

ABSTRACT

KALI GATLIN

Family Divided: The Todd Sisters Living in Selma During the American Civil War
(Under the Direction of STEPHEN BERRY)

This paper will examine Elodie Todd Dawson and Martha Todd White, two sisters of Mary Todd Lincoln who lived in Selma, Alabama, during the American Civil War. Both were married to Confederate soldiers, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson and Clement White, and both supported the rebel cause. While many Kentucky families were divided between the Confederacy and the Union, the Todd family was in a unique situation. They were torn between the Confederacy, for which their brothers and husbands fought, and the federal White House, the home of their sister and brother-in-law. Despite their political disagreement, their strong familial bonds were not broken. Residents of Selma, Alabama were not hesitant to openly criticize Abraham Lincoln in front of the sisters. However, they adamantly defended the Lincolns. As a result, the town became separated between regiments, which were fighting for the same cause. The social and politic divisions among the women of Selma would be transmitted to the soldiers through letters, creating rivalries among regiments. Using the Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers archived at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, coupled with other newspaper and secondary sources, this paper will tell the story of how the sisters' loyalty to the Lincolns divided the town of Selma.

INDEX WORDS: Elodie Todd Dawson, Martha Todd White, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson, Families Divided, Selma, Alabama

FAMILY DIVIDED: THE TODD SISTERS LIVING IN SELMA
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

KALI BRINTON GATLIN

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by

KALI BRINTON GATLIN

Approved:

Stephen Berry
Dr. Stephen Berry
History Professor

4/29/2010
Date

Approved:

John Inscoe
Dr. John Inscoe
Reader

4/29/2010
Date

Approved:

David S. Williams
Dr. David S. Williams
Director, Honors Program

5/7/2010
Date

Approved:

Pamela B. Kleiber
Dr. Pamela B. Kleiber
Associate Director, Honors Program

5/7/2010
Date

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kim and Bobby Gatlin. Without their unrelenting support and encouragement, I would have never had the academic confidence to undertake this project. To my mother, I would like to especially thank for the countless hours she has spent editing papers for me. Also, to my father for stressing the importance of following my dreams and doing what I love most, learning the history of my country.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This is the tale of two sisters struggling to make their way in a time when not only their country, but also their family, has been divided by civil war. Martha and Elodie Todd grew up just outside of Lexington, Kentucky, as part of a large family of fourteen children. Their father, Robert Smith Todd, was a widower with six children when he first met their mother, Betsey Humphreys. Robert had hastily proposed to Betsey only five months after the death of his first wife, Eliza. Betsey, afraid of becoming an old maid, hesitantly accepted Robert's marriage proposal over a year after his first attempt. In a span of fifteen years, Betsey gave birth to nine children, eight of which survived¹. Now with fourteen children, the Todd home became somewhat of a madhouse. With several crying babies, the house was rarely quiet.

Martha, born June 9, 1833, came into the Todd family as the tenth born child. To most of her siblings and family, Martha was known by her nickname Matt. When Martha was just a teenager, she met Clement White, a physician who resided in Selma, Alabama. In 1852, she married White and moved to Selma at the age of nineteen. Elodie, the thirteenth born child, was nicknamed DeeDee by her family and often signed her letters "Dee."² Unlike Martha and her other siblings, Elodie had remained single, staying with her mother in Kentucky. Betsey saw Elodie as her primary caregiver after her husband's death in 1849. However, as tensions grew between the North and South, the Todd family began to mirror this discord as well.

¹ Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, a Family Divided by War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 8-12 (hereafter, Berry, *House of Abraham*).

² *Ibid*, 58.

On February 18, 1861, Jefferson Davis took his place as the President of the Confederacy, making his inauguration speech in Montgomery, Alabama, then the state capital. After Davis' inaugural speech, a ball was held in his honor as the first social event of the Confederacy. Of the guests who attended the ball, two sisters were of particular interest, Elodie Todd and Martha Todd White. All eyes were on the Todd sisters as they attended the reception in full support of the Confederacy. As stepsisters of Mary Todd Lincoln and sister-in-laws of President Abraham Lincoln, it is no wonder Elodie and Martha received a great deal of attention from fellow guests³. Clearly Elodie and Martha had different political allegiances than their sister Mary, yet their appearance at Davis' inauguration had to have been shocking to everyone in attendance as well as to the Lincolns sitting in the White House. As time passed, this would not be the first time Elodie and Martha would receive stares as a result of their link to the White House.

After visiting Martha to attend the Confederate inaugural ball, Elodie made a decision that would stun her family, especially her mother Betsey. Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson, a friend and neighbor of Martha's, was infatuated with Elodie from the moment he met her at the ball. Dawson, at thirty-two years old, had lost two wives already, leaving him widowed and with a baby daughter⁴. Elodie, only sixteen years old and as the only single Todd left, was very popular at the dance, yet Nathaniel's attention seemed to rise above all others and the two secretly began courting one another. Elodie was hesitant about her relationship with Nathaniel, believing him to be devoid of any kind of feeling, romantic or otherwise. To her great surprise, within a few short weeks Nathaniel waltzed over to Martha's house and asked for Elodie's hand

³ Berry, *House of Abraham*, 58.

