

Mary's Velvet Rose

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ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS



Todd Family Column

Mary Lincoln was a member of the Todd clan – the Kentucky Todds. It was a large and diverse family, and when Elizabeth Edwards referred to 'the family,' she meant the Todds. They consisted of well-educated men and women who shaped American history and carved their own places within that history. The Todds were more than aristocrats – they were pioneers, war heroes, statesmen, doctors, educators and members of the clergy. In every aspect of early American history, there was a Todd.

The family came from Scotland to Ireland, and then to the American colonies. Robert Todd (referred to as "the Emigrant") was the first to come to America. He settled in Pennsylvania and raised a large family. Over the years, his descendants moved into Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, North Dakota and all the way to the western shoreline.

It is the intention of the author to share a few comments about various members of the Todd family in future issues of the ALP newsletter.

Elizabeth Todd Edwards

Elizabeth was the eldest child of Robert Smith Todd and Eliza Parker Todd. Born November 18, 1813, she never wanted people to know her true age and changed it

several times when census takers came to call.

At the Presbyterian Church suppers in Springfield, Ill., Elizabeth was famed for her chicken salad.

It has been written that during Mary Lincoln's insanity trial, when tempers flared on both sides, only Elizabeth remained "fair-minded and uncalculating" (The Insanity File by Mark E. Neely and R. Gerald McMurtry).

Elizabeth and her husband, Ninian Edwards, had four children. --Submitted by Donna McCreary

Who or What was Dolly Varden?

Those of you who traveled to Springfield, Ill., to see the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum were treated to a White House depiction of Mary Lincoln inside the White House. Elizabeth Keckly was shown helping Mary Lincoln get dressed for a White House reception. The dress was a lovely evening robe, decorated with embroidered clusters of flowers and small embroidered dots. The dress was completed with a white bertha, white gloves, a corsage of flowers on her bodice and a wreath of flowers on her head. Her jewelry was the pearl set that her husband had purchased for her as a gift at Tiffany's in New York. Mary Lincoln sat for Matthew Brady in this dress, and four photos are still in existence from that 1861 session. In his book, *The Photographs of Mary Todd*

Lincoln, author Lloyd Ostendorf referred to this dress as a 'Victorian gown of Dolly Varden pattern.'

So, who or what was Dolly Varden?

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, a Dolly Varden is a brightly colored fish. This dress is floral, not fishy in design. There must be another explanation.

An internet search revealed that "Dolly Varden" was a fictitious character from the Charles Dickens' novel, Barnaby Rudge. She was known for her flirtatious ways and her brightly colored dresses. One of her favorites was a green dress with pink polka dots.

In the late 1860's (post Civil War), a green fabric with crimson polka dots was manufactured. This fabric was named Dolly Varden. An investigation through several fashion books led to a description of a Dolly Varden dress. C. Willett Cunnington describes it as a dress of chintz over a bright silk petticoat, plain, flounced or quilted. Later, for winter, the Dolly Varden may have been made of fine flannel or cashmere printed in chintz pattern, with a black silk, satin or velveteen petticoat,

often quilted or lined eiderdown. In this fashion, the petticoat is seen as a skirt and not an undergarment.

A copy of the 18th-century polonaise dress, the Dolly Varden was made of print chintz panniers, buttons and sometimes had a large bow at the waist. It first appeared in the fashion plates in the summer of 1871, and it remained popular until 1875.

By the turn of the century, the term Dolly Varden referred to a woman's large-brimmed hat trimmed with flowers. These were the hats that Gibson girls often wore to garden parties. When the Dolly Varden came into vogue, Mary Lincoln was in mourning attire and not wearing brightly colored skirts. While her 1861 floral-themed evening attire would remind a modern eye of the flirtatious character and the late 1860's fabric of the same name, neither Mary Lincoln nor Elizabeth Keckly would have used the term to describe the gown.

Surely, Charles Dickens had no idea when he created Miss Varden that she would be the inspiration for a fabric, a dress design, a hat and a fish. That is an impressive legacy for a young girl who is a fictional character. --

Submitted by Donna McCreary