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1809—The Lincoln Centenary—1909

## Courtships of Lincoln

Death of Ann Rutledge.
The Mary Owens Affair.
Lincoln and Douglas as Rivals in Love

By James A. Edgerton

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MOST men have several affairs of the heart, and little or nothing is said about them. With Lincoln it is different. His courtships are magnified, torn to pieces, paraded before the world, his tenderest emotions being dissected and laid bare in a manner the most callous. His despair over the death of one sweetheart, his letters to another, his misunderstandings with a third, who finally became Mrs. Lincoln—all are set forth to the last detail. They are only such experiences as occur to most men, with variations, of course, to fit each individual case. With others they are considered sacred, however, and if mentioned at all it is with a delicacy which one would wish shown to his own love affairs. It seems to be the price of greatness that nothing is sacred. If the future immortal whispers tender nothings in a corner they are afterward bawled from the housetops. If he so much as casts a melting glance at some fair one it is photographed for the inspection of future ages.

There are three affairs in the life of the martyr president, and a fourth is hinted at by at least one biographer. The average man can remember an equal number and perhaps several more. The beauty with Lincoln is that all his heart attacks came before marriage, which is not invariably the case in these days of affinities and divorce courts.

There must be no mistake made in one regard. Abraham Lincoln was a society man. In Springfield his name was on most of the committees that got up functions, and he was a welcome guest at all houses. The same was true in Washington the two years he served in congress. While he was not exactly a ladies' man for the reason that he was forever telling stories and so got all the men around him, he was not insensible to feminine charms and was as ready to fall in love as any young man with strong passions and an eye for beauty.

This seems so much a matter of course that it is strange Mr. Lincoln's biographers should dwell on it at such length. It is on a par with referring so constantly to his height, to his homeliness and to the fact that he told broad stories. It is as though we should say that Abraham Lincoln is chiefly noted for his ugliness, his love affairs, his risque anecdotes and his great length and not that he is celebrated for liberating a race, for saving a nation, for being merciful, democratic, truth loving and white of soul. In other words, we put forward his nonessentials at the expense of his essentials. We emphasize those things in which he was not distinguished from his kind to the exclusion of those things in which he was so distinguished. Other men have had love affairs not essentially different from those of Lincoln; others have been as ugly or as tall, and others have told as many stories, but nobody else ever issued an emancipation proclamation; no one else ever held together the world's greatest republic in the hour of her supreme trial; no one else, with one exception, ever combined such meekness and greatness, and few others have been more tender hearted, benevolent, honest and truthful. He was the very incarnation of the thing we call Americanism, of the democratic spirit. He was the glorified type of the common man, the voice and leader of the plain people. It is these things that have made him "the gentlest memory of our world." Presumably he had ten fingers, two ears and the usual number of bones found in the human body. But why obtrude these facts? Tom Smith and Jim Jenkins are equally endowed in this regard. There are a billion and a half of human entities now living, nearly all with ten fingers, two ears and the full complement of bones. Most of them likewise have had love affairs or will have them when they arrive at the susceptible age; most of them old enough to talk at all have told stories or have tried to do so; most of them are plain of face, especially if they are of the male gender, and all of them have linear dimensions of some sort or other. Yet there is not a single Abraham Lincoln in the whole billion and a half. Why spend so much time on describing a man's hair and eyebrows when he has a soul, or, rather, is a soul, so supremely worth study?

Not that I would minimize Mr. Lincoln's love affairs. These things in the life of any man are beautiful and are cherished according to the degree of his development. With a man of Lincoln's tender heart and sensibilities such things would be sacred and holy, not to be profaned by light references or prying eyes. A man's public life belongs to the public. His private and domestic affairs are his own. The mere fact that one is prominent does not make him the legitimate prey of the merely curious. Many great men have had unhappy home lives. Poor Lincoln was none too fortunate in this regard. But he is at least entitled to respect, even though he was denied his full measure of happiness. Such respect would shield him from a prying scrutiny after death that would never have been given his affairs during life. With all due respect to Messrs. Lamon and Herndon, who, having been his law partners, should have been his devoted friends, it must be said that they have dragged his purely private affairs to light in a very tactless if not an indelicate manner. Moreover, many of their conclusions reflecting on his parents and some regarding his wife have been shown by thorough investigation to be untrue. For example, Herndon says that Lincoln absented himself on his wedding night. As careful a biographer as Ida M. Tarbell denies this and gives the word of numerous personal friends of both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln to prove her statement. In the same manner several of Herndon's allegations concerning Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln have been proved untrue by the actual records brought to light.

The simple facts are that Lincoln's parents, his early life, his education, his courtships and his domestic life were about such as fall to the lot of the average man born, reared and living his adult life in a similar environment. His stories were about such as were told by other frontiersmen, lawyers and politicians in his day, except that Lincoln's were better and more to the point. He might have been a little taller and more homely than most, but if so what of it? There was nothing about all these circumstances to differentiate him from his kind or to explain him. They were the shell of the oyster, but gave no indications of the pearl inside.

