

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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Mary Todd Lincoln

Mary Todd Lincoln Comes to Greenville! **Mary Todd Lincoln Comes to Greenville!**

A warm-ish day that later settled into the 70s after a cold front passage greeted both the Greenville Local History Group and the Civil War Round Table on a Wednesday evening at our usual spot. Although some people attend both groups' meetings, those who looked familiar from local history meetings were: Dave & Judy Rundell, Stephanie Ingalls, Dot Blenis, Walt Ingalls, Dot Hesel, and Don & Deb Teator. (I know a few did not attend because of a power outage caused by the cold front's winds!)

Our August meeting will return to its second Monday of the month, as usual, on August 8; program notes to follow later in the newsletter.

Judy (Daoust) Gudeesynakowski played Mary Todd Lincoln in a 45 minute narration/commentary, covering biographical material as well as historical.

Mary Todd was born in 1818 to well-to-do parents in Kentucky, a border state in the slavery conflict. Her mother died when she was six years old, and her relationship with her step-mother

can only be described as rocky (from Mary's point of view, of course).

She was well educated and was active in the social circles of her area. She caught the interest of both Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, both national personalities in near-future presidential politics. After a broken engagement, she re-connected and married Abe Lincoln (but you knew that already, or there would be no story!).

Mary (Judy) admitted to being very insecure, probably resulting from all of the uncertainty of her life, especially her tough growing up years. Combined with what we would call bipolar disorder today, life with Mary probably was not an easy one (but Abe does not let on!), and I will leave any further comment alone.

Mary came dressed in period garb – a light lime-green and black checkered design, with the obligatory hoop skirt. (A question from the audience prompted her to demonstrate how a lady would sit down, making it look easy, which it would have had to have been, but it looks quite imposing today!) Mary also admitted to owning 300 pairs of gloves.

Abe and Mary bore four children – one dying early, one dying during the Civil War (the one that, according to the usual story, was the one that caused Mary to fall off the deep end, something she explains differently), one lived until 1872, and the fourth one (Robert) outliving her (and that relationship is a difficult one, at best).

Mary was known for visiting wounded troops during the Civil War, and enjoyed the social life, although much less so after Willie's death in 1862.

She was confined to a sanitarium for a while before being allowed to leave (she was assigned there because of her son, although Mary maintains her mental state was fine!). She lived in Paris for a few years, traveled in Europe, came back to Chicago, and would die in 1882, leaving behind a character who has been unsympathetically simplified to "Crazy Mary" although this evening's Mary maintained the story was much more complex than that.

Questions and comments were allowed, taking another twenty minutes and filling in more of the story, both of Mary Todd Lincoln's life and of Judy's initiation into the role she plays.

Thank you, Mary Heisinger, for organizing the meeting, and I would encourage anyone interested in the Civil War era to come to the Civil War Round Table's meetings which take place on the second Wednesday of the month.

Although 150 years have passed, the depths and heights of human behavior is so awe inspiring, while being so ordinary, that we still associate

with a terrible period of American history and the thousands of personal and regional stories that still garner our attention today.

Our August 8 meeting will feature a retelling of Walter Ingalls' cross-country trip in 1947 with his parents and an aunt and uncle. Although Walter had just received his license, he drove most of the 8,000 miles.

Available will be his diary, as well as his mother's diary of the trip, parts of which will be read side by side. Also available is a map produced by Conoco for Eleanor Goff Ingalls (yes, you should see the map!) with a highlighted path for them to follow.

There is a photo album available, and, of course, a few (ok, maybe a few more than that) digressions that really is the fun of having Walter talk. He also will include some family background and his personal situation that gives insight to growing up in Norton Hill as well as what a teenager was facing in the 1940s.

I kid you not! This should be a fun evening, not just for the travelogue it is but for the storytelling that Walter brings. This should be local history at its best.

I will try to arrange for light refreshments.

Take care,