⁴ *Ibid*, 58.

in marriage. Feeling as if she was the only member of the Todd family not making commitments, Elodie accepted Nathaniel's proposal and the two became secretly engaged⁵. The newly engaged couple only had a few days together before Nathaniel and his fellow cadets would leave for the oncoming war. Their relationship would play out through constant letters, showing Nathaniel's undying devotion to Elodie. As a result of her engagement, Elodie chose to stay in Selma, Alabama, with Martha. Martha's husband, Clement White, had joined the war effort as well. Despite his "thin and feeble" stature, as Elodie described him, White entered the Confederate Army willingly to avoid humiliation and shame from the draft⁶. With both of their husbands away, Elodie and Martha became very close, looking to one another for companionship in the small southern town. For the Todd sisters, the quaint town of Selma became increasingly more divided as the war progressed. They would find themselves at odds with members of the community, causing stress in their everyday lives in addition to the anxiety they felt as a result of the war.

By examining the Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers along with other secondary sources, this paper will focus on the Todd sisters' life in Selma during the American Civil War. As members of a family divided by the war, the sisters' presence in Selma threatened to divide the town as well. While the women of Selma strove to provide goods to soldiers fighting on the battlefield, they also became concerned with the politics of the war. Their involvement would, for a short while, separate the community along the lines of which Selma regiment members of the town supported. The underlying reason for this division would be the Todd's connection to the White House. Suspicions about their loyalty to the Confederate cause and openly harsh

⁵ Berry, *House of Abraham*, 63-64.

⁶ *Ibid*, 157.

criticisms of Abraham Lincoln plagued the sisters' existence in Selma. The politics of the war became intertwined into the social lives of the women of Selma, including the Todd sisters.

CHAPTER 2 SELMA, ALABAMA

Like most states in the United States, Alabama was once Native American territory, most notably that of the Alabamos tribe. The Alabama River as well as the state of Alabama derived its name from this Native American tribe. Years later, in 1818, Dallas County was established in an act of the Territorial Legislature of Alabama. The county is located in the central part of the state. The “Selma Town Land Company” envisioned a city in Dallas County and in 1817, began laying out streets and drawing plans for the city of Selma. On December 4, 1820, the State Legislature passed an act incorporating the town into the state of Alabama. Only fifty miles west of Montgomery, Selma is positioned along the banks of the Alabama River. Historical statistics reveal Dallas County as a largely agricultural district, producing crops such as corn, wheat, rice, and cotton.⁷ As Selma became an established town, its population increased and commerce began to thrive. Selma sent shipments of cotton along with other produce to Mobile daily, earning a place in the booming cotton industry. In 1848, a charter for the construction of the Alabama and Tennessee railroad was issued by the legislature, adding to the prosperity of Selma.

In 1860, the population of Dallas County consisted of 7,788 Whites and 25,840 Blacks, numbers that were not unusual in the slaveholding South.⁸ Members of the town feared slave rebellions and created militia groups to counter any possible insurrections. However, after the National Democratic Convention in 1860, the growing tensions between the North and South

⁷ John Hardy, *Selma: Her Institutions and Her Men* (1879; repr., Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), 5-8 (hereafter Hardy, *Selma*).

⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

could no longer be ignored, especially not by Selma, a town invested in the cotton industry. After Lincoln's election in November 1860, the southern states rallied together to form their own government, the Confederate States of America. On January 11, 1861, Alabama seceded from the Union.

Selma as Part of the Confederate States of America

Because of its prime location, Selma became an integral part of the Confederacy. Its location on the Alabama River and its connection to major railroads made the transportation of weapons across the Confederacy possible. It did not take long for the leaders of the Confederacy to notice Selma's ideal location. Numerous manufactory buildings were established including a powder mill, nitre works, an arsenal, a naval iron foundry, as well as several others.⁹ In support of the Confederate effort, the demand for war productions skyrocketed. By 1863, Selma employed at least ten thousand men and women to work at the various production factories.¹⁰ Four notable gun boats were built in Selma, the "Tennessee", "Selma," "Morgan," and "Gaines," which made up Buchanan's fleet at Fort Morgan.¹¹ Supplies for the army were also readily accessible from Selma due to its central location. Because of Selma's importance as a military depot for the Confederacy, the city was fortified by a wall that extended for four miles. The city's importance to the Confederacy was also recognized by the Union. In 1865, General Grant chose General James H. Wilson to lead a group of men and capture Selma. In April 1865, General Wilson would defeat General Forrest in the Battle of Selma, destroying everything "that

⁹ *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, s.v. "Dawson, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes," 1237, <http://216.226.178.196/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/dictionary&CISOPTR=978&REC=1> (accessed March 5, 2010).

