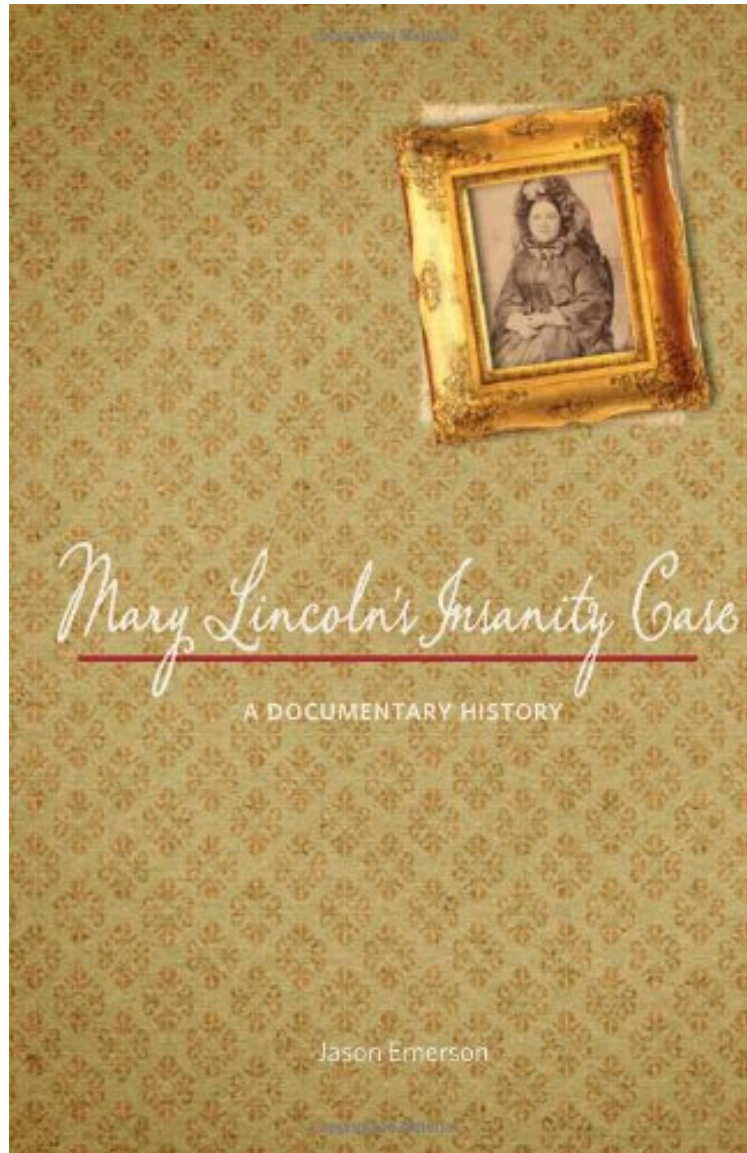


(Download pdf ebook) Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History

Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History

Jason Emerson

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Jason Emerson : Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mary Lincoln's Insanity Case: A Documentary History:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Mary Todd Lincoln: Legally InsaneBy Cheryl Lynn BlumNot 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. The accumulation of these sorrows seemed to drive Mary over the edge of reason, with her delusions, paranoia and monomania (in the form of obsessive shopping) becoming undeniable, forcing Robert to act. She was declared insane by the court in Springfield, Illinois, (the verdict can be found on page 169 of the book) and was remanded to "a State hospital for the insane." Fortunately, a less harsh option presented itself: Bellevue Place sanitarium in Batavia, Illinois, where Mary was sent for psychiatric care. The hospital, which housed only 20 other women, was located in the home of Dr. Richard Patterson, a forward-thinking doctor who treated her with the best care that was available at the time: "moral therapy" in the form of fresh air, rest, baths, and diversion. She wasn't there more than a month when she began to agitate for her release. A vortex of letters began circulating between Mary; Robert; Dr. Patterson; Mary's sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth Todd and Ninian Edwards; and a spectacularly meddling couple, James and Myra Bradwell, friends of Mary's who decided that she had been wrongly incarcerated and who fomented Mary's escape plans. Robert and Mary became estranged when she accused him of wanting her money, although it is perfectly clear by all accounts that his actions as the court-appointed conservator were in her best interest. It is here when Robert's pain and anguish at his mother's accusations come through most clearly, and the pace of the book accelerates as he tries to extricate himself from the position while still protecting her assets. Emerson's thorough account of Mary Lincoln's insanity case is both documentary history and searing family portrait; a love story between a mother and son who survived the unthinkable.

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.