
Peeling Away the Myth: How the Lincoln Bedroom Wallpaper Constructs an Identifiable Lincoln Family in Public Memory

Cayla N. Wagner

Cayla Wagner, a graduate student in the Historical Administration Program, is originally from Orland Park, Illinois. She wrote this paper for Dr. Debra Reid's HIS 5330: Material Culture and Decorative Arts in America.

In May 1844, Abraham Lincoln and his family moved into their home at Eighth and Jackson Streets in Springfield, Illinois. Abraham and his wife, Mary, would expand the home in 1856 to accommodate not only their growing family, but their growing presence in Springfield. In seventeen years, the family would face trials and triumphs: losing a son, hosting fabulous parties, and watching Abraham grow from a small-town lawyer to president-elect. After being elected to the presidency in 1860, the Lincoln family scrambled into a carriage on a rainy morning with intentions of coming back to their Springfield home. They never did.

Though the Lincolns never returned, today visitors flock to the Springfield home, now a historic site operated by the National Park Service. Historians, history, and the public alike have championed the Lincoln family—specifically Mary and Abraham—as something beyond human. Abraham has been placed upon a pedestal as a man who had done no wrong. Mary, on the other hand, has been cast aside in the Lincoln narrative as a crazy, overly demanding housewife. However, while many have emphasized these stereotypes of the Lincolns, the Lincoln Home site has not. Instead, the Lincoln home depicts typical and ordinary mid-nineteenth century family life to which many visitors of all backgrounds can relate. Through using material objects as evidence, such as the replica wallpaper in Abraham and Mary's bedrooms (Figure 1), the narrative and public memory of the Lincoln family within the home separates Mary and Abraham from their outlandish stereotypes.¹ Through the acquisition and preservation of the wallpaper, the narrative told of the Lincolns contributes to an overall aesthetic and memory of the Lincoln home.

Polarizing a Generalized Public Memory and History

To historians and the public alike, Abraham and Mary Lincoln appear as two complete opposites. Historian Merrill D. Peterson equates public memory of Lincoln to a “myth.” The Lincoln myth is composed of several myths, including “The Great Emancipator,” the man from the



Figure 1: Lincoln Bedroom Wallpaper, replica. Photo taken by author, August 2015.

¹ The wallpaper in this essay will be delineated as the Lincoln wallpaper, since it is unknown if it originally hung in Mary's room as well.

backwoods, a martyr, and so forth.² Abraham mythology often focuses on the great accomplishments of his life and presidency; doing no wrong, Abraham was a flesh-and-blood embodiment of true American values. “He was a masterpiece,” continues Peterson, “a natural treasure to be preserved, loved, reserved, and emulated.”³

The emulation and embodiment of American values lay in the overarching biography of Abraham: he was born in unincorporated Kentucky and self-educated. He struck out on his own as a young man before finding himself as a lawyer in Springfield. Almost two decades later, he became president during great turmoil and emancipated millions of enslaved people only to be assassinated by a Confederate sympathizer. “‘Honest Abe,’” again writes Peterson, “was more than a political slogan; it was God’s truth.”⁴ However, if Abraham Lincoln represented “God’s truth” in public memory, Mary Lincoln seemed a devil.

Mary Lincoln in public memory oftentimes emerges as the complete opposite of her husband. “In our national version of this myth, [Abraham] Lincoln, the most venerated of all American heroes,” writes biographer Jean Baker, “daily practiced tolerance of a cantankerous female who was neither his first nor greatest love.”⁵ Difficult indeed, Mary’s temperament is often the first thing for which she is remembered. A temperamental woman, Mary would also go on later in life to have hysterical fits and other bouts of emotional expressions. For Baker, Mary was “easily transformed into the most notorious of shrews, her faults magnified, her virtues forgotten, her neuroses observed, and her very sanity questioned.”⁶ Whereas Abraham would forever be remembered as a true American, Mary would be the juxtaposition. Biographer Catherine Clinton laments that “[Mary’s] story is bound up with the story of the nation, with the story of her husband’s,” and “she was one of the first American women in the White House to capture public imagination and to maintain a historical reputation into the present.”⁷

The historical reputation had continued into the contemporary era and has polarized Abraham and Mary Lincoln. Abraham is not only remembered as the man who saved the nation, but a man who struggled with his wife at the same time. Mary is often remembered as the ill-tempered, stubborn, and crazed wife whom Abraham endured. With the celebrations of the American bicentennial, as well as the centennial of Lincoln’s birth, Americans had begun to look deeper into their history and tell the stories of those often marginalized.⁸ More and more individuals wished to see themselves in their history.