¹⁰ Hardy, *Selma*, 47.

¹¹ *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, 1238.

would aid the Confederate cause.”¹² However, Selma contributed more than just ammunition and supplies to the Confederacy.

At the outbreak of the war, Selma contributed over six hundred men to the Confederate Army. As soon as rumors of war emerged, the men of Selma formed five companies. The companies were formed as follows: the Magnolia Cadets captained by Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson, the Governor’s Guards led by Captain Thomas J. Goldsby, the Selma Blues led by Captain Thomas C. Daniel, the Phoenix Reds led by Captain James M. Dedman, and finally a company formed at Selma by Dr. James Kent.¹³ For the Todd sisters, the Magnolia Cadets became an important part of their lives during the Civil War, especially for Elodie whose fiancé was captain of the company.

¹² Hardy, *Selma*, 49-51.

¹³ *Ibid*, 46.

CHAPTER 3 THE MAGNOLIA CADETS

The Magnolia Cadets were one of five companies organized in Selma at the start of the war. The Cadets were the first company to be formed and consisted of “the first young men of the place.”¹⁴ Leading the company was Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson, who had previously become engaged to Elodie Todd shortly before the company left Selma. The company was among the first to answer Alabama’s call for volunteers.

Before the Magnolia Cadets left Selma, Elodie and Martha presented the company with a flag. It was common for “ladies who were associated with or related to the men of individual companies” to sew flags bearing the company’s name.¹⁵ These flags were made of dress silk and not very sustainable against the harsh conditions of war. James Averitt presented the flag to the Magnolia Cadets on April 24, 1861 at Watts’ Hall in Selma.¹⁶ An account from an onlooker claims, “I saw them as they stood in line to receive the elegant silken banner, bearing the stars and bars of a new nation.”¹⁷ A few days later, the company arrived in Dalton, Georgia, where their flag received great attention. In a letter to Elodie, Nathaniel claims he told the men of Atlanta “that it [the flag] was the creation of two ladies nearly related to the hostess of the White

¹⁴ Hardy, *Selma*, 46.

¹⁵ Robert Bradley, “The Flag of the Magnolia Cadets,” *Alabama Heritage*, Winter 2007, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ Mary A. H. Gay, *Life in Dixie During the War* (Atlanta: Charles P. Byrd, 1897), 18, <http://neptune3.galib.uga.edu/ssp/cgi-bin/tei-books-idx.pl?sessionid=7f000001&type=HTML&byte=14809644&rgn=DIV1> (accessed March 5, 2010).

House and had been presented to us by the fair women of Selma.”¹⁸ According to Nathaniel, the crowd cheered in excitement about this announcement. Shortly after Nathaniel’s declaration, the *Daily Sun* of Columbus, Georgia, on May 4, 1861, wrote “The Magnolia Cadets [and] Capt. N. H. R. Dawson, from Selma, Ala. passed through Atlanta a few days ago . . . carrying a beautiful flag, which was made and presented to them by a sister of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.”¹⁹ Nathaniel mentioned the flag again in a letter to Elodie, claiming “You are the idol of my company, being identified with our flag, and the young men never lose an opportunity of mentioning you as one of its makers.”²⁰ Almost a year later, Nathaniel supposedly brought the flag home to Elodie after his resignation from the army. The flag remains in excellent condition and is perhaps the most well-kept company flag from the Civil War [see Figure 2.1].

Rivalry Between the Magnolia Cadets and the Selma Blues

As the first company to leave Selma, the Magnolia Cadets were in competition with the four other Selma companies for attention from members of the town, especially from the ladies. For Elodie and Martha, the competition between the Cadets and the Independent Selma Blues [see Figure 2.2] came to rule their social lives. Nathaniel had been the Blues first captain before Capt. Kent, and Elodie often commented about the Blues in her letters to Nathaniel. In one letter, she had to excuse herself for berating the Blues, writing “But I forget myself when writing spitefully of them that you were their *first captain* and *owe* their training to you do they not? But

¹⁸ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, April 29, 1861 in Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter Dawson Papers).

¹⁹ Bradley, 9.

²⁰ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 16, 1861, Dawson Papers.

I don't like them anyhow."²¹ Elodie felt the Blues received an extra amount of attention since they had stayed behind in Selma after the Cadets and Governor's Guards had left.

