Ruth Burns Stanton: House Servant to the Lincolns, Bradfords, and Semples

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In November 1894, Ruth Burns Stanton, an elderly, diminutive, African American janitress, claimed in a brief interview for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that she had worked as a live-in servant for Abraham Lincoln's family in Springfield, Illinois. Aunt Ruth, as St. Louisans affectionately knew her, told the reporter she lived with the Lincolns about a year "and was only 14-years old then, and I will be 59 on December 5th next." Her self-acknowledged age and birthdate indicate she lived with the Lincolns in 1851. Quite significantly, given the pervasive racial prejudices against blacks in St. Louis, the news correspondent added: "She spoke with an intelligence and distinctiveness which comes from constant association with cultured people. Hence it will be needless to give her story in [African-American] dialect."[1]

After a lapse of more than forty years, Mrs. Stanton's memory was selective. She remarked: "I don't remember much about the Lincolns," and specifically for Mr. Lincoln, "I don't remember anything particular about him. . . . He used to be in his office all day long." With respect to her house work, however, the aged woman did recall with clarity many principal details of her service in the Lincolns' home at Eighth and Jackson Streets. She said the Lincolns then resided in a frame

1. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. The *Post-Dispatch* reporter subtracted Mrs. Stanton's impending age (fifty-nine)—instead of her age at the time (fifty-eight)—from the interview date (1894) and mistakenly stated she lived with the Lincolns in 1849. In the article, the reporter said her full name was Margaret Ruth Stanton.

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house having just six rooms.[2] Mrs. Stanton remembered Mary Lincoln as being a nice lady and a hard worker; she affirmed that Abraham Lincoln was a very good and kind man; and she stipulated that Robert and Willie Lincoln, for whom she cared, were good boys.

The *Post-Dispatch* published Mrs. Stanton's interview in the midst of the 1894 mid-term elections. Her story ran two weeks after several newspapers in Chicago, St. Louis, and downstate Illinois promoted a partisan push to nominate Robert Todd Lincoln to oppose two-term, incumbent Republican Shelby Cullom for U.S. Senator from Illinois.[3] Although Mrs. Stanton said she knew that the now-grown Robert Lincoln was a wealthy and prominent Republican, the Democrat-leaning *Post-Dispatch* did not tie her interview to the wished-for candidacy of other papers. Instead, it printed her account as a human-interest feature about a young servant girl's experiences living with the Lincolns about a decade before the presidential election of 1860. The layout editor attached the headline, "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," and buried the piece on the third page of an eight-page entertainment supplement for the newspaper's enlarged Sunday morning edition. Mrs. Stanton's interview was printed with a two-column-wide, signed photo-engraving, but there was no identifying byline for the writer.[4]

During the next two years, syndicated and pirated versions of the *Post-Dispatch* interview appeared in dozens of daily and weekly newspapers throughout the country. Many of these—including the oft-cited version that appeared in Springfield's *Illinois State Journal* on February 12, 1895—were severely edited and omitted Mrs. Stanton's first-person statements about her birth, her parents' prior status in servitude, and

2. Historians refer to the simple, one-and-a-half story frame house that Page Eaton and his father built for Reverend Charles Dresser in 1839 as the Lincoln Cottage. The Lincolns purchased this modest dwelling in 1844 and in 1856 remodeled it into the more elaborate, full two-story structure that today is known as the Lincoln Home. Wayne C. Temple, *Builder of Lincoln's Home: Page Eaton* (Harrogate, Tenn.: Lincoln Memorial University Press, 1962), 1; Sale Contract between Charles Dresser and Abraham Lincoln, January 16, 1844, in Roy P. Basler, Marion D. Pratt, and Lloyd Dunlap, eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953–1955), 1:331 (hereafter cited as *CW*); Richard Hagen, "What a Pleasant Home Abe Lincoln Has," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 48 (Spring 1955), 10–11.

