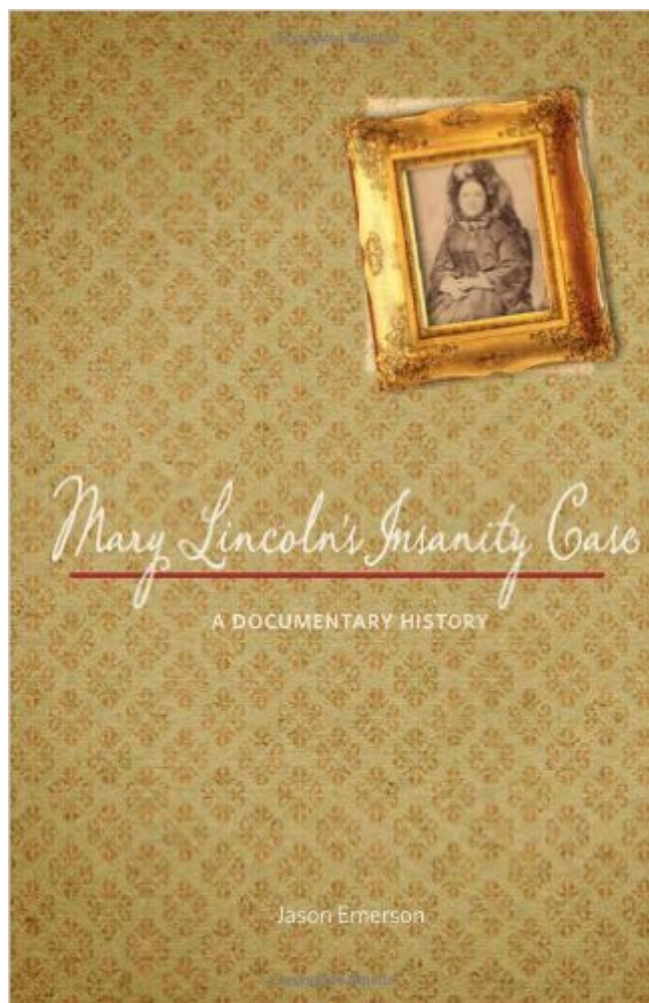


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# Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History



## Synopsis

In 1875 Mary Lincoln, the widow of a revered president, was committed to an insane asylum by her son, Robert. The trial that preceded her internment was a subject of keen national interest. The focus of public attention since Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860, Mary Lincoln had attracted plentiful criticism and visible scorn from much of the public, who perceived her as spoiled, a spendthrift, and even too much of a Southern sympathizer. Widespread scrutiny only increased following her husband's assassination in 1865 and her son Tad's death six years later, after which her overwhelming grief led to the increasingly erratic behavior that led to her being committed to a sanitarium. A second trial a year later resulted in her release, but the stigma of insanity stuck. In the years since, questions emerged with new force, as the populace and historians debated whether she had been truly insane and subsequently cured, or if she was the victim of family maneuvering. In this volume, noted Lincoln scholar Jason Emerson provides a documentary history of Mary Lincoln's mental illness and insanity case, evenhandedly presenting every possible primary source on the subject to enable a clearer view of the facts. Beginning with documents from the immediate aftermath of her husband's assassination and ending with reminiscences by friends and family in the mid-twentieth century, *Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History* compiles more than one hundred letters, dozens of newspaper articles, editorials, and legal documents, and the daily patient progress reports from Bellevue Place Sanitarium during Mary Lincoln's incarceration. Including many materials that have never been previously published, Emerson also collects multiple reminiscences, interviews, and diaries of people who knew Mary Lincoln or were involved in the case, including the first-hand recollection of one of the jurors in the 1875 insanity trial. Suggesting neither accusation nor exoneration of the embattled First Lady, *Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History* gives scholars and history enthusiasts incomparable access to the documents and information crucial to understanding this vexing chapter in American history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Not many First Ladies have lived a life filled with such sorrow as Mary Todd Lincoln's. And not many Presidential children lived a life filled with quite as much drama as Robert Todd Lincoln. But the relationship between Robert Todd Lincoln and his widowed mother, Mary Todd Lincoln, detailed in Jason Emerson's remarkable "Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History," was strikingly universal. In 1875 when Robert became aware, ten years after his father's assassination, that his mother was becoming increasingly deranged, he sought the advice of numerous doctors and trusted family friends on how best to handle Mary's situation. When they agreed that she was in need of medical care, but wouldn't submit to it, the only way he could force her to begin psychiatric treatment was to take her to court. In Illinois, this amounted to a civil trial, which played out to the public through the scandal-mongering press of the day. Through those newspaper articles, personal letters and trial records, author Jason Emerson traces Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case from early 1875 through her trial, treatment, and aftermath. Robert's relationship with his mother is in some ways unique - after all, how many Presidential spouses and children have survived the assassination of their husband and father, with their lives played out in the public eye - and in some ways very relatable, with the familiar case of a frustrated adult child trying to care for his unreasoning parent. Mary and Abraham suffered the loss of two young sons before his assassination, and in 1871 Mary and Robert lost their remaining son and brother, Tad, at age 17.

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