The Blues seemed to take advantage of their additional time in Selma, seeking attention from the ladies who willingly sewed them clothing and gathered supplies for the company. Soon after the Cadets departure, Elodie wrote to Nathaniel, "The Blues are making more music and commotion about going to the *War* than when you left. The Church bell rings two or three times a day to call the ladies together . . . concerning the making up of 110 uniforms for the chivalrous corps."²² In response to Elodie's comment about the Blues, Nathaniel wrote back, "The ladies of Selma had better bestow their favors upon the Guards and Cadets than the Blues."²³ Only days later, Nathaniel once again spoke negatively of the Blues writing, "But I presume that the Blues engage all of their attention at this time. They certainly have not deserved it and will never recover from their conduct."²⁴ While many of the companies from Selma had left for the war, the Blues remained in town, hosting gatherings with the ladies of the town each night. Elodie described their gatherings as "enjoying pound cake and all delicacies the ladies in such quantities."²⁵ For those who had already left, the attention given to the Selma Blues was cause for jealous feelings. According to Elodie, the Blues finally left for Richmond on May 22, 1861. However, the tensions between supporters of the Blues and supporters of the Magnolia Cadets in Selma had just begun.

Women took great pride in sewing clothing for soldiers while they were at war along with sending them various supplies. *The Selma Reporter* wrote on December 4, 1862, "We

²¹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 26, 1861, Dawson Papers.

²² Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 2, 1861, Dawson Papers.

²³ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 7, 1861, Dawson Papers.

²⁴ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

²⁵ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

hazard nothing in saying that Selma has done and is yet doing more for the soldiers in the service than any other city of its size in or out of the Confederacy.”²⁶ Since Selma had sent out five companies to the war, competition for materials and supplies to send the soldiers broke out across the town. Shortly after the Blues left Selma, Elodie wrote, “I was really indignant at the partiality shown to the Blues, and indeed it has been so spoken of that they have interested themselves wince the *pets* left.”²⁷ Elodie, along with the other ladies supporting the Cadets and Guards, had sent for materials to make clothes for the companies, yet the supplies had not arrived. Many of the resources had been given to the Blues before they left Selma, and feelings of unfair favorability toward the Blues began to increase as the war progressed.

About a month after the Magnolia Cadets left, the company began to notice the unfavorable conditions in which they had been placed. They had very few supplies and camp life was anything but comfortable. Nathaniel told Elodie “we [the Cadets] think that we who were the first companies to volunteer deserved as much consideration as the Blues . . . We were sent off without tents or accoutrements in sufficient number, and the consequence has been that we have suffered greatly.”²⁸ Most of these men had never experienced living situations such as those of a soldier during wartime and desperately looked for ways to improve their conditions. Eventually the ladies of Selma came to the Cadets aid, putting on concerts in order to raise money for supplies and materials to send the company. After the first concert, “The ladies made \$152 . . . The sum is to be expended in yarn and they are to knit it up” Elodie wrote to Nathaniel. Women would continue to sew uniforms, socks, hats, and whatever else the company needed.

²⁶ Name of N. R. H. Dawson Prominent in Dallas History and Progress, *Selma Times Journal*, November 2, 1927 [Selma-Dallas County Public Library].

²⁷ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 22, 1861, Dawson Papers.

²⁸ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 29, 1861, Dawson Papers.

The society of Selma seemed to revolve around the concerts and tableaux put on by the women, making them social events. According to Elodie, the military aid society put on a concert and tableaux to celebrate their design of the winter clothing for the companies and to raise money to make the uniforms. Her sister, Martha, along with two other Selma women were managers of the show.²⁹ However, the military aid society as well as Selma society in general was about to change.

Elodie mentioned the gradual change in society from April 1861 to the end of the year. In a letter written in November, she mentioned that “The ladies Military aid society has been reorganized . . . there is so much indignation expressed by many ladies and gentlemen about the partiality shown the ‘Blues’ that I would not be surprised if there was not a society organized for them especially.”³⁰ Only a week or two later, Elodie commented again about the growing tensions between supporters of the Blues and those who support the Guards and Cadets. She believed that as a result of tableaux given in support of the Cadets “some of the indignant ladies into a society for the Guards and Cadets in opposition to the worshippers of the chivalrous ‘Blues’” might be formed.³¹ Even though Elodie supported the Cadets wholeheartedly, she did not want to become involved in the new society forming out of contempt for the Blues. She told Nathaniel, “I am always willing to assist in sewing and knitting for them but do not desire to belong in any way to the sisterhood of uncharitable Gossipers.”³² However, the tensions between the two societies were only going to become more real at the end of the year.

²⁹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, September 1, 1861, Dawson Papers.

³⁰ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, November 2, 1861, Dawson Papers.

³¹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, November 17, 1861, Dawson Papers.

³² Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, November 23, 1861, Dawson Papers.

