



## Divided Kentucky Families During the Civil War

The Civil War in Kentucky was a fratricidal conflict that split families, including that of President Abraham Lincoln.

Thousands of Kentucky families were broken by the war. U. S. senator John J. Crittenden had one son who was a Union general and another who was a Confederate general. Union colonel Charles Hanson had two brothers fight for the Confederacy, including Brigadier General Roger Hanson, who was mortally wounded at the Battle of Stones River, Tennessee. The Reverend Robert J. Breckinridge, a staunch Unionist who helped sway Federal military policy in Kentucky, had two sons fight for the North and two fight for the South. These scenarios were repeated in scores of Kentucky families.

Although Lincoln was the Union commander-in-chief, most of his in-laws, the Todd family of Lexington, supported the Confederacy. Lincoln's brother-in-law, Confederate general Ben Hardin Helm, was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863. Upon learning of Helm's death, Lincoln reputedly wept and said, "I feel as David of old did when he was told of the death of Absalom."

After Helm's death, his widow, Emilie Todd Helm, visited Abraham and Mary Lincoln in the White House. This created a stir in Washington, and newspapers complained when Lincoln's rebel sister-in-law visited. Later, when Emilie was seeking the president's permission to travel into the Confederacy to sell cotton, she reminded Lincoln that Union bullets had made her a widow and her children orphans, so Lincoln bore the responsibility to help her.

Mary Lincoln lost several family members during the war, including her half-brother, Samuel, who was killed at the battle of Shiloh, Tennessee, and another half-brother, Alexander, who was killed at the Battle of Baton Rouge. Several more of her siblings were Confederate soldiers or sympathizers.

Few families were immune from the divisions of the Civil War.

Major General George Bibb Crittenden (1812-1880) and Major General Thomas Leonidas Crittenden (1819-1893), by E. Anthony & Co., 1861  
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