3. "Lincoln for Senator," *Chicago Times*, November 12, 1894; "Robert Lincoln for Senator," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 12, 1894; "Boom for Bob," *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Ill.), November 12, 1894; *Rock Island Argus* (Ill.), November 12, 1894.

4. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894.

her relationship to the family of General James Semple.[5] This essay examines how well statements from her *Post-Dispatch* interview coincide with the economic and social circumstances affecting the aspiring middle-class households of Abraham Lincoln, John Bradford, and James Semple in Springfield during the early 1850s.

Ruth Burns was born in Madison County, Illinois, on December 5, 1835 or 1836. There are no known contemporaneous public or family records of her birth; Madison County did not record births until 1850, and the State of Illinois did not do so until 1877. A family member likely told her when and where she was born because throughout her adult life, she or others acting on her behalf consistently entered into public records the same date and place of birth quoted in her *Post-Dispatch* interview.

According to Mrs. Stanton, her parents were free when she was born. Both parents likely were born into bondage, her father in Virginia and her mother in Kentucky, but as required by the 1819 Illinois Black Codes, they had been emancipated in a slave state before arriving in

5. "A Lincoln Nurse," *Illinois State Journal*, February 12, 1895. For an analysis of the version of Ruth Stanton's interview that was printed in Springfield, see Wayne C. Temple, "Ruth Stanton Recalls the Lincolns," *Lincoln Herald*, 92 (Fall 1990), 88–92. In 1828, General James Semple (1798–1866), a native of Kentucky, settled in Edwardsville, the seat of Madison County, Illinois, where he practiced law and engaged in land speculation and town-planning. He joined the Illinois Militia and served as aide-de-camp to General Samuel Whiteside in the Black Hawk War in 1832. For his service, he was commissioned as brigadier general, a title he proudly retained for the rest of his life. The following year, he married a widow and mother of two, Mary Stevenson Cairns Mizner (1806–1875). In 1832, Madison County voters elected General Semple to the first of three consecutive terms to the Illinois House of Representatives. Semple, who self-identified as a Jacksonian Democrat, was elected House Speaker for the 1834 and 1836 sessions, the first two sessions in which the Whig Abraham Lincoln served in the General Assembly. See "Cronology of James Semple, of Illinois," n.d., Eugene Semple Papers, Box 9, Folder 25, Special Collections, University of Washington Library, Seattle, Wash., a typed manuscript of James Semple's handwritten list of significant events in his life (hereafter cited as "Cronology of James Semple"). See also William L. Burton, "James Semple: Prairie Entrepreneur," *Illinois Historical Journal*, 80 (Summer 1987), 66–84, esp. 67–68 (hereafter cited as Burton, "James Semple"); William Kyle Anderson, *Donald Robertson and His Wife Rachael Rogers of King and Queen County, Virginia, Their Ancestry and Posterity* (Detroit, Mich.: Winn and Hammond, 1900), 6, 44 (hereafter cited as Anderson, *Donald Robertson*).

Madison County.[6] The Black Codes also obliged free African Americans staying in Illinois to register and post bond with the clerk of the county court when taking up residence. Registration required a white witness to swear that the prospective black settlers were free. Registration documents filed for free African Americans living in Madison County between 1830 and 1840 show that most were emancipated in slave states. There are no records in the registry for a Burns family or of James Semple acting as a sponsor or witness for any free African Americans in the county.[7]

In regard to becoming a member of the Semple household, Mrs. Stanton remembered, "I was bound out [indentured] to General Semple's family, for my mother used to belong to them." Mrs, Stanton was mistaken, however, in believing that her indenture was contingent on her race or her mother's prior status as a slave in Kentucky.[8] She was actually indentured as an apprentice: With her mother's or a guardian's consent, she voluntarily agreed to live and work with the Semple family in order to learn a useful trade.[9] Young Ruth—or in her later years as Mrs. Stanton—did not realize that under Illinois

6. An Act Respecting Free Negroes, Mulattos, Servants, and Slaves, *Laws of the State of Illinois Enacted by the First General Assembly* (Kaskaskia, Ill.: Blackwell and Berry, 1819), 354–61. Mrs. Stanton reported the place of birth of her parents in the 1880 U.S. Census. U.S. Census, 1880, 730, 47B, 35. Each census citation in these notes includes the census year followed by the microfilm roll or reel number, page number and, if available, line number for the entry.

