

A Death in the Family

The Lincoln's visits to Lexington began to take a dark turn with the 1849 return to Mary's hometown. That summer, a deadly cholera epidemic swept through Lexington and much of Kentucky, killing hundreds, including Robert S. Todd, Mary's father.

Robert Todd's deathbed will, however, was declared invalid because it did not contain two witnessing signatures as required by law. He had left the bulk of his estate including his slaves to his second wife Elizabeth (Betsy) Humphreys Todd for the remainder of her life, and then to her eight children. Mary Todd Lincoln and the other children of his first wife, Elizabeth (Eliza) Parker Todd who died in 1825, sued to force an estate sale and distribution to all 14 Todd children.

Abraham Lincoln was selected to represent the Todd children from the first marriage, four of whom lived in Springfield, Ill.

Complicating matters was another suit filed by Robert Todd, a year before his death, against "Old Duke" Robert Wickliffe for the recovery of the large estate of his cousin Mary Todd Russell – considered at one time the "richest woman in Kentucky" – which had been conveyed to Wickliffe after their marriage in 1826.

Upon Todd's death, the suit was abated – unless the Todd heirs intervened. Which they did.

About Oct. 20, 1849, Abraham and Mary Lincoln arrived in Lexington.