In her letters, Elodie repeatedly told Nathaniel about a tableaux, or a staged performance, and fancy party she and Matt, Martha, have been busily working on to be given on New Year's Eve. In opposition to the Cadet tableaux, those who supported the Blues decided to give "Tableaux, Charades, and music etc," for entertainment on Christmas Eve. They claimed the Blues had been neglected and never received anything from the town of Selma. Elodie sarcastically wrote about the situation, referring to the Blues as "unfortunate souls" who "only had a number of boxes sent them a week or two ago."³³ When Christmas Eve arrived, the program describing the entertainment for the evening came as somewhat of a shock to Elodie. The program revealed that part of the entertainment would be insulting Abraham Lincoln, her brother-in-law. This no doubt upset Elodie as well as Martha. In a letter to Nathaniel, Elodie wrote:

I must confess that I have been more hurt or indignant in my life than since this last step has been taken. What have we ever done to deserve this attempt to personally insult and wound our feelings in so public a manner. We have suffered what they never have and perhaps never will in severing ties of blood . . . I thought when my visitors used to wish Mr. Lincoln would be caught and hung to me that, that was enough but I feel I can never feel kindly again toward those who take part in this.³⁴

Both Matt and Elodie decided it was best to no longer take part in the social affairs, which separated Blues from Cadets supporters. After the New Year's Eve Benefit, Elodie told Nathaniel "we prefer giving way rather than creating any more rivalry than now exists between the Companies."³⁵ The two sisters had had enough of the gossip and personal insults from the people of Selma. Unfortunately, the New Year proved to be no less dramatic. Three weeks into

³³ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, December 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

³⁴ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, December 22, 1861, Dawson Papers.

³⁵ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, January 1, 1862, Dawson Papers.

1862, society in Selma had been split in two. The first class contained the Weaver's, Weedow's, Fournier's, Morris, Mrs. Steele, Perkinson's, Watts, Miss Echols, Misses Sikes and Carroley. The second class of society included the Todd sisters, Mrs. Mabry, Misses Goodwin and Elsberry, Misses Ferguson and Bell. The two distinct classes had formed due to the Christmas Eve Benefit given for the Blues. The two classes were at war with one another, yet no victory had been claimed by either class. The first class called themselves the Anti-Whites, while the second class adopted the name Whites, referring to Martha's last name³⁶. The division deepened over the course of January 1862. The Anti-Whites sought out those in the second class for reconciliation except for the Todd sisters and Miss Elsberry. According to Elodie, the Anti-Whites remarked that "the division had been made to 'cut the Todd's' . . . and Miss E. for being our friend."³⁷ The deep separation between society did not last for an extended period of time. After only a month, the tensions had begun to die down. The difficulties of the war placed a strain on everyone in Selma, and many women were willing to set aside their petty differences as the war progressed. Elodie noticed the women were "exceedingly friendly" and "the unkind feeling that at first existed is dying away."³⁸ However, for Elodie, Martha, and their younger sister Kittie, who made a short visit to Selma, the Christmas Eve Benefit was not the only reason why they felt like outsiders in the small town. Members of the town as well as their significant others constantly reminded the sisters of their relationship to the White House.

³⁶ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, January 5, 1862, Dawson Papers.

³⁷ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, January 12, 1862, Dawson Papers.

³⁸ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, February 2, 1862, Dawson Papers.



Figure 2.1: Flag of the Magnolia Cadets, Company C of the 4th Alabama Regiment (Photo Credit: Alabama Department of Archives and History)

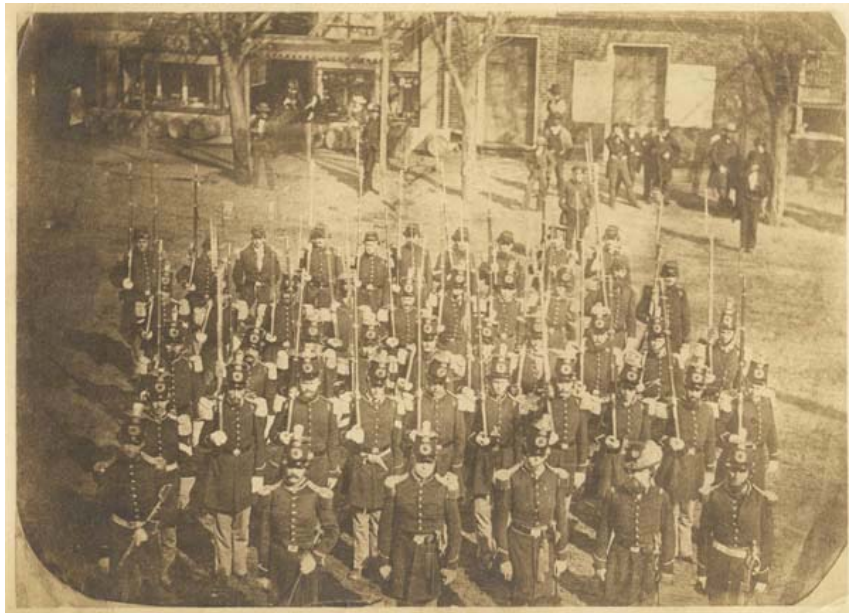


Figure 2.2: Photograph of the Selma Blues (Photo Credit: Alabama Department of Archives and History)

CHAPTER 4 A FAMILY DIVIDED

During the Civil War, the Todd sisters not only witnessed the division of a nation but also the division of their own family. While Martha and Elodie lived in the Deep South, their mother lived in the border state of Kentucky and their sister Mary lived in the heart of the Union in the White House. In addition to their living situation, three of the Todd brothers immediately joined the Confederate Army, Martha, Elodie, and Emilie had significant others in the Confederate Army, their youngest sister, Kittie, was flirting with the leader of a Union company, Elmer Ellsworth, and Mary had married the leader of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.³⁹ The family was now divided politically as well as geographically.