7. Madison County Circuit Clerk, *Slave Emancipation Registry, Book 1, 1820–1850*, Edwardsville, Ill., https://madisoncountycircuitclerk.contentdm.oclc.org.

8. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. James Semple's parents, Major John and Lucy Semple, brought slaves with them from Virginia when they settled in Kentucky in 1797. As was the convention in Kentucky and other slave states, the Semples regarded their slaves to be real estate rather than personal property. In 1824 James Semple immediately emancipated a slave bequeathed to him from his father's estate. Lucy Semple kept her inherited slaves. U.S. Census 1830, 35, 115; "Cronology of James Semple"; Mary Semple Ames Cushman, "General James Semple," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 6 (1905), 63. On enslaved people as real estate, see, for example, Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 197.

9. It is not known if a written indenture of apprenticeship between General Semple and Ruth Burns is extant. Indentures of apprenticeship that were executed and recorded with the clerk of the Madison County Court in the 1830s and 1840s may no longer exist. There are, however, many examples of this kind of agreement from Sangamon County. Theodore Calvin Pease, *County Archives of Illinois* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Historical Library, 1915), 409; Sangamon County Indentures of Apprenticeships (original papers), Manuscripts Collection, SC-1327-5, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.

statutes passed in 1819 and 1826, the only legally permissible way that minor males under twenty-one and females under eighteen were bound out was through apprenticeships. The 1826 statute permitted free black minors to be apprenticed under the same conditions and procedures as whites.[10] Ruth Burns was unquestionably free when she was apprenticed to General Semple and subsequently when she was sent to work for the Lincolns in Springfield.[11]

The covenants in Ruth Burns's indenture had her bound out to learn the "art and mystery of housewifery," the most common skills taught to young girls apprenticed in the 1830s and 1840s. The remaining requisite statutory covenants in her apprenticeship agreement would have been the same as those for whites with one exception: Masters were required to teach reading, writing, and simple arithmetic to white apprentices but only reading to blacks. Apprentices were not allowed to marry, thus avoiding the question of the master's entitlement to a birthright. Masters could not take their apprentices out of state, but they could lend or hire them out to work for others. Any

10. An Act Respecting Apprentices of 1819, *Laws Passed by the First General Assembly at Their Second Session* (Kaskaskia, Ill.: Blackwell & Berry, 1819), 4; An Act Respecting Apprentices, 1826, *Revised Code of Laws of Illinois Enacted by the Fifth General Assembly* (Vandalia, Ill.: Robert Blackwell, 1827), 54–59; Mason Brayman, *Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois: Adopted by the General Assembly, 1844–45* (Springfield, Ill.: William Walters, 1845), 51–55; Eugene L. Gross, ed., *The Statutes of Illinois: An Analytical Digest of All the General Laws of the State in Force at the Present Time, 1818 to 1868* (Chicago, Ill.: E.B Myers & Co., 1868), 47–51. Article VI, Section 1 of the 1818 Illinois Constitution anticipated indenturing minors as apprentices but did not specify who was eligible or how indenture agreements were to be executed. U.S. House of Representatives, *Constitution of the State of Illinois, November 16, 1818* (Washington, D.C.: E. De Krafft, 1818), 14–15.