The public’s quest to identify with historical figures and events continues even today. “Americans view themselves as historic people, [and because of this view], they tend to emphasize the lives of great individuals,” argues Diane F. Britton, a public historian.⁹ From great to marginalized individuals, contemporaries seek to understand and connect with day-to-day life in the past. Projecting contemporary values onto historical figures can lead to myths, like that surrounding Abraham Lincoln, and provoke questions. What does it mean to be an American? In what ways was a historical individual’s life akin to people’s today? This question generates other questions and calls out for new methodologies with which to explore the past. Public history can aid the public in exploring and answering these questions.

² Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6. His book goes into great depth about not just the public memory of Abraham, but also historians’ memories, too.

³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵ Jean Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2009), 6.

⁸ Peterson, 378.

⁹ Diane F. Britton, “Public History and Public Memory,” *The Public Historian* 19, no. 3 (1997): 14.

In her article, “Public History and Memory: A Museum Perspective,” Barbra Franco argues that “place and memory are unavoidable in discussion of history in public venues.”¹⁰ She continues that “visitors [to historic sites] combine abstract information with highly personal and specific memories to make new syntheses for themselves.”¹¹ Getting up close and personal with historic artifacts, documents, buildings, and so forth allows guests truly to process and internalize this new synthesis and identification with the past. A new synthesis allows for guests to question their pre-conceived notions of public memory of the past. Furthermore, a new synthesis might create an entirely different new public memory than originally constituted. To question public memory allows both professionals and the public alike to think about the past in different ways.

Internalizing a new synthesis allows individuals to question pre-determined public memory. Memory is obviously questioned at a historic institution like the Abraham Lincoln Home National Site. There, guests encounter an 1850s Springfield bedroom; perhaps the wallpaper can remind guests of their own outrageously patterned wallpapers in their homes. Perhaps, and more importantly, visitors to the site can use the wallpaper to alleviate the stereotypes of Abraham and Mary Lincoln. However, before analyzing how the wallpaper contributes to this different public memory of Abraham and Mary Lincoln, first an examination of the history of the wallpaper, National Park Service, and its contribution to public memory should be conducted.

The Lincoln Bedroom Wallpaper

Domestic Life and the Original Wallpaper

“As a couple,” writes historian Catherine Clinton, “[Abraham and Mary] did seem to work out a rough division of [gender] spheres. Lincoln encouraged his wife to be in charge of home life, including the setup of their house.”¹² Mary hailed from a prominent Kentucky family; her 1843 wedding to Abraham completely changed her social and economic status, as Abraham was a struggling lawyer. Clinton suggests that Mary was “painfully aware of the financial limitations that her marital choice had imposed,” yet “[she] was relieved when Lincoln finally freed himself from the debts he had accumulated before moving to Springfield,” and “Mary was happiest trying to create a salon...reminiscent of her father’s Lexington [home.]”¹³ Mary’s pride was decorating her home and making it suitable for her family and Springfield.

During the nineteenth century, especially the mid-nineteenth century, women were the primary decorators. Adorning a home was a way for a woman to express herself.¹⁴ As social life began to dominate nineteenth-century domestic middle-class duties, such as receiving guests and hosting parties, the interior of a woman’s home was her identity. Interior decoration became a successful and rapidly-growing business; though mostly associated with elites, women who lived outside of populous cities or were in the middle-class could get tips and tricks from magazines and newspapers, such as *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, and *The Ladies’ Home Journal*.¹⁵ These designers, newspapers, and magazines dictated how a woman decorated her home—from the public to the private rooms. Of course, the parlor of the Lincoln Home is decorated lavishly, including the beautiful cream and yellow-colored wallpaper (Figure 2), all of which express a sense of style, and therefore, status. However, the bedrooms on the second floor also express identity, style, and status.