As siblings of the First Lady of United States during the Civil War, the Todd sisters living in Selma, Alabama, were aware of the stares and suspicions people in the South had about them. Despite their public loyalty to the Confederacy, people were wary of them, believing they secretly supported the Union. Despite their political allegiance to the Confederacy, the Todds placed a high value on family. Their separation geographically and politically did not change the fact that they were family, and family always had each other's back. For this reason, the ridicule both Mary and Abraham Lincoln suffered in the South was seen as a personal attack on their family by the Todd sisters. The Anti-Whites' Christmas Eve entertainment insulting Abraham

³⁹ Berry, *House of Abraham*, 55-56.

Lincoln was not the first time Martha and Elodie had experienced harsh criticism for their familial connections.

Separation From Their Home State of Kentucky

The Todd sisters spent their childhood days on a large estate in Lexington, Kentucky. At the start of the war, Kentucky did not secede despite its status as a slave state. As one of the five border states, Kentucky felt pressure from both the North and South and became a very divided state. The Todd sisters' mother, Betsey, chose to stay in Kentucky at the start of the Civil War. She did frequent a few visits to Selma, Alabama to see her daughters and even made a trip to the White House. Since her mother lived in Kentucky and she had grown up there, Elodie felt strong ties to the state. She was very concerned about the fate of Kentucky and whether or not the state would eventually secede. Living in Selma, she often longed to return to Kentucky but feared her safety in the heavily divided state. After one of her mother's visits, Elodie claimed, "I regret so much to part with her but, Kentucky has not *seceded*, and I think myself safer and better off in many respects down here."⁴⁰ Elodie took jokes and harsh remarks about Kentucky very personally and publically admitted she still had faith that Kentucky would eventually secede. According to Elodie, "Kentuckians think ourselves as much Southerners as anybody."⁴¹ On December 10, 1861, the Confederate Provisional Congress unanimously voted to admit Kentucky into the Confederate States of America.⁴² When the news reached Elodie, she was

⁴⁰ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, June 27, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴¹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, November 9, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴² Lowell Hayes Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1975), 22,
<http://books.google.com/books?id=TrpoH5NAH0QC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+civil+war+i+n+kentucky+harrison&source=bl&ots=IFBI004yLL&sig=6oH8WoRzY7S28zLrmL9uCsIwy3M&hl=en&ei=brLYS->

ecstatic, telling Nathaniel, “I could not tell you the vast amount of joy it gave me.”⁴³ However, Elodie’s relief would not last long. Kentucky had not officially joined the Confederacy, nor would they ever throughout the war. While Kentucky’s provisional government may have been recognized by the Confederacy in December, it had no official authority and little support from Kentuckians, who had strong Union ties. Just a few months into 1862, the provisional government was exiled.⁴⁴ Kentucky’s brief foray into the Confederacy had ended.

Personal Feelings About Abraham Lincoln as President and as a Brother-in-law

The Todds were in a strange predicament when their brother-in-law became the most hated person in the South. To the South, Abraham Lincoln embodied everything they feared and many thought his election as President would lead to the destruction of the South. As supporters of the Confederate cause, the Todd sisters had to agree that his politics were fatal to the South, yet how could they loath the man who married their sister and therefore, became a part of their family.

Nathaniel was well aware of Elodie’s distress about the division of her family and her feelings toward Abraham Lincoln, which they discussed in their letters. Like many Confederate supporters, Elodie sometimes referred to the President as “King Lincoln,” believing him to be a tyrant who sought too much power over the country. Nathaniel agreed, yet he was still hopeful things would change before the war progressed beyond a year. He was optimistic that “better

abHoeU8QTG0bSpDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAYQ6AEwAA#v=onepa (accessed March 6, 2010).

⁴³ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, December 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴⁴ Kent Masterson Brown, *The Civil War in Kentucky: Battle for the Bluegrass State* (Mason City: Savas Publishing Company, 2000), 87-88, http://books.google.com/books?id=wUGkrADGPywC&pg=PA88&lpg=PA88&dq=kentucky+provisional+government+exiled&source=bl&ots=n2WEPZKa7i&sig=-1zXTD2bBgVs_hIX1mAaIHtNSDU&hl=en&ei=nrbcS7FKk8LzBLqLwJgH&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CB8Q6AEwBw#v=onepag (accessed April 30, 2010).

