

HISTORIC ROOTS

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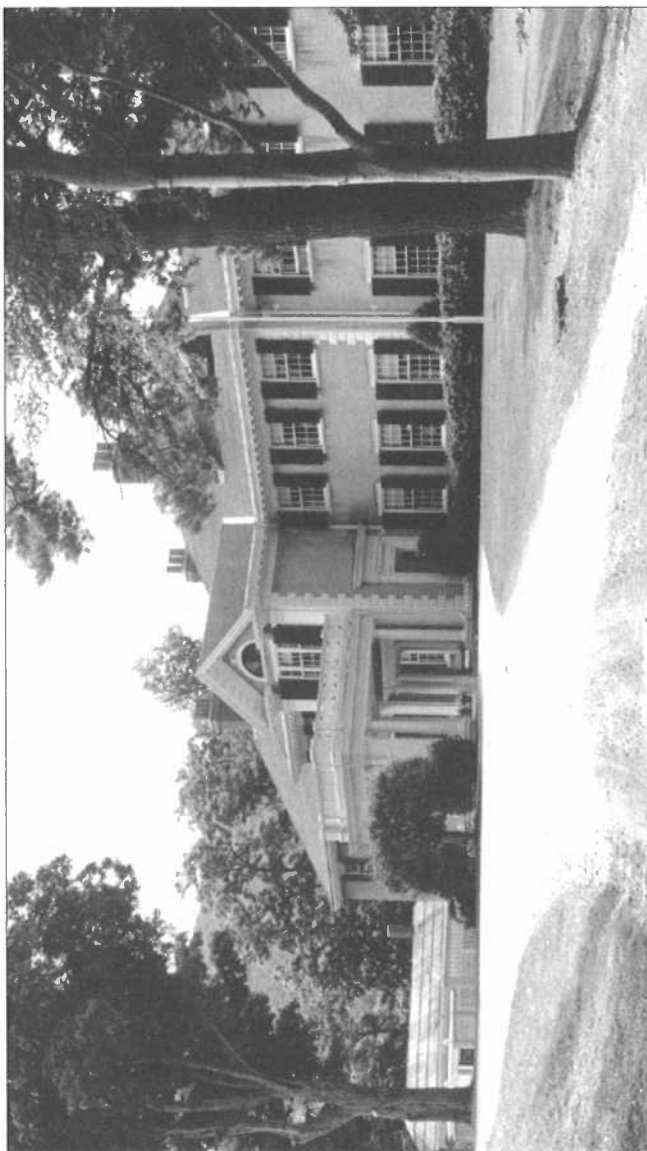
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Courtesy of Hildene

Hildene, home of Robert Todd Lincoln, in Manchester, Vermont

THE LINCOLN FAMILY HOME IN VERMONT

By ALBERT C. JERMAN

HISTORIAN, ROBERT TODD LINCOLN'S HILDENE

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky and spent most of his life in Illinois. He never came to Vermont. But his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, did—twice. In 1863 and 1864 she and her son Robert Todd Lincoln spent part of their vacation at the Equinox Hotel in Manchester. Robert was the oldest of the Lincoln children. He fell in love with Vermont and swore that he would some day build a house there.

It did not happen right away. After he graduated from Harvard College he became a captain in the army. Then he became a lawyer, like his father. Like his father, too, he served in the United States government. He was Secretary of War from 1881 to 1885 and then was minister to Great Britain. When he came back to this country in 1894 he lived in Chicago. He was president of the Pullman Company, which made sleeping cars for the railroads. At the time it was the largest corporation in the country.

Courtesy of Hildene



Robert Todd Lincoln

Robert did not forget his dream of a house in Vermont. In 1903 he began to build it. It still stands today, just south of Manchester on a hill between the Green Mountains and the Taconic Mountains, overlooking the Battenkill valley. The Lincolns called the house Hildene, an Old English word meaning hill and valley.

It took two years to build the house, which has 24 rooms. The Lincolns spent from May until November there. They came to Vermont by train. Their two daughters and their grandchildren came to visit. The rest of the year the Lincolns lived in Chicago. Hildene is the only house in which all of Abraham Lincoln's descendants lived.

