



Abraham and Mary Lincoln (Concise Lincoln Library)

Kenneth J. Winkle

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For decades Abraham and Mary Lincoln's marriage has been characterized as discordant and tumultuous. In *Abraham and Mary Lincoln*, author Kenneth J. Winkle goes beyond the common image of the couple, illustrating that although the waters of the Lincoln household were far from calm, the Lincolns were above all a house united. Calling upon their own words and the reminiscences of family members and acquaintances, Winkle traces the Lincolns from their starkly contrasting childhoods, through their courtship and rise to power, to their years in the White House during the Civil War, ultimately revealing a dynamic love story set against the backdrop of the greatest peril the nation has ever seen.

When the awkward but ambitious Lincoln landed Mary Todd, people were surprised by their seeming incompatibility. Lincoln, lacking in formal education and social graces, came from the world of hardscrabble farmers on the American frontier. Mary, by contrast, received years of schooling and came from an established, wealthy, slave-owning family. Yet despite the social gulf between them, these two formidable personalities forged a bond that proved unshakable during the years to come. Mary provided Lincoln with the perfect partner in ambition—one with connections, political instincts, and polish. For Mary, Lincoln was her “diamond in the rough,” a man whose ungainly appearance and background belied a political acumen to match her own.

While each played their role in the marriage perfectly—Lincoln doggedly pursuing success and Mary hosting lavish political soirées—their partnership was not without contention. Mary—once described as “the wildcat of her age”—frequently expressed frustration with the limitations placed on her by Victorian social strictures, exhibiting behavior that sometimes led to public friction between the couple. Abraham's work would at times keep him away from home for weeks, leaving Mary alone in Springfield.

The true test of the Lincolns' dedication to each other began in the White House, as personal tragedy struck their family and civil war erupted on American soil. The couple faced controversy and heartbreak as the death of their young son left Mary grief-stricken and dependent upon séances and spiritualists; as charges of disloyalty hounded the couple regarding Mary's young sister, a Confederate widow; and as public demands grew strenuous that their son Robert join the war. The loss of all privacy and the constant threat of kidnapping and assassination took its toll on the entire family. Yet until a fateful night in the Ford Theatre in 1865, Abraham and Mary Lincoln stood firmly together—he as commander-in-chief during America's gravest military crisis, and she as First Lady of a divided country that needed the White House to emerge as a respected symbol of national unity and power.

Despite the challenges they faced, the Lincolns' life together fully embodied the maxim engraved on their wedding bands: love is eternal. *Abraham and Mary Lincoln* is a testament to the power of a stormy union

that held steady through the roughest of seas.

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