and wiser counsels will rule the cabinet of Mr. Lincoln” after Congress met and discussed the issues plaguing the country.⁴⁵ Rumors of peace also brought Nathaniel hope. He begged Elodie to write to Lincoln and ask him to make peace with the South.⁴⁶ Both North and South never believed the war would last more than a few months, much less that it would last four years. However, Elodie was convinced Lincoln would not propose peace. She told Nathaniel “I do not think of peace and know well Mr. Lincoln is not *man enough* to dare to make it. He is but a tool in the hands of his party.”⁴⁷ Despite Elodie’s obvious hatred of Lincoln’s policies, he was still a member of her family and their division caused her much sorrow. In describing her family’s predicament, Elodie wrote, “Surely there is no other family in the land placed in the exact situation of ours, and I hope will never be so unfortunate.”⁴⁸ While she was right, no other family was in her exact situation, many families were divided by the Civil War.

Not only did the Todd family have members fighting for the Confederacy, others fought for the Union. John B. Todd, a cousin of the Todd sisters, is mentioned in one of Elodie’s letters as a disgrace to the family for joining a division in the Union Army.⁴⁹ Another cousin, B. Graty Brown, fell while fighting for the Union Army. In reference to his death, Elodie claims, “I cannot say I grieve but sympathize with his wife and the rest of his friends . . . His turning Republican caused his father great distress.”⁵⁰ Stories from the Civil War reveal it was not uncommon for family to meet one another on the battlefield, and Elodie’s family was no different. Despite disagreeing with their entry into the Union Army, Elodie still showed concern

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 30, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴⁶ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 8, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴⁷ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, August 4, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴⁸ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, September 1, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁴⁹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, October 13, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁵⁰ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, July 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

for her relatives. She told Nathaniel, “I wish the only three relations I have in Mr. L’s service uncaught, unharmed by the Confederates.”⁵¹ Her family was suffering already and she simply could not wish them any more harm.

While the Todd sister’s might privately talk about their family’s division and their hatred of Lincoln’s policies, they were publically scrutinized about their situation. People were well aware they were the sister-in-laws of Abraham Lincoln, yet they made no effort to censor their insults of the President when around the Todds. The Todds knew Lincoln personally and were unable to dislike him for his character. Nathaniel agreed with Elodie, saying “I have never been able to entertain for him any unkindness . . . I have never believed the slanders upon him as a man and accord to him the respect that is due a gentleman” in reference to Lincoln.⁵² Nathaniel walked on tiptoes about the subject of the President, making sure he did not offend Elodie in any way.

With three of his wife’s sisters living in the South as well as three of her brothers fighting in the Confederate Army, Abraham Lincoln must have known his rank as President was a stress to the entire Todd family. Lincoln and the Todds suffered great tragedies throughout the war and never wished harm upon each other. In an account written by Katherine Helm, daughter of Emilie Todd Helm, she recalls Lincoln’s kindness to her mother after her father’s death. After declining a commission to the join the Union Army, Benjamin Hardin Helm became a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. While Helm was fighting in the war, Emilie lived with her sisters, Martha and Elodie, in Selma. After General Helm was killed during a battle near Chattanooga, Emilie wished to return to Kentucky to spend time with her mother. However,

⁵¹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, December 1, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁵² Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, July 11, 1861, Dawson Papers.

Kentucky was a border state and the Union required she take an oath of allegiance to the United States in order for her to return home. Being a devout supporter of the Confederacy, Emilie refused to do so. President Lincoln sent a message to the military authorities stationed in Kentucky, requesting Emilie be sent to the White House.⁵³ Under the care of Lincoln and Mary Todd, Emilie spent her time grieving inside the White House. In Emilie's diary, she wrote, "Sister and I cannot open our hearts to each other as freely as we would like. This frightful war comes between us . . . She and Brother Lincoln pet me as if I were a child, and, without words, try to comfort me."⁵⁴ Lincoln knew that in times of sorrow, family became a means of support. The Todd family lost three brothers during the war and their grief was something they shared in common. Lincoln, like any husband, did not want to see his wife in pain nor her family.

Fear of Becoming a Prisoner of War

Elodie's soon-to-be husband frequently spoke of her connection to Lincoln in their letters to one another. As a soldier in the Confederate Army, there was a constant fear of being captured and held as a prisoner of war by the Union Army. Nathaniel felt no differently and often wrote to Elodie expressing his concern. He believed that as the fiancé of a Todd, their connection to the White House would save him from being imprisoned within the Union. Just after he left Selma, Nathaniel wrote, "I hope her [Kittie] influence with Mr. Lincoln will save me the trouble of being hanged."⁵⁵ Kittie was a favorite of the Lincoln's due to her relationship with Elmer Ellsworth, a notable leader in the Union Army and personal friend of Abraham Lincoln. Nathaniel disliked Ellsworth, claiming he would not "let her throw herself away on Col.

⁵³ C. M. Stanley, "Mrs. Lincoln and Her Selma Sisters," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 15, 1959 [Selma-Dallas County Public Library].