11. Allen C. Guelzo erroneously hypothesized that Ruth Burns's mother was indentured under the often-abused 1807 territorial Act Concerning the Introduction of Negroes and Mu1attos (the Indentures Act) and that Ruth, as the legacy of an indentured servant, was in servitude to James Semple as his registered servant when she worked for the Lincolns. Guelzo failed to recognize that in 1836, Illinois courts declared the legacy right to registered servants as unconstitutional and decreed all African American minors registered under the territorial laws of Indiana and Illinois to be unquestionably free. The court ruled that unlike indentures, registrations were not valid contracts within the scope of the Illinois Constitution. Allen C. Guelzo, "Did the Lincoln Family Employ a Slave in 1849–50?" *For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 3 (Autumn 2001), 1; Bennington Boon v. Juliet, a Woman of Color, in J. Young Scammon, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court* (Chicago: Callaghan & Co., 1886), 1:258; Darrel Dexter, *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* (Cape Girardeau, Mo.: Southeast Missouri State University, 2011), 11; Mason McCloud Fishback, "Illinois Legislation on Slavery and Free Negroes, 1818–1865," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year, 1904*, 5 (1904), 415–16.

wages an apprentice earned were held by the master until the end of the indenture.[12]

The precise date of Ruth Burns's indenture is not known, but census listings indicate it occurred after 1845, or after she was ten years old, when she was in her early teens. Ruth and two putative siblings—older sister Mary Burns (1834–1864) and younger brother James Burns (1840-?), both of whom were also born in Illinois—were also apprenticed to General Semple around this same time. Their mother was no longer able to provide for them; she was widowed, abandoned, or deceased.[13]

Ruth Burns joined the Semple family when they lived in a large country home in Semple Town, a residential subdivision that General Semple platted in a picturesque setting on elevated acreage just north of Alton, Illinois. Semple had moved his family from Edwardsville to Alton in 1836, hoping to exploit better opportunities for real estate development in this rapidly growing city on the Mississippi River. He promoted the sale of lots (in what today is North Alton) as providing a healthier place to live than in the crowded city environs along the river.[14]

The Semple family resided in Semple Town until early 1850. However, from 1843 to 1850, General Semple spent most of his time in Washington serving as U.S. Senator from Illinois and in Springfield working to promote his patented invention of a giant steam-powered locomotive that utilized large, drum-like wheels to run on a trackless roadbed. Because privately financed railroads had not yet demonstrated their profitability, Semple hoped to enrich himself by perfecting a transportation alternative that avoided the huge capital expense of laying tracks. From 1845 to 1849, Semple conducted field trials near

12. The phrase "bound out" was commonly used in covenants of indentured servitude in England and America. See, for instance, Philip R. Popple, *Social Work Practice and Social Welfare Policy in the United States: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 35; James Barry Bird, *The Laws Respecting Masters and Servants, Articled Clerks, Apprentices, Manufacturers, Labourers, and Journeymen*, 6th ed. (London: W. Clarke & Sons, 1813), 22–23.

13. Neither the 1840 U.S. Census nor the 1845 Illinois State Census list any African American minors—females under eighteen or males under twenty-one—living with the Semples.

14. "Cronology of James Semple"; Madison County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 14, 89; *Gazetteer of Madison County, Illinois* (Alton, Ill.: James T. Hair, 1866), 70.

Springfield to demonstrate the technological and economic feasibility of his invention, which became known as the prairie car.[15]

Mrs. Stanton remembered that the Semple family moved from Semple Town to Vandalia. Semple's desperate need for financing for his invention led him to form the Illinois Transportation Company to attract patrons to fund his enterprise. The company's failure to do so probably precipitated the relocation in late 1849 or early 1850. In the summer of 1849, Semple discarded his real estate speculation business and sold all remaining building lots in Semple Town and other acreage adjoining Alton at bargain prices, hoping to sustain his transportation venture.[16] In Vandalia, the Semples resided near Robert King McLaughlin (1779–1862) and his wife Isabella (1791–1868), who was Mary Semple's half-sister. The McLaughlins were among Vandalia's founders in 1820. McLaughlin had served with Semple in the General Assembly and was his long-time political ally and business partner. The 1850 U.S. Census of Vandalia lists Ruth Burns and her two siblings as free blacks living in James Semple's household. It is the earliest known public record that links Ruth to the Semple family.[17]