Yet there are beautiful things and such as can be spoken of with all propriety and respect in the love affairs and the home life of Abraham Lincoln. His despair at the death of Ann Rutledge, his agony over the "snows beating on her grave," the fears of his friends for his sanity, which went to the length of their taking precautions against his possible suicide—all this presents a touching and pathetic picture.

As for the affair with Mary Owens, there is nothing in it worthy a passing notice except that it showed a fine sense of honor on the part of Lincoln and an unselfish thoughtfulness for the happiness of his future wife.

About the courtship with the woman he finally married and about his home life with her there has been more or less dispute. Herndon's exploded story that Lincoln ran away on his marriage night has already been mentioned. With quite as much particularity Lamon states that at this time Mr. Lincoln was really in love with a Miss Edwards, who lived in the same house with his fiancee, and that this fact accounts for his dejection, which was then more pronounced than usual and also for the long delay in his marriage to Miss Todd. So far as the writer is aware no other biographer mentions the alleged infatuation for Miss Edwards.

That Mr. Lincoln was to some extent unhappy in his married life is a fact disputed by none. The degree of this unhappiness has probably been exaggerated. Moreover, there have been so many slighting references to Mrs. Lincoln that I feel like taking up the cudgels in her behalf. That she had a temper is probably true. A temper is not necessarily a bad thing. Mr. Lincoln himself had a prodigious temper when it was aroused. So had Washington. So has every man or woman that amounts to anything.

But there is this much to be said for the wife of Abraham Lincoln. She loved him, as was shown by the fact that she married him despite his long delay. While Herndon's story about the marriage night dereliction is probably untrue, there was some kindred happening at about that time. Another thing that can be said in Mrs. Lincoln's behalf is that she showed enough discrimination to prefer Abraham Lincoln to Stephen A. Douglas. Under the circumstances this required true insight into character. Douglas when he paid court to her was already a great man, which was not so apparent in Lincoln's case. Douglas was brilliant, polished and had a most winning manner, while Lincoln was more or less uncouth and shy in feminine society. Miss Todd was the daughter of a leading man of Kentucky, and thus Douglas belonged to her own social class in those outward things which make up class distinctions, while Lincoln did not. Nevertheless she chose Lincoln. She is entitled to honor for both her vision and her heart.

Miss Todd always said that she would marry a president of the United States. No ordinary woman would have had the courage to say that in the face of the ridicule it would occasion, and no one but a very extraordinary woman would have had the ability to pick the winner.

Is it not just possible that some of Lincoln's biographers have overdrawn his unhappiness at home just as they have unduly emphasized his poverty and have done positive injustice to his father? Is it not possible that there was some resentment due to the fact that Miss Todd belonged to an aristocratic family and did not share her husband's views on slavery? And is it not more than possible that there has been an undue prying into the private affairs of both Mr. Lincoln and his wife?

Lincoln's great love for his children, which caused him to err, if at all, on the side of too great indulgence, would not indicate a wholly unhappy home life. The fact that Mrs. Lincoln was loyal to her husband and his ambition, that she shared his great life, that she bore double sorrows in the death of her sons and his own assassination and that she endured so much abuse from biographers without murmur entitle her to our charity and respect. She was a woman, a wife and mother. She is dead. Common chivalry and common humanity would at least dictate that nothing should be said of her now except in loving tenderness; if not that, silence.

For one I am tired of much of the utterly trivial stuff written about Abraham Lincoln. He was a great enough man to be treated in a great manner. He had an innate dignity and fineness that call for respect from those who would show his true spirit to the world.

His domestic life was utterly white. The same high honor, the same thoughtfulness for the happiness of others, the same patience and forbearance, the same great love nature, are found in his courtships and his home that appear in all his other relations and deeds. He was so much greater than his early environment and associates that there is little gained by dwelling upon them.

Abraham Lincoln as we have come to know him appeals to all men because he is so like what all men want to be. He appeals to all boys because he shows them their possibilities. He appeals to all women because he is so much the lover and because he proves that the strongest manhood may be as tender as the gentlest womanhood.

He was not insensible to feminine charms.

## TWO FAMOUS INDIAN FIGHTERS BY BUFFALO BILL

"FIRST TRUE TALES OF THE PLAINS"

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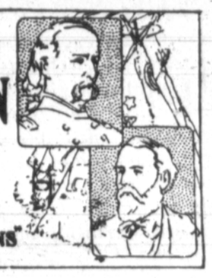

MY first meeting with General George A. Custer was when I was a scout in the department of the Missouri, in the spring of 1867. At this time General Custer's regiment, the Seventh cavalry, United States army, was at Fort Larned, on Pawnee Fork, near the Arkansas river.

