# Lincoln's Confederate In-Laws



#### Courtesy of the Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana

### A Rebel in the White House

Widowed by war, Emilie Pariet Todd Helm. the vounger half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, received a pass from her brother-in-law in which he used the word "Confederate," a word he so rarely wrote or spoke, writing "Whom it may concern: It is my wish the Mrs. Emilie T. Helm (widow of the late General B. H. Helm, who fell in the Confederate services) now returning to Kentucky, may have protection of person and property, except as to slaves, of which I say nothing. A. Lincoln"

However, when Emilie refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, feeling that it would be treason to her dead husband, her pass would not let her into Kentucky from Fort Monroe, Virginia. A Federal officer decided to break the impasse and telegraphed the president. Lincoln promptly sent a short, curt reply, "Send her to Me." Emilie Todd Helm was then escorted to the White House at the President's direct order.

"Little Sister" was known to cause quite a stir when conversing with guests in the White House with her rebellious support of the South's sentiments. Her very presence was known to stir rumors around Washington that there was a Confederate spy in the executive mansion. General Sickles, who had recently sacrificed one of his legs at the Battle of Gettysburg, told Lincoln, referring to Emilie Helm, "You should not have that Rebel in your house!" Lincoln came through with one for the family: "Excuse me, General Sickles, my wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests. We do not need from our friends either advice or assistance in that matter."



THE EMILIE TODD HELM VISITS TO THE WHITE HOUSE HELP US UNDERSTAND THE MEASURE OF COMPASSION ABRAHAM INCOLN HELD FOR EVEN HIS WARTIME ENEMIES. WITH INFINITE PATIENCE AND UNEQUALED FORBEARANCE AND SAGACITY LINCOLN BORE THE BURDEN OF BINDING UP THE WOUNDS OF BOTH HIS FAMILY AND THE NATION TO ACHIEVE PEACE.



## Uncle Lincoln... Always The White House Peacemaker

Katherine Helm, following the death of her father, General Ben Hardin Helm, traveled to the White House with her mother at Lincoln's direct order. While the nation was in the throes of rebellion, the President experienced a small scale one unfold on the White House sitting room floor when Katherine and Tad nearly came to blows over a photo of Lincoln. Tad had identified the photo of his father as The President... and Katherine insisted that Jeff Davis was President. An argument broke out, with Tad pronouncing Lincoln as President and Katherine countering that Davis was President. Lincoln intervened as Peacemaker. He suggested that Tad could call him President and Katherine would simply refer to him as "Uncle Lincoln."

## Brother-in-Law Leads Enemy Forces

Benjamin Hardin Helm married Emilie Todd, the half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, in 1856.

In 1857, Helm had occasion to travel to Springfield, Illinois, on a law case and while there he visited with the Lincolns a week. Helm and Lincoln became friends, although their political ideas were different.

In the summer of 1861, Lincoln called Helm to Washington and offered the West Point graduate the position of Paymaster in the Union Army as a Major. It was a highly coveted office and Mrs. Lincoln hoped to have her sister live with her in the White House while Ben served the country.

After three days, Helm declined the generous commission and returned to Kentucky. That fall he joined the Confederate Army and rose to the rank of Brigadier General before his death on September 20, 1863, at the Battle of Chickamauga.



Courtesy of the Kentucky State Historical Society

SENATOR DAVID DAVIS SAID IN REFERENCE TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S RECEPTION OF THE NEWS OF GENERAL HELM'S
DEATH, "I NEVER SAW MR. LINCOLN MORE MOVED THAN WHEN HE HEARD OF THE DEATH OF HIS YOUNG BROTHER-IN-LAW,
BEN HARDIN HELM, ONLY THIRTY-TWO YEARS OLD, AT CHICKAMAUGA. I CALLED TO SEE HIM ABOUT FOUR O'CLOCK ON THE
22ND OF SEPTEMBER; I FOUND HIM IN THE GREATEST GRIEF; "DAVE," SAID HE, "I FEEL AS DAVID OF OLD DID WHEN HE WAS TOLD OF THE DEATH OF ABSOLOM." I SAW HOW GRIEF STRICKEN HE WAS, SO I CLOSED THE DOOR AND LEFT HIM ALONI



As an adult, Katherine Helm achieved great success in portraiture. Among many others, she painted an oil portrait of her father and the governor of Kentucky. She painted three portraits of her aunt, as Lincoln's First Lady. The image of Mary, painted in 1925 by Helm, now hangs in the White House in the Lincoln bedroom. The portrait was done from an early

As a writer, she immortalized her Aunt Mary Lincoln, carefully gathering material from her mother's diary and her own personal recollections. So doing, she captured in print the true story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln which was published in 1928.





#### LINCOLN - FAMILY and FRIENDS

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