¹⁰ Barbara Franco, “Public History and Memory: A Museum Perspective,” *The Public Historian* 19, no. 2 (1997), 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹² Clinton, 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹⁴ Kristen Hoganson, “Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002): 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

Bedrooms during the nineteenth century communicated identity, style, and status despite being within the private sphere. A more public space, like a parlor for example, might demonstrate a woman's individuality; however, because the space is shared, it often incorporated identities of other family members.¹⁶ Bedrooms were for the sole individual. Items within the bedroom were typically gender-specific and housed several miscellaneous furniture pieces: washing and dressing equipment, clothing presses, and other storage.¹⁷



Figure 2: Parlor Wallpaper, photo taken by author, August 2015.

Mary's bedroom even had a commode! Yet, virtually everything in Lincoln bedrooms displayed identity, even the wallpaper. First, it is imperative to understand the history of the wallpaper.

While Mary may have decorated their Springfield home, Abraham purchased a lot of the furnishings, including the wallpaper. Over the course of four years, Abraham acquired numerous wallpapers to furnish their homes; however, it is impossible to know specifically if the Lincoln bedroom wallpaper was purchased during this period. A list of purchases provided by the National Park Service shows that Abraham purchased rolls of paper anywhere from 50 cents to \$92.66.¹⁸ Over the four years as well, Abraham more than likely benefitted from readily available sources.

By the mid-19th century middle-class Americans enjoyed access to an increasing variety of types and styles of wallpapers. The Industrial Revolution finally appeared in the western United States by the 1840s, and new machine technologies allowed for objects to be made on a larger and faster scale. Wallpaper was no exception. Through a steam-powered engine, factory workers fed wallpaper through a cylindrical tool which printed from raised, not engraved, surfaces.¹⁹ This process utilized thinner colors and standardized paper-width.²⁰ Suddenly, homeowners like Abraham Lincoln found themselves standing at a shop counter with many wall covering patterns and options. Technological advancements also meant that as furnishing styles evolved, wallpapers could adapt just as quickly.

Mary, with her knack for fashion and ambition for a home reflecting her family's growing prominence and prosperity, no doubt tried to decorate her home with the latest mid-nineteenth century styles. The wallpaper, not unlike the furniture, demonstrates that Mary succeeded in having

¹⁶ Elizabeth Collins Cromley, "A History of American Beds and Bedrooms, 1890-1930," *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Space and Services*, edited by Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 128.

¹⁷ Ibid, 130.

¹⁸ Katharine Menz, *The Lincoln Home: Lincoln Home National State Site, Springfield Illinois Historic Home Furnishing Report* (Harper's Ferry: Harper's Ferry Center, National Park Service, U.S.: Department of the Interior, 1983.) 143, 147. In her book, *Southern Girl, Northern Woman*, Stacy Pratt McDermott states that Mary had purchased this wallpaper from John Williams & Co., but this remains unconfirmed. See page 54.

¹⁹ Catherine Lynn Frangiamore, "Wallpapers in Historic Preservation," (Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1977), 7.

²⁰ Nylander, 67.

an up-to-date home. Though the Lincolns bought an 1839 Greek Revival cottage, they filled it with Rococo revival materials, including the wallpaper.²¹

The Rococo, or Chippendale, revival gained popularity in homes across the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century. Furniture guidebooks and magazines, much like the wallpaper, became readily available and easily accessible to homeowners in all parts of the country. Such books explained how this style may be mixed with other popular revival styles of the time.²² Rococo revivals were influenced by the French style. It often incorporated elaborate S scrolls, patterns and motifs of birds, flowers, vines, and leaves, and so forth to mimic the love of still-life and landscapes.²³ The wallpaper in the Lincoln home featured a bold scroll and floral print. A Francophile, Mary spoke French fluently and visited France several times throughout her life.²⁴ There is no doubt that she enjoyed the French influence in this style and its implied luxury and sophistication. After Abraham was elected to the presidency in 1860, and the Lincoln family never returned to their home at Eighth and Jackson, the house was rented out. Mary and her surviving sons, Robert and Tad, were co-owners of the home following Abraham's assassination.²⁵ Thus, while the Lincolns never physically returned to the home, the family remained its owners, and the wallpaper remained. The wallpaper is not only an integral part of the history of the Lincoln Home, but to the family's sense of self during their time in Springfield.