One evening the general arrived at Fort Hays from Fort Harker. He had with him only two officers and three orderlies. The general told Captain Ovenshine, who was in command of Fort Hays at the time, that he wished to leave Fort Hays the next morning at daylight to join his regiment and wanted a guide who knew the country, one that would make no mistake, well mounted, to guide him to Fort Larned.

Captain Ovenshine sent for me and told me to be ready sharp at daylight to go with General Custer and that he wanted me to have the best mount there was at the post. At that time the horses at the fort were pretty well run down from many chases after Indians, but I was riding and had at the time as good a long distance horse as I have ever known, and he was a mule. The general himself was riding a Kentucky thoroughbred.

*The mule would get ahead of the horses.*

At daylight I rode up to the commanding officer's quarters, and Captain Ovenshine introduced me for the first time to General Custer. The general, seeing that I was mounted on a mule, said to Captain Ovenshine:

"Captain, I haven't got time to dilly dally along the road with a mule. I see that my guide here is mounted on a mule. I want him to have a horse, and a good one."

I said, "General, this is the best horse at the fort, and I assure you that he won't be much behind you when you reach Fort Larned."

The captain explained to the general that the horses were in pretty bad condition at the fort and that he had heard me brag so much about that mule that he felt quite sure that the beast was all right.

The general seemed a little displeased and said, "Well, if that is the best you have I will have to put up with it."

We mounted and started out on the road. For the first fifteen miles to Smoky Hill river there was a good wagon road, and as we rode along the general asked me numerous questions in regard to the country and the Indians, and thus we talked along mile after mile. But the general was going at a pretty rapid gait, and my mule was not very speedy on the start, but I knew he would finish all right. So when the general was not looking I would put the spurs to the mule a little to wake him up. However, I kept alongside of the general until I got to Smoky Hill river. I noticed that the old mule was not panting much, but the horses were.

I told the general that this would be the last water for forty-five miles until we got near Larned; that it would be best to water the horses there, and if the men required any water they had better fill up their canteens, which they did.

From this point we struck into the sand hills, leaving all roads. It was pretty sandy and pretty heavy traveling for horse or mule, but I made up my mind that I would show the general from there on that I had spoken the truth about the mule. So when the general was not looking at me I would put the spurs to him, and as he would lunge ahead I would say:

"Whoa, there! Take it easy, old fellow. Don't get to frettin'."

We went on like that for a mile or so. The mule would get ahead of the horses, and whenever the general wasn't looking I would spur him, and as the mule would forge ahead I would pat him to calm him down.

Finally the general remarked, "That is really quite a horse you are riding me."

"Oh, he isn't warmed up yet, general," I said. "He doesn't go good until he gets his second wind."

By this time the mule was really beginning to show his staying qualities over the Kentucky horse that the general was riding, and the general could not keep up. But the general would not give up, and we went on mile after mile through the sand hills until finally I had actually to wait on the general a little. Every once in awhile the general would remark about that mule. But we went on, and the general still would not give in. We continued going until we got within about fifteen miles of Fort Larned. Here we stopped on a hill to wait for the officers and orderlies to overtake us. When they got up I showed the general a depression in the sand hills and told him that that was the Pawnee Fork creek and that all we had to do was to follow the creek down and we would come to the fort.

"Now, general," I said, "if you have any urgent dispatches that you want taken to your commanding officer, if you will give them to me I will take them on and have them delivered to him. You cannot help but find your way."

"Ah," he said, "you are kidding me about what I said in regard to that mule. Well," turning to one of the officers, "you bring the escort in. Follow the direction we are going, and I will go on with Cody."

And we started, I giving him as lively a ride as his horse could stand until we reached the fort. That night the general's horse died. The next morning at guard mount I rode up to the headquarters of Fort Larned, which was commanded by Captain Dainger-field Parker, with whom the general was stopping, and reported to him. I said that if he had no further use for me I would return to my own fort and that if he had any dispatches he wanted taken back to Fort Hays I would take them, as I expected to get there in eight hours on the same mule.

He laughed and said, "Well, I will never say anything against a mule again."

* * * * * * *

Among the many army officers under whom I have served one of my earliest experiences was with Major General Eugene A. Carr, retired. General Carr was a graduate of West Point when cabins were more plentiful than frame houses in upper New York state, whence he came. Graduating in 1850, he went to the frontier and graduated in that old school that made him one of the best of Indian fighters.