⁵⁴ C. M. Stanley, "Mrs. Lincoln and Her Selma Sisters," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 15, 1959 [Selma-Dallas County Public Library].

⁵⁵ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 10, 1861, Dawson Papers.

Ellsworth and she must have a Confederate Col. for her beau.”⁵⁶ While the company was stationed in Harper’s Ferry, Nathaniel again mentions Elodie’s connection, asking her to write her sister Mary “so that in case of being taken prisoner I will not be too severely dealt with.”⁵⁷ Yet, Elodie did not believe her link to Lincoln would do Nathaniel any good in the event he was captured. She told Nathaniel “He [Lincoln] would make you suffer for yourself and my being such a secessionist too.”⁵⁸ A few months later in July 1861, a statement made by Mary Lincoln would confirm Elodie’s theory. With three brothers enlisted in the Confederate Army, Mary suffered suspicions from people within the Union and had to make her political allegiance to the United States believable. In regards to her brother David’s involvement in the Confederate Army, Mary claimed “that by no word or act of hers should he escape punishment for his treason . . . should he fall into their hands.”⁵⁹ For Elodie, the news was devastating, and she refused to believe Mary had ever uttered those words. Whether Mary truthfully felt this way about her brothers who had entered the war, her husband’s position as President would make it difficult for her to play favors to any member of her family in the Confederacy without causing a public scandal. Northerners would suspect Lincoln’s loyalty to the Union if Mary exempted her family from punishment due to someone who had committed treason against the United States. The Civil War had definitely created a thick barrier between the brothers and sisters of the Todd family.

⁵⁶ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 22, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁵⁷ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, May 16, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁵⁸ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 23, 1861, Dawson Papers.

⁵⁹ Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, July 23, 1861, Dawson Papers.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The division of their family plagued the Todd family throughout the Civil War. During the war, they would lose three brothers and a brother-in-law in the Confederate service. When the Civil War ended in 1865, the devastation after four years of bloody fighting hung over the entire country. Elodie and Martha were fortunate that both of their husbands survived the war. However, Clement White had left the war only a few months after he first joined the Confederate forces due to his weak physical health.⁶⁰ Nathaniel Dawson had carried out his commission as captain of the Cadets for a year before he exited the war as well. Though Dawson was no longer actively engaged in the war, he continued to play a part in Alabama's existence to the end of the war. In 1863, Dawson was elected to represent Dallas County in the State Legislature. In 1865, he commanded a battalion of cavalry on the coast of Alabama.⁶¹ His participation in the war was a notable and honorable one. Even after the war, Nathaniel and Elodie became very involved in the community of Selma. When the St. Paul's Episcopal church was founded in 1871, town records show Elodie Dawson donated a communion service to the newly established church.⁶² Also, Elodie was president of the Ladies Memorial Association of Selma. Her main contribution to the town was the erection of the Confederate monument located in Live Oak cemetery.⁶³ The memorial is still visible today and contains the graves of several unknown

⁶⁰ Berry, *House of Abraham*, 157.

⁶¹ Hardy, *Selma*, 189.

⁶² *Ibid*, 123.

⁶³ Name of N. R. H. Dawson Prominent in Dallas History and Progress, *Selma Times Journal*, November 2, 1927 [Selma-Dallas County Public Library].

soldiers as well as a large monument to commemorate the soldiers who fought bravely for the Confederacy [see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2].

The Live Oak Cemetery would become Elodie's resting place in 1877. She died in Selma on November 14, 1877, and Nathaniel built a statue of his wife in the cemetery next to her grave [see Figure 5.3]. The engraving on the statue reads:

“Wife of N.H.R. Dawson and daughter of Robert S. Todd and Elizabeth L. Humphreys. Born in Lexington, Ky., April 1, 1840; died in Selma, Ala., Nov. 14, 1877. To the memory of his wife, her husband dedicates this monument – thankful for his happiness – sorrowing for his loss, hoping steadfastly through God's mercy to meet her – when the night is past, in the perfect and unending day.”⁶⁴ [see figure 5.4]

Nathaniel Dawson would join Elodie in death in 1895. He is buried next to Elodie in the Live Oak Cemetery, marked with a Confederate cross to remember his service to the Confederate Army.

⁶⁴ Jean T. Martin, “Old Live Oak Cemetery Rich with Lincoln History,” *Selma Times Journal*, April 21, 2003 [Selma-Dallas County Public Library].



Figure 5.1: Photograph of an unknown soldier's grave at the Live Oak Cemetery in Selma, Alabama (Photo Credit: Kali Gatlin)



Figure 5.2: Photograph of the Confederate Monument at the Live Oak Cemetery in Selma, Alabama (Photo Credit: Kali Gatlin)



Figure 5.3: Statue of Elodie Todd Dawson (Photo Credit: Kali Gatlin)



Figure 5.4: Inscription on Elodie's statue (Photo Credit: Kali Gatlin)

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