The identity of the Lincolns, as expressed in spaces such as rooms, is conveyed through the wallpaper in Abraham and Mary's bedrooms. It is unknown if Mary and Abraham had identical wallpapers in their bedrooms. While Mary is notorious for her ill-temper and emotional outbursts, many scholars have and continue to acknowledge the deep role she has played in Abraham's political sphere.²⁶ Mary and Abraham engaged in political talk constantly—often considered a taboo topic between a man and wife, head of the private sphere—and often bounced ideas back and forth from one another.²⁷ Mary and Abraham's political talk transformed each other beyond husband and wife, man and woman, public and private sphere. In a sense, it equated them as two adults having important and intellectual conversation. They transcended the rigidity of nineteenth century gender roles, and this equality is shown through the wallpaper, presuming the couple shared wallpaper in their bedrooms.

While Mary and Abraham belonged to the private and public spheres which dominated the nineteenth century, potentially thinking of decorating with identical bedroom wallpapers exemplify equality. Their bedrooms are joined; not only could an individual enter the bedroom from the hallways, but Mary and Abraham could move to the other's room through a connecting door. Remaining wallpaper fragments in the home, discussed later in this article, decorate both the Lincolns' rooms. If women decorated their houses to procure a specific identity and to express individuality in the privacy of their own bedroom, then Mary Lincoln saw in herself a woman not beneath her husband, but equal to him. The greatness she saw in him was, in fact, a mirror of the greatness she saw in herself, but to which she could not aspire since women were confined to the private sphere during her time. As historian Jean Baker concludes, Mary Lincoln was a woman with

²¹ Clinton, 68.

²² Jason Busch, "The French Rococo Revival Along the Mississippi River," *Magazine Antiques* 166, no. 2 (2004): 87. This was especially important for the parlor and sitting rooms.

²³ Wayne Craven, "Decorative Arts: The Age of Romanticism & Eclecticism, 1800-1870" *American Art: History and Culture* (McGraw Hill, 1994), 197.

²⁴ Baker, 87.

²⁵ Susan Haake, e-mail correspondence. 24 Oct 2016. The Lincolns had four sons altogether: Robert, Edward "Eddie," William "Willie," and Thomas "Tad." Eddie would die in the Springfield home in Feb 1850, and Willie would die in the White House in 1862.

²⁶ Baker, 178.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 178.

a political agenda years before it was acceptable.²⁸ Again, it is unknown if Mary Lincoln originally had the identical wallpaper in her bedroom. If she had, it would attest to this political partnership and equality she and Abraham had in their family life.

Finding the Original and Making a Replica

With Tad's death in 1871, and Mary's death in 1882, Robert Lincoln became sole owner of the home. In 1883, Osborn H. Olyroyd took up residence in the Lincoln home, filling it with collections of clothing, furniture, books, portraits, and so forth. Many of the items memorialized Abraham, but nothing related to Mary.²⁹ Olyroyd then later encouraged Robert Lincoln to sell the home to the state of Illinois.

In 1887, Robert deeded the family home to the state of Illinois for \$1; in this deed, he requested "that the home had to remain in good repair and free of access to all."³⁰ The state ran it as a historic site until it was deeded to the National Park Service in 1972.³¹ The original Lincoln bedroom wallpaper remained on the walls since the addition of the second floor in 1856.

