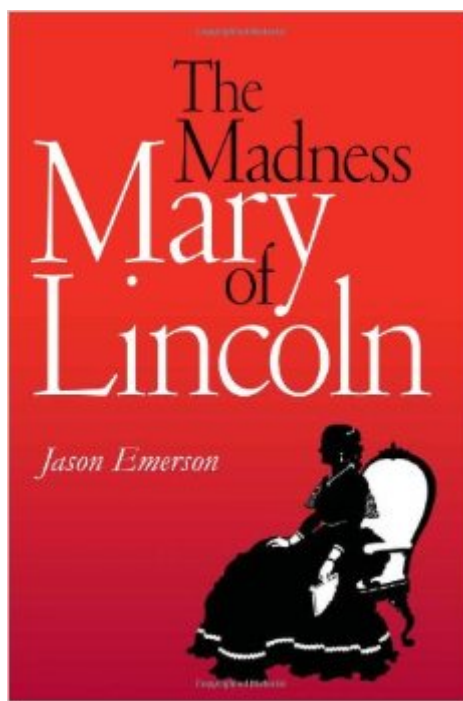


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The Madness Of Mary Lincoln



Synopsis

In 2005, historian Jason Emerson discovered a steamer trunk formerly owned by Robert Todd Lincoln's lawyer and stowed in an attic for forty years. The trunk contained a rare find: twenty-five letters pertaining to Mary Todd Lincoln's life and insanity case, letters assumed long destroyed by the Lincoln family. Mary wrote twenty of the letters herself, more than half from the insane asylum to which her son Robert had her committed, and many in the months and years after.

The Madness of Mary Lincoln is the first examination of Mary Lincoln's mental illness based on the lost letters, and the first new interpretation of the insanity case in twenty years. This compelling story of the purported insanity of one of America's most tragic first ladies provides new and previously unpublished materials, including the psychiatric diagnosis of Mary's mental illness and her lost will. Emerson charts Mary Lincoln's mental illness throughout her life and describes how a predisposition to psychiatric illness and a life of mental and emotional trauma led to her commitment to the asylum. The first to state unequivocally that Mary Lincoln suffered from bipolar disorder, Emerson offers a psychiatric perspective on the insanity case based on consultations with psychiatrist experts.

This book reveals Abraham Lincoln's understanding of his wife's mental illness and the degree to which he helped keep her stable. It also traces Mary's life after her husband's assassination, including her severe depression and physical ailments, the harsh public criticism she endured, the Old Clothes Scandal, and the death of her son Tad.

The Madness of Mary Lincoln is the story not only of Mary, but also of Robert. It details how he dealt with his mother's increasing irrationality and why it embarrassed his Victorian sensibilities; it explains the reasons he had his mother committed, his response to her suicide attempt, and her plot to murder him. It also shows why and how he ultimately agreed to her release from the asylum eight months early, and what their relationship was like until Mary's death. This historical page-turner provides readers for the first time with the lost letters that historians had been in search of for eighty years.

Book Information

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United States > Civil War

Customer Reviews

Did Abraham Lincoln suffer a mental illness? Well, the death of his first love, Ann Rutledge, may have pushed him for a time to the edge of despondency. But are we to believe that Father Abraham pulled off nothing less than the saving of democracy while also battling a severe mental disorder? No. He might have been sad, but he wasn't mad. But his poor wife Mary was a different story. So one easily concludes after reading (in one sitting) *The Madness of Mary Lincoln*, a fascinating and well-crafted later-life biography by newcomer Jason Emerson of the Great Emancipator's disturbed wife. It is the riveting, and pathetic, tale of Mary Lincoln's involuntary commitment to an insane asylum in 1875, as mandated by a jury trial involving her sole surviving son, Robert. It also relates the meddlesome efforts of her friend, social crusader Myra Brantwell, to secure her release one year later. And it is a sleuthing tale about the only recent discovery, in a long-forgotten attic-relegated footlocker of Robert Lincoln's lawyer, Frederick Towers, of 25 personal letters and other documents of Mary Lincoln, bringing to light lusciously rich new historical evidence from the hand of Mary herself. While obviously problematic as a diagnosis backward in time, the book's appendix contains a reasonable assessment from a modern day psychiatrist that identifies Mary's affliction as BiPolar disorder with psychotic features. In the end, it seems that Robert was left with no choice but to undertake the drastic measure of committing his own mother against her will for her own protection. Painfully, the episode leads to Mary's estrangement from Robert, of whom she later refers in her letters as the "monster". This book hits an audience trifecta.

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