended to be skeptical of Whig views. During the Constitutional Convention of 1847, many Whigs advocated allowing only those immigrants who had lived in the state for one year and were naturalized citizens the right to vote. Democrats had regarded residency as the only requirement for voting. Citizenship, or even the intent to become a citizen, was not necessary. Enough Democratic convention delegates sided with Whigs on this issue to have it included in the new constitution.

It is important to note that the new constitution failed to garner a majority vote in only one county, the heavily German populated Monroe County. But as Gustave Koerner

claimed later in his memoirs, his opposition to the citizenship requirement was offset by the other positive reforms reflected in the new constitution. Morrison's strategy of winning ethnic voters remained an important political goal. It would have been helpful had it been implemented during the presidential campaign. Although the Whig presidential candidate, Zachary Taylor, won in 1848, he lost in Illinois.

The following transcription contains all the spelling and punctuation idiosyncrasies found in nineteenth-century correspondence.



James L. D. Morrison

Belleville Decr. 13 1848

My Dear Lincoln

I was very anxious to have Seen you at St. Louis on you way Eastward, and watched for your arrival at that place—but did not get notice of your being there until you had left. In the first place I must congratulate you upon the glorious success of our party, and I expect an original Taylor man would not now be so scarce a commodity in the Washington market. Your old friend Truman Smith man-

aged his part of the canvass admirably well, and deserves the gratitude of the Whig party. What a pity that you were not renominated in your District,—it is a shame that a District containing the Whig majority which it has should be so misrepresented. The moderate Loco focus here express themselves as well satisfied with the result, though Koerner, Bissell, Kinney and others are sadly dejected. Bissell particularly who took very violent and unwarrantable grounds against Genl Taylor. I hope that his course may be understood at the "White house." Taylors letter upon "nativism", (the genuineness of which I have my doubts) has been used amongst our German population with some effect, and if it had been published here before the Election would have given us 100 more votes in this county.

Above all things now we must be cautious in making removals and appointments in our state,—a greedy swarm of applicants for office will congregate at Washington, more generally the least deserving in our party, whose importunities it will require resolution to resist,—and as you will be unaided by any colleague you will have to shoulder the responsibility of their appointments. My doctrine you know in political management, is to "secure success" and if we use the patronage we will have at disposal judiciously, never has our state been in so fair a condition for political regeneration- all patronage having been taken from the Gov. & Legislature, nothing is to be looked for from that quarter, which greatly weakens the influence of the cliques who have so long controlled the state. Nearly all the little postmasters in this region have rendered themselves obnoxious to the charge of interfering in the elections, which according to our creed (when our opponents are in) is good cause of removal. I hope the knife will be pretty freely used, the

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Mary Lincoln and the Swings

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described by Ricker as being given before the Chicago Fire of October, 1871, was a turquoise and pearl ring.

On Christmas Day, 1873, Mary Lincoln gave Mary Swing an inscribed two-volume set of Longfellow's poems. A week later, on New Year's Day, 1874, she gave Elizabeth Swing an inscribed volume of Tennyson. These books are still owned by our family.

As her friendship with the mother and daughter bloomed, Mary Lincoln came to look upon David Swing as a spiritual counselor. In this role, he helped her through another crisis. In December of 1873, Abraham Lincoln's former partner, William Herndon, gave a lecture in which he said that Abraham Lincoln had not been a Christian—a charge that reinforced earlier statements by Ward Hill Lamon and that deeply distressed Mary Lincoln. She refers to her support from David Swing and her resulting reliance on him in five of the Illinois State Historical Library letters. In letters to John Todd Stuart dated January 20 and 21, 1874, she says that her "good friend, Professor Swing" had called Herndon and Lamon "small barking dogs," and says that Swing reported to her that Herndon had been denounced at a dinner party as a drunkard and an "outrageous storyteller." In an August, 1874, letter to Robert Todd Lincoln, she names Swing as her choice to preach her funeral sermon. In two letters to Willis Danforth dated December 22 and 24 (probably from 1874), she refers to a visit from Swing and calls him "a noble man."

Mary Lincoln heard David Swing in the pulpit as well as in private meetings. Ricker states that on January 4, 1874, she attended the first services of the Fourth Presbyterian Church when it was rebuilt after the fire. It is reasonable to assume that she attended on other occasions as well.

To express her appreciation for David Swing, in 1874 or 1875, Mary Lincoln gave him a silver goblet and

napkin ring, still owned by our family, objects that had been used by the Lincolns in the White House (see page 8).