The National Park Service used numerous preservation materials on the wallpaper to maintain it. These materials included formaldehyde, varnish, and placing it under glass.³² Figure 3 is a postcard that demonstrates a section of the wallpaper under glass. Surrounding the glass and original wallpaper was a replicated wallpaper that matched the original; dark gray and dark blue, it gave the room a dark appearance.³³

In 1987, the National Park Service enlisted Mt. Diablo Handprints out of Vallejo, California, to print reproduction wallpaper. The original plans had called for a direct reproduction of the original and the 1950s replica – maintaining the muddy browns and dark blues. However, conservators wished to study and conserve some of the original wallpaper. While cleaning, the conservators found that the hues of the wallpaper were not, in fact, the dark colors. According to Susan Haake, "the conservators immediately called the wallpaper manufacture and literally 'stopped the presses' to redo the colors."³⁴ The new wallpaper, with the correct bright colors, was installed in 1988, as part of a whole-house



Figure 3: Postcard of Conserving Lincoln Bedroom Wallpaper with original under glass. Note Mary's room is decorated in a different wallpaper. Photo ca. 1950s. Photo courtesy of Susan Haake, Lincoln Home Curator.

²⁸ Baker, 71.

²⁹ Peterson, 144.

³⁰ Susan Haake, e-mail correspondence. 24 Oct 2016.

³¹ Per Susan Haake, in the 24 Oct 2016 e-mail correspondence, the state of Illinois deeded it to the National Park Service also for \$1.00 and with the same stipulations Robert Lincoln had bequeathed. Therefore, there is no admission to get into the Lincoln Home, and is one of two parks that have no admission due to deeds. The other is the Great Smoky Mountains.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. It is unknown who the company was that made the first reproduction wallpaper.

³⁴ Ibid.

renovation. The public first saw the wallpaper on June 16, 1988.³⁵ The public and National Park Service has been interpreting it ever since.

Interpreting historic wallpapers, despite the contributions of professionals, remains challenging. Historic wallpapers, as Richard C. Nylander writes in his 1983 book, *Wallpapers for Historic Buildings*, “have not been explored as extensively as other decorative arts.”³⁶ This is due, concludes Nylander, to a lack of original wallpapers, and surviving records do not normally indicate what was put on the walls.³⁷ His book documents specific wallpapers—as well as how to research and produce reproductions—and offers a brief history of wallpaper in specific eras. Many other books on historic wallpaper follow this example—they are “how-to” guides, telling the curator or another interpreter what to look for and why to restore a historic home.

Other books, such as the 1977 *Wallpapers in Historic Preservation*, by the Technical Preservation Services Division, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior, and *An Introduction to Wallpaper*, by Jean Hamilton in 1983, historicize and explore historic wallpaper. According to *Wallpapers in Historic Preservation*, “stylistic characteristics [can be studied] as further clues to the age of wallpapers, and provide guidance for choosing replacement patterns.”³⁸ Fortunately, the original bedroom wallpaper in the Lincoln bedroom had remained for conservators and historians to interpret, reproduce, and display. Salvaging the original and producing an identical copy of the Lincoln bedroom wallpaper can help the public remember the Lincolns not as mythological figures, but as everyday individuals.

Using the Wallpaper as a Tool for Public Memory

“The people saw in [Abraham Lincoln],” writes Merrill D. Peterson, “the vindication not only of American democracy, but also of American character.”³⁹ Abraham Lincoln’s place in public memory is that of a great hero: on a pedestal, Abraham was a man who did no wrong and is the model for all American people. Mary Lincoln, on the other hand, has oftentimes been cast in the Lincoln family narrative by historians as the shrew and hellish wife.⁴⁰ These two mythologies have often guided and cemented the roles of the Lincolns in American history. However, the Lincoln Home, and specifically the Lincoln bedroom wallpaper, helps visitors reconsider these mythologies for what they are. The wallpaper helps reconstruct a different public memory of the Lincolns: a memory of everyday, down-to-earth individuals. The narrative of the Lincolns presented by the National Park Service plays a large role in constructing this different public memory. It begins with the role of the Home.