Robert Todd Lincoln died at Hildene in 1926. His wife died in 1937. Their granddaughter Peggy Beckwith then lived there until her death in 1975. Hildene was opened to the public in 1977.

Almost all of the furniture now in the house belonged to the Lincolns, and the house looks

Courtesy of Hildene



This engraving shows Abraham Lincoln in the White House, reading the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet. The room in which his cabinet met is now called the Lincoln Bedroom.

pretty much as it did in 1926. The organ, which has 1,000 pipes, is played for every group that visits Hildene. You can also see one of Abraham Lincoln's famous stovepipe hats. And there is a picture showing President Lincoln reading the Emancipation Proclamation.¹ This is the very picture that the president himself bought from the artist. Robert Todd Lincoln's library of 4,000 books is still the way he left it when he died.

At Hildene you can also see the mirror that hung in Abraham Lincoln's dressing room in

¹Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, during the Civil War. It freed all the slaves in the parts of the South that were at war with the United States.

the White House. It may be that the last time he saw himself was in this mirror. It is one of only two pieces of furniture that Mrs. Lincoln took from the White House after his death.

Many famous people came to visit Robert Todd Lincoln at Hildene. One of them was William Howard Taft. Taft was President of the United States from 1909 until 1913 and later served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He and Robert Todd Lincoln liked to play golf together. The room he stayed in has a beautiful four-poster bed. But Taft did not sleep in the bed. He weighed more than 350 pounds and was so heavy he would have broken it. He slept on a mattress on the floor.

Hildene is also famous for its gardens. They were designed by Robert's daughter Jessie. In



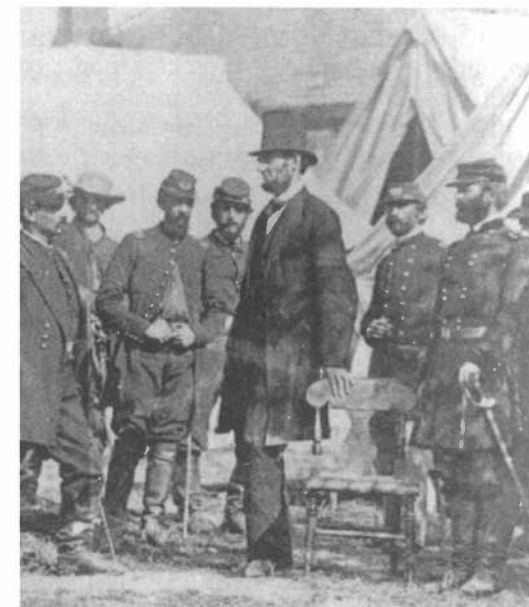
Courtesy of Hildene

Robert Todd Lincoln and President William Howard Taft at Hildene in 1912.

them colorful flowers bloom from mid-May until the fall frost.

Hildene is surrounded by 400 acres of land. Every year there are craft shows, car shows, concerts, and many other events on the grounds. More than 50,000 people come every year to walk through the house and gardens.

Hildene lets us see how this very rich family lived at the start of this century. It is also a Vermont connection to the family of Abraham Lincoln, who some say was the greatest president the United States has ever had.



Vermont Historical Society

President Lincoln in a stovepipe hat visiting troops at Antietam in 1862. Hildene's copy of this photograph was owned by Calvin Coolidge and donated by his son John.

Rooting Around

Hildene is located on Historic Route 7A, just south of Manchester Village. It is open to visitors every day from mid-May until the end of October. Call 802-362-1788 for more information.

Your library is sure to have quite a few books about Abraham Lincoln and about the Civil War. It is interesting to see photographs of this famous president and of the war itself.

More than 34,000 Vermonters fought in the Civil War. Of these more than 5,400 died. Many more were wounded or became ill. You can read about one of these Vermont soldiers in the article "Thank God I am Alive Yet..." in the April 1996 issue of *Historic Roots*.

