



President and Mrs. Lincoln lost a beloved son - Willie - while they lived in the White House. Mr. Lincoln always said it was one of the most difficult things he'd ever experienced.

In this drawing - based on a photograph by Anthony Berger (who worked at Mathew Brady's studio) - we see the President with another of his sons - Tad. The engraving was published in the May 6, 1865 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. It is believed to be the only existing close-up image of the President wearing his glasses.

Lincoln became extremely close to Tad following Willie's death in 1862. According to the National Portrait Gallery, father and son were "inseparable" during the President's final years.

Tad - whose real name was Thomas, after his paternal Grandfather - was eight years old when his father moved the family to the White House. At that time, American Presidents were sworn-in during the month of March, so Tad became a White-House resident in March of 1861.

He was the youngest of Abe and Mary's four sons. Robert was the first, then Eddie, Willie and Tad.

Tad - who was born on the 4th of April, 1853 - never knew his brother Eddie (who died during the winter of 1850 at the age of three). Historians believe that Eddie died of tuberculosis (also called "consumption" at the time).

When the Lincolns lost Willie, also at the age of eleven, both Tad and Willie had become seriously ill during the winter of 1862. Tad recovered; Willie died (likely of Typhoid Fever) during February of 1862.

Now Tad was the only Lincoln child living with his parents at the White House (since Robert was a student at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts). Tad and his father became very close.

It was very hard for Tad to eat solid food. Historians tell us that he was born with a partial cleft palate which caused both a lisp and dental impairments. Even so, he was full of energy and bounded around the White House on all of his childish pranks and escapades.

Lincoln, who loved the boy very much, gave him nearly free rein of the Executive Mansion (until finding out, one day, that Tad was charging people a nickel to meet the President). Even though Tad gave his earnings to charity, his father immediately ended that business opportunity. John Hay, one of the President's secretaries, said that Tad had:

...a very bad opinion of books and no opinion of discipline.

Hay would have known Tad's ways from firsthand observations. Once the child even tried to sell some of his parents' clothes in a White-House yard sale. He liked to give his "earnings" to the U.S. Sanitary Commission (which is how today's Red Cross was known during the U.S. Civil War).

Tad had two ponies which lived in the White House stables. He liked to ride them while wearing a military uniform. The one thing Tad disliked, however, was studying. He preferred to be with his father instead of reading books on his own.

In 1863, President Lincoln declared that the last Thursday in November would be a national holiday - "Thanksgiving Day." The next month, the first family received a live turkey. It was intended to be a gift for Christmas dinner. Tad, however, had other ideas.

Declaring that the turkey would be his pet, the boy named the bird "Jack." When his father said that his pet's days would end, on Christmas Eve, Tad disagreed that his playmate should be turned into food. He reportedly told the President

He's a good turkey, and I don't want him killed.

As he often did, Lincoln gave-in to his son. To make it official, he wrote-up a turkey reprieve - which we could probably call a pardon - and gave the paperwork to his boy. Jack didn't become part of the family's meal that Christmas (or at any other time).

On the night John Wilkes Booth shot the President, Tad was twelve years old. While his parents were watching "Our American Cousin," Tad and his tutor were watching "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp" at a nearby theater. The son learned about the assassination of the father when someone who worked for the theater shouted-out that Lincoln had been shot.

While the crowd sat in stunned silence, the room was filled with the sobs of a devastated child crying for the person who meant the most to him in all the world:

They've killed him! They've killed him! (See *All the Presidents' Children*, by Doug Wead, at page 93 of the paperback edition.)

Officials wouldn't allow Tad to see his dying father, at the boarding house across from Ford's Theater, so the child didn't see his "Pa" again until the President's body was available for viewing in the White House East Room. According to reports, Tad told his nurse:

Pa is dead. I can hardly believe that I shall never see him again... I am only Tad Lincoln now, little Tad, like other little boys. I am not a president's son now. I won't have many presents anymore. Well, I will try and be a good boy, and will hope to go someday to Pa and brother Willie, in heaven. (Wead, at page 93.)

Not many years passed before Tad also died. He and his mother, Mary Todd Lincoln, traveled to and from Germany where Tad was attending school in Frankfurt. Returning to America, during 1871, the President's youngest child became very ill. Historians believe he had tuberculosis from which he did not recover.

Credits:

Engraving of Abraham and Tad Lincoln, based on a photo by Anthony Berger, from the May 6, 1865 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

For more information about the original photo, see the [information provided by the Library of Congress](#).

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Abe-Lincoln-with-His-Son-Tad1>

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