“The fundamental interpretive role [of the Lincoln Home],” writes Katherine D. Menz, in the “Lincoln Home Furnishings Report,” “is to illuminate the life and character of Abraham Lincoln during the seventeen years that he lived in the home, rather than represent the everyday life of the period or to recapture the setting of a single event.”⁴¹ As guides tell visitors about the wallpaper—and joke that it is no wonder Mary was plagued with headaches due to the complex patterns and colors—visitors may begin to recognize familial life that is no different than their own. Everyone does, in due time, pick out ways to decorate their home, including wall coverings.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Richard C. Nylander, *Wallpapers for Historic Preservation: A Guide to Selecting Reproduction Wallpaper* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1983), 9.

³⁷ Ibid, 9.

³⁸ Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in Historic Preservation*, (Washington: Technical Preservation Services District, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1977), 18.

³⁹ Peterson, 362.

⁴⁰ For further information on these characterizations, see Catherine Clinton, Jean Baker, Stacy Pratt McDermott, and Ruth Randall’s Mary Lincoln biographies.

⁴¹ Menz, 1.

Guests may marvel at the outlandishness of the Rococo Revival, mid-nineteenth century style, as tour guides tell anecdotes about the future First Family. However, despite the flamboyance (by today's standards) of the styles and patterns of the furnishings and wall-coverings, guests see that decorating a home meant a lot to the Lincolns, especially Mary. Visitors come to terms with the fact that Mary, though perhaps plagued with a bit of a poor temperament and unpleasant disposition at times, wished to make her family fit in with urban Springfield.

Furthermore, the National Park Service has set out four interpretive goals, each constructed to distance their narrative from the typical mythological public memory of Abraham and Mary. The four goals are:

One: To interpret the developing career of Abraham Lincoln and the events associated with that career while he lived in this house and the Springfield community.

Two: To interpret events in the life of Abraham Lincoln in this house where he lived primarily as a father, husband, citizen, and neighbor.

Three: To present the Lincoln Home, the contemporary neighborhood around it, and the related historical remains in the Springfield community in such a way as to enable visitors to understand the environment of which Mr. Lincoln was a part of for the 17 years that took him from the beginning of a law practice here to the presidency.

Four: To interpret Lincoln's social and political ideas, many of which were formed while he lived in this house in Springfield, and which were implemented in a national policy during his presidency and left to us – a complex legacy of both national and individual ideals to which we still aspire and toward the fulfillment of which we continue to work.⁴²

Point number two is extremely important in separating the mythology from the Lincoln Home narrative. Abraham, according to point two, was not just the "Great Emancipator" and sum of great American values; he is also a father, a citizen of Springfield, and a husband. He had duties to perform in each of these roles. Thus, the interpretive goals of the Lincoln Home aim to separate Abraham (and Mary) from their previously conceived pedestals and place them in a narrative that negates these stereotypes. As stated previously, Mary may have been the one who wanted to decorate the home in Rococo Revival fashion, but it was Abraham who worked, and spent his money on wallpaper for the home. Through this goal and the narrative told in the Lincoln Home, visitors learn the Lincolns were more than just their mythological public memory: they were ordinary individuals with goals and responsibilities.

This difference in public memory, however, has been both supported and challenged by visitors to the Lincoln Home. One reviewer on "Trip Advisor" suggested the crazed patterns of the wallpaper and other fabrics, in conjunction with the black horse hair seats, proved that Mary Lincoln indeed was "psychotic."⁴³ Another asked "who knew Mary Lincoln was such a jezebel? LOL"⁴⁴ Yet, that same "jezebel" reviewer also credited the guides with doing an excellent job of providing history that textbooks ignore. Shying away from textbook approaches, per the interpretive goals of the Lincoln Home, allow for public memory to also shy away from the mythologies of Abraham the Great, and Mary the Shrew. One reviewer even stated the home separates Abraham from the mythical "godlike" qualities and "bring him down to earth."⁴⁵

⁴² Menz, 1-2.

⁴³ Trip Advisor Review, Jimmy L., 28 Jan 2013, <https://www.yelp.com/biz/lincoln-home-nationalhistoric-site-springfield?start=40> [accessed 23 October 2016].