In 1868 I first met him when I was a scout for Colonel Royal's command, whom he succeeded. It has been the pride of my career that, he being an officer of such wide experience and ability, I secured his esteem and friendship, and in his writings he has been very generous in alluding to my services. I had the honor of serving with him in many trying campaigns, notably in that which culminated in his success over Tall Bull, who had long been the terror of the plains with what is known as the "dog soldiers," who were renegades recruited from a dozen disappointed tribes and were composed of the most vicious, fanatical Indians who were opposed to the white man's intrusion in the west. The depredations were of a terrifying nature, and Carr was delegated to punish them at all hazards. Their continuous pursuit for many months was a very trying one, as they employed the Indians' methods of annoyance in attack by safely scattering when hard pressed. Knowing that only strategic cunning could eventually effect subjugation or dispersal, General Carr proved by his persistent energy and strategy that he was equal to the situation. It was during the continuous pursuit of these warriors that I met one of my closest calls in an incidental fight which occurred at a point called Elephant rock. It was in the spring of 1869 that we reached Elephant rock, which is a point on a rock on the south side of Beaver valley, where I found an Indian trail going down the Beaver, and, following it, the command went into camp. The general ordered Lieutenant Ward to follow it, I being already on the scene. I was keeping the Indians in sight while covering my presence from them, when somewhat to the left, almost parallel with them, I heard firing, and I afterward ascertained that Lieutenant Ward was in a skirmish so premature that at one time it threatened to cut me off.

General Carr left the command under Major Brown to follow with the wagons, and the Indians, skirmishing with great daring, put up a game fight. General Carr followed them until nearly dark and returned to meet and protect the wagons. Forming his men in a hollow square, he made an orderly retreat, the Indians showing great pertinacity in their skirmish tactics, so much so that the general got a bullet through the scabbard of his saber. Meeting the wagons and getting into a good position, he went into camp, but the Indians stayed around all night, emitting the cries of owls and coyotes as usual. Next day the Indians were followed, and skirmishing was kept up incessantly. Lieutenant Schenofsky on that occasion came near being ambushed and had a few men killed. This continuous skirmishing was kept up for three days, with myself almost continuously in the saddle, and while we were in front the general sounded the officers' call for consultation. I will permit General Carr to tell the story of an affair in which he punished the Indians severely, while the story relates also to my connection with the matter:

"I had heard some firing in front, where the advance guard had gone out of sight. My orders were for the advance guard to regulate on the main column and always keep in sight of it, but as Major Babcock and Lieutenant W. P. Hall, now General Hall, were so ambitious and anxious for a fight I thought I would give them a chance, and so I let them alone. After hasty consultation regarding lack of supplies I sent a bugler to recall the advance guard. He came back saying he could not reach them, as they were surrounded by Indians. The Indians had got into four ravines which headed near the trail, two on each side. The half dozen had led the advance on with insulting gestures and defiant words (some could speak and swear in English), and when they came between the ravines the whole poured out around them. Babcock dismounted his men and formed them in a circle and stood the Indians off. I sent Lieutenant Brady with the next company to open communications, and the Indians, supposing the whole command was coming, went on as before.

"Reaching the scene, we could see the Indians scattering in retreat. A figure with apparently a red cap rose slowly on the hill. For an instant it puzzled me, as it wore a buckskin and had long hair. But on seeing the horse I recognized that it was Cody's Powder Face and saw that it was 'Buffalo Bill' without his broad brimmed sombrero. On closer inspection I saw that his head was swathed in a bloody handkerchief, which served not only as a temporary bandage, but as a chapeau, his hat having been shot off, the bullet plowing his scalp badly for about five inches. It had ridged along the bone and was bleeding profusely, a very close call, but a lucky escape. However, it would not do to turn back immediately after such impudence, so I took to the gallop and ran them for twelve miles to and across the Republican and up the bluffs on the south side, where they acted in their usual aggravating style by scattering in every direction after dropping a good deal of plunder. We could see them on the distant hill, but could not catch them under the circumstances or without means of some counter strategic cunning, so we went back and camped north of the Republican. The advance guard had been relieved and the Indians severely punished, with a loss on our side of but four or five killed and a few wounded, this with Babcock's horse wounded and Cody's narrow escape as the resulting casualties. The object of the campaign was nearly accomplished, but our greatest need was supplies, which the hot trail had sidetracked in the excitement of the necessary pursuit of the defiant foe. As the country was infested with Indians and it was fifty miles to the nearest supply point, Fort Kearny, on consultation with Cody he decided that it would be best to undertake the job himself, a point characteristic of him, as he never shirked duty or faltered in emergencies. I gave him the best horse in the outfit, and when twilight arrived he decided, after patching up his head a little, to bring relief and meet us at a point 'northwest on the Platte river, about a day's march onward.' These were about the most definite directions any scout got in the trackless wastes of those days, and it showed the peculiar sixth sense or acumen possessed by experienced officers and why practical scouts, like Cody, in the wide terrestrial seas of the great plains rarely ever missed connections. Cody therefore reached us safely, making a successful ride of fifty miles during the night and arriving at Fort Kearny at daylight."

*His head was swathed in a bloody handkerchief.*