

Mary's Velvet Rose

September 2026

ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS



Mary Lincoln's Visit to Mammoth Cave

A Kentucky Moment of Renewal

In the summer and fall of 1876, Mary Todd Lincoln entered a season of quiet rebuilding. Newly released from Bellevue, she returned to Springfield, determined to reclaim her independence and re-establish the rhythms of her own life. She reconnected with family, regained confidence, and soon made her way back to the Bluegrass she had always called home.

During this extended stay in Kentucky, Mary traveled with her great-nephew Lewis Baker, whose companionship brought steadiness and youthful energy to her days. It was in this period—between her release in June 1876 and her departure for Europe in October 1877—that Mary made **her** only documented visit to Mammoth Cave, as confirmed by biographer Jean H. Baker.

A Journey Underground

Touring Mammoth Cave in the 1870s was an experience of spectacle, wonder, and carefully staged drama. Mary would have encountered the same celebrated features that mid-century travelers described:

Gothic Avenue, the Rotunda, and other great chambers: These vast underground halls cool and echoing, offered visitors a sense of stepping into another world. Guides led guests through miles of winding passages, pointing out formations already famous in travel literature.

Torch and lantern lighting: Before electric light, the cave was illuminated by flickering torches and hand-held lamps. Shadows danced across stone walls, creating an atmosphere both eerie and enchanting—an effect that made Mammoth Cave feel like a natural cathedral.

The Star Chamber: The highlight of every tour. Here, the guide extinguished all lamps, revealing a ceiling that shimmered like a night sky. Mineral deposits caught the faintest glimmer of reflected light, producing the illusion of stars overhead. Visitors often described it as one of the most magical sights of the entire journey.

A Kentucky Interlude of Peace

For Mary Lincoln, this excursion was more than sightseeing. It was a moment of calm after years of grief, scrutiny, and upheaval. Traveling with Lewis Baker, she experienced Kentucky not as a public figure under pressure, but as a Todd daughter returning home—finding solace in familiar landscapes and quiet wonders.

Her Mammoth Cave visit stands as a small but vivid chapter in her late life: a reminder that even in difficult seasons, Mary sought beauty, curiosity, and connection. In the cool darkness of the cave, beneath the shimmering illusion of the Star Chamber, she found a brief and welcome peace before beginning her European years.



Save the Date



Association of Lincoln Presenters

Summer Activities

Laura Schlessinger and Susan Miller
In Winchester, Kentucky with smiles,
good company, and Jacob Truax
bringing Lincoln to life July 5.



Marianne and John King at the Annual Civil
War Event at Hale Farm and
Village, Bath, Ohio on August 8-9, 2026.

Pam Brown and Randy Duncan at
the Lincoln Home Park in Springfield.
It was a “Meet and Greet” event.



Laura portrays Lydia Moss Bradley, a remarkable Peoria philanthropist who lived during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Another “other” member of ALP - Leslie Goddard as Abigail Adams, circa 1801. The two programs were two hours and six blocks apart on August 29.



Mother Jones and Laura on July 12.

The ladies of Crossing Bridges in Hamilton County, Indiana, played hammered dulcimer and fiddle on “Play Music on the Porch Day” 2026! MaryAnne Mathews and Friends.



Julie Cope McMahan and Whit on July 27!





Sue and Tom Wright at the East Tennessee History Fair on August 15 in Knoxville.

Tom and Sue at a Civil War Show in Brandon, Mississippi in June.



Sam Houston School House in Maryville, TN in May. Sam Houston was a school teacher in Tennessee before he went to Texas. It is now a small state park. The park has an annual event.



Speakers for ATHS June 2026 meeting were Larry and Mary Elliott. Their program presented Lincoln's life from birth to his death at Ford's Theatre.