⁴⁴ Yelp Review, Roger C., 1 Sept. 2012, [https://www.yelp.com/biz/lincoln-home-national-historic-site-springfield?hrid=IdVVyTP0eAO2Qbey-dveNw&utm_campaign=www_review_share_popup&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=\(direct\)](https://www.yelp.com/biz/lincoln-home-national-historic-site-springfield?hrid=IdVVyTP0eAO2Qbey-dveNw&utm_campaign=www_review_share_popup&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=(direct)) [accessed 30 October 2016].

⁴⁵ Trip Advisor Review, Sharp H., 19 Jan 2013, <https://www.yelp.com/biz/lincoln-home-national-historic-site-springfield?start=20>, [accessed 23 October 2016].

Other reviewers found themselves placed in the Lincoln family's shoes, further allowing them to remember the Lincolns not as their mythologies, but as regular individuals. "It was incredible to walk the same steps as Lincoln and his family," one reviewer gushed about her experience at the home overall.⁴⁶ Another called the home "surprisingly colorful."⁴⁷ Many other posts on popular review sites, like Facebook, TripAdvisor, and Yelp discuss this down-to-earth feeling.

Unfortunately, while many of these reviews discuss how the Lincoln Home sheds new light to the narrative and mythologies of the Lincolns, none attest to the wallpaper. Clearly, however, this sense of identifying with the Lincolns on a more personal level is due in part to the wallpaper in the Lincoln bedroom. The reproduction wallpaper in the bedroom allows visitors to fully envision the Lincoln family in the home, as well as the lives they lived daily. Without the replicated wallpaper, this may not have been possible.

Additionally, it is important to note that the wallpaper extends into Mary's bedroom, as well (Figures 4 and 5). The two rooms may have had different wallpaper; however, the NPS has interpreted Mary's room as identically decorated with the similar wallpaper. If bedrooms in the nineteenth century were a



Figure 4: Restoration of Mary Lincoln's Bedroom. Man with reproduction wallpaper. Ca. 1988. Photograph by Joe Winkleman, National Park Service.



Figure 5: (Left) Restoration of Mary Lincoln's Bedroom. Man pasting reproduction wallpaper. Ca. 1988. Photograph by Joe Winkleman, National Park Service.

⁴⁶ Facebook review, "Lincoln Home National Site," 23 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2F> [accessed 30 October 2016].

⁴⁷ Facebook review, "Lincoln Home National Site," 24 Feb 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2F> [accessed 30 October 2016].

symbol of individuality, and a woman decorating her home was a product of identity, as the NPS suggests in its interpretation, the Lincoln wallpaper tells an important story. By emphasizing the Lincolns, specifically Mary's, contributions to the family, Springfield, and Springfield society over her malignancy, the NPS offers a counterbalance to popular conceptions of the Lincolns.

The wallpaper in each of the rooms are similar, embracing Mary and Abraham in a common identity. Mary's narrative within the home is bound to Abraham's, and vice versa. It is impossible to talk about the private world of such a public man as Abraham Lincoln without a narrative of the contributions of his wife. Of course, the home also offers insights into nineteenth-century society and everyday life. Encapsulated in the wallpaper, Abraham's bedroom is furnished with a desk, books, and a shaving mirror. In her bedroom, furnishing includes a trundle bed which her boys slept on, a commode, and clothing presses. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was common for married couples to sleep in different bedrooms.⁴⁸ Visitors therefore can be reminded that Mary and Abraham's rooms have the same wallpaper; the rooms do not reflect the mythologies that Abraham was "better" than Mary, nor does it reflect the patriarchal society to which Abraham and Mary belonged.⁴⁹ Visitors also notice that the rococo revival style of the wallpaper aligns with Mary's flair for fashion, as well as a desire to prove to Springfield that she and her family were prominent and well-to-do. Guests can admire Mary's choices and reflect upon their own decorating styles. Surely, many visitors' homes have spaces that they try to keep up-to-date with the latest innovations and styles. Coupled with the furniture in the bedrooms, the home gives guests a personal connection to the Lincolns not found in textbooks. Again, reviewers suggest this personal connection is a highlight of the trip. The aesthetic created by the wallpaper, in conjunction with the Lincoln Home National Site overall, is a catalyst to free Mary and Abraham from their previously constructed mythologies.