If 1874 was troubling for Mary Lincoln, it was tumultuous for the Swings. David Swing's month-long

heresy trial was accompanied by heavy newspaper coverage throughout the nation, and the acquittal was followed by an appeal to the Synod. That Mary Swing chose to marry Jewett E. Ricker, Sr., on October 22, 1874, *continued on page 8*

Dec 24th
Grand Central

Dr Danforth
My Dear Sir:
You
certainly had not been
gone 2 minutes, when
Professor Swing, was
announced - and he
mentioned that only
five minutes before,
had he received my ~~note~~ ^{note}

Advice to Lincoln on Obtaining Ethnic Voters

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same may be said of our Land Offices generally—but in making new appointments we should keep our eyes steadily upon advancing the interests of the Whig Party- there are two or three German Postmasters in our county for instance, who ought to be turned out, but Germans should be appointed in their places, and then we do not render ourselves obnoxious to the charge of “nativism.” I know that many of the Germans of this county can be brought to vote the Whig ticket- my own experience satisfies me that, if wiggery is dissolved of “nativism”, with which the interested politicians here have sought to invest it, that many Germans will join us & when you reflect that we have 4000 German votes here in a half dozen counties all against us, it is worth the effort to conciliate them. You know how tenacious they are upon that subject, and to show you that with a little manourving we may make the charge stick against loco focoism. I will relate what occurred in a strong German precinct in this county during the August canvass. I was fiercerly assailed by Reynolds and Bissell as belonging to a party which was native American in its tendencies etc. opposed to for-

eigners etc. I had to make every edge cut to overcome 1300 majority, and was badly beaten if I couldn't break into the Germans. I retaliated and making our new constitution the basis of my charge against the locos in the precinct to which I allude, concluded a *fierce assault* upon nativism the Saturday upon the election (where I had the precinct to myself) by holding up the Constitution with the signatures of the members to the convention attached. “George Bunson” a German from this county was a member, he refused to sign the constitution without attaching “witness” to his name—this looked suspicious, and all were ready to charge a contention with being “natives” which would not allow a German to sign the constitution in any other way than as a witness. I recd 150 majority in the precinct which might otherwise have gone 200 against me. In reference to my business at Washington, in which I will require your assistance this winter, I wanted to have spoken to you—in order to have some one on the spot to represent the interests I have charge of. I spoke to Washburne on his way East who has it in charge. I recd finally to days mail for the inspection of the committee the only *original Patent*

issued by Gov. Harrison for these claims which I can lay my hands upon it- the land covered by this patent as well as all the others for which I am petitioning has been patented by the U.S. the second time, and are now very valuable- do Lincoln examine this case and support the bill, a more righteous claim was never presented to Congress and I know it must pass if Examined.

We will instruct Breese & Douglass in favour of the Wilmont Proviso. I think there is no doubt of that. If you have time write me at Springfield. I would go on to the inauguration but for the suspicion at home that I would be seeking office, and I think as “Old Zack” has done so well by letting office seek him, that his example had better be followed. If Mrs. L. accompanied you to Washington pay my respects to her—and tell her to laugh as much as She pleases, at the fantastic asses who will swell this winter at Washington & if it should so happen that Mrs. L is at home, I'll promise to give *your* respects to her this winter & dance with her at the first party.

Yr. friend
Jas. L. D. Morrison

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Please enroll me as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Association in the category indicated:

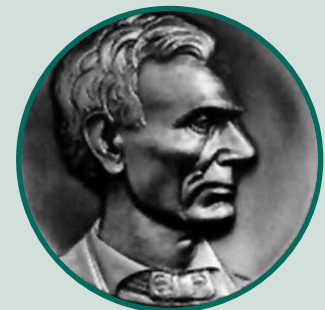
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- Sustaining \$ 125.00
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The Abraham Lincoln Association
1 Old State Capitol Plaza
Springfield, Illinois
62701

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Website: www.alincolnassoc.com

Mary Lincoln and the Swings

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probably provided a joyous, but even more stressful diversion. The wedding was held at the Fourth Presbyterian Church, with David Swing officiating.

If any event can test a woman's social abilities, it is the wedding of a close friend. In Ricker's speech, he reports that Mary Lincoln was on the wedding scene in full force, seeking to provide her young friend a splendid send-off. Besides purchasing the bride's going-away hat and items for her trousseau, Mary gave the couple a bouquet, silver ice cream spoons, and a pair of gold bracelets. In her active

role, Ricker states, Mary "dressed my mother for the service, checked up on all details, and talked so entertainingly

not, in fact, preach at her funeral in 1882.

It is hoped that the connection with the Swings will shed new light on Mary Lincoln's life, particularly in the year of 1874. Though she was sometimes alone and despairing, she was known to many as a vibrant spirit. Through trial after trial, she was a survivor—one who looked outward to others for help and support as well as inward to a spiritual core. Through her friendship and generosity, Mary Lincoln has left a legacy to my family which we greatly treasure today.



(photo courtesy of the author)



(photo courtesy of the author)

to my father that he was almost late in walking in to meet his bride."

The newlyweds moved to Oxford, Ohio. Ricker reports that Mary Lincoln and Mary Ricker corresponded, but those letters have not survived. In 1875, Mary Lincoln declined rapidly, and was committed in the spring. No evidence has been found of further close contact between Mary Lincoln and the Swings, and David Swing did

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

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