In the preface to the 2008 edition of her biography, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, Jean Baker states that the mythology of Abraham as a great man was created partly by degrading Mary. "My tasks became one of challenging the myths that encrusted her reputation," Baker writes. She continues: "These myths served a national purpose, as all tales do, of creating the heroic Lincoln who freed the slaves and saved the Union. Denigrating Mary Lincoln enhanced her husband's reputation as a man of tolerance and forbearance. [It] continues to imprint interpretations of her life [today]."⁵⁰ The public memory of Abraham and Mary Lincoln, as well as this mythological status of both, therefore are intertwined within one another. Of course, at the Lincoln Home National Site, this is no different. Tour guides do not talk about Mary without Abraham, and vice-versa. Yet, the narrative that the National Park Service has constructed moves the public toward a new national memory: not one of pitting husband versus wife or man versus woman, but a national memory of unity. "[Mary] provided Abraham with the space and support he required to achieve his goals," writes Catherine Clinton, "and with the emotional yeast he needed to become the wartime president he became."⁵¹ Abraham and Mary Lincoln's marriage depended on both to become not only a strong parental and familial unit, but a strong political and public unit as well. Mary's freedom to decorate the home at Eighth and Jackson, and Abraham's purchasing, is an example of this unity. Yet, while the wallpaper reinforces the National Park Service's revisionism, identity with contemporary visitors, it also may cement the already in-place mythologies of Abraham and Mary exist. The Trip Advisor post that suggested the egregious style, while popular at the time, correlate to Mary's psychosis suggests the wallpaper, in some cases, can subvert the NPS's idea of unity and promote the typical mythologies. Jumbled patterns and bright colors apparently link Mary to her

⁴⁸ Lincoln Home Virtual Tour, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/liho/rooms/lincolnsRoom.html>.

⁴⁹ See Jean Baker's biography for an extensive analysis of mid-nineteenth century society and how Mary and Abraham fit into it.

⁵⁰ Baker, preface.

⁵¹ Clinton, 336.

mental instability. Merrill Peterson writes that following her son Willie's death in 1862, in the prime of the presidency, the world became subjected to "what her husband had known for years that Mrs. Lincoln was 'semi-insane.' [Then] she did nothing to earn the country's gratitude after her husband's death."⁵² This feeling only contributed to the mythologies of Abraham and Mary Lincoln.

Conclusion

The public memory of Abraham and Mary Lincoln places them in two separate mythologies: Abraham is the great savior of the American people and nation, and Mary is the ill-tempered wife who often held him back. Catherine Clinton puts it best: "While Abraham Lincoln became immortal in the American imagination, Mary Lincoln would become infamous."⁵³

The National Park Service and the Lincoln Home National Site challenges these mythologies and instead places the Lincolns within a narrative that redefines public memory. Instead of two juxtaposing individuals, the National Park Service has painted Abraham and Mary Lincoln as ordinary individuals, whose lives are easily identifiable to visitors from many diverse backgrounds. Visitors can find themselves within the home, and within the Lincoln family.

Through studying the Lincoln bedroom wallpaper, which also extends into Mary's bedroom, guests can identify with choices nineteenth-century heads of households (including wives) had in decorating their home. This identification in turn allows guests to think about their own home-decorating choices, while also providing additional history not found in textbooks.

The Lincoln family's history of seventeen years in Springfield are forever told in the Springfield home. The wallpaper is a true testament to how the Lincolns became a glorified family in American history while maintaining identity, individuality, and values typical of any nineteenth century person. Though the Lincolns never did come back to live in their home at Eighth and Jackson Streets, their memory lives on as guests come to admire the wallpaper, and identify themselves with the Lincoln family.

⁵² Peterson, 52.

⁵³ Clinton, 3.