Ruth Burns's time in Vandalia did not last very long. In the summer of 1850, General Semple sent her from Vandalia to Springfield to live with the family of his brother-in-law, John Bradford. In her interview with the *Post-Dispatch* writer, she mistakenly linked being sent to Springfield with General Semple's term in the U.S. Senate, which had ended more than three years earlier. As a young teenager, Ruth

15. Semple served as U.S. Senator from Illinois from December 1843 to March 1847. In August 1843, Governor Thomas Ford appointed Semple to finish the deceased Samuel McRoberts's term. In December 1844, the state legislature elected Semple to a two-year term that ended in March 1847. By the summer of 1846, Semple had his fill of national politics, and in January 1847 he prematurely ended his term and returned to Springfield six weeks before the 29th Congress was scheduled to adjourn. "Cronology of James Semple"; Frank Stevens, "Life of Stephen Arnold Douglas," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 16 (1924), 393; *Sangamo Journal*, January, 21, 1847; Burton, "James Semple," 72. On the prairie car, see "Prairie Car," *Sangamo Journal*, September 25, 1845; "A Monster Loco Foco," *Illinois Journal*, June 29, 1848; "The Prairie Locomotive," *Illinois Journal*, August 2, 1848; "General Semple's Steam Car," *Illinois State Register,* March 10, 1849; Burton, "James Semple," 74–80.

16. "Sale of Lots and Lands," *Alton Weekly Telegraph*, July 6, 1849.

17. The 1850 U.S. Census was the first federal census to enumerate the name, age, gender, and race of each free individual living within a household. The census taker asked each head of household to name every person "whose usual place of abode *on the first day of June 1850* [emphasis added] was in this family." U.S. Census, 1850, 111, 384A, 28.

did not differentiate between Semple's activities when he was away from home, either in the Senate or elsewhere when he was working to develop the prairie car.

Semple's efforts to develop the prairie car were popular and considered newsworthy among Springfield residents. Perhaps believing the head office of the Illinois Transportation Company would be located in the state capital, in February 1850, the Whig *Illinois Daily Journal* reported in its local chat column that Semple was about to make Springfield his permanent place of residence.[18] Indeed, some of Semple's actions were indicative of a desire to relocate to the state capital. He escorted his middle daughter, fourteen-year-old Lucy Virginia Semple, to Springfield with the idea of enrolling her in one of the city's female academies.

Mrs. Stanton remembered that Semple, as was the custom among well-off southern families when visiting for prolonged periods, sent her along as a waiting maid with Lucy to stay in the Bradford home. General Semple stayed at the Globe Tavern.[19] Mrs. Adaline Bradford, or Aunt Lina as her nieces called her, welcomed Lucy's company and Ruth's assistance with housework. Mrs. Bradford had been living alone with her three small children since January 1849, when husband John joined General Semple's stepson, Lansing Mizner (1825–93), in trekking to Benicia, California, where John ran a very successful business outfitting prospectors headed for the gold fields.[20]

When living with the Bradfords, one of young Ruth's duties was to escort their two oldest sons—William, age seven, and Oscar, age five—to Sunday school at the newly consecrated St. Paul's Episcopal Church. In 1850, the Bradfords resided on East Jefferson between Third

18. *Illinois Daily Journal*, February 26, 1850.

19. James Semple and Lucy Semple were both enumerated as living in Vandalia *and* in Springfield in the 1850 census. Lucy Semple was enumerated living with the Bradfords. U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 93A, 29. James Semple was listed as a boarder in the recently refurbished Globe Hotel. U.S. Census of 1850, 127, 121B, 33.

20. On John S. Bradford (1815–1892), see John Bradford, *Diary of John S. Bradford, Jan. 1, 1849–Dec. 30, 1849: Springfield, Ill. to Benicia, California*, typescript, Manuscript Collection, California State Library, Sacramento, Calif. John S. Bradford, Jr., presented the diary to the California State Library in April 1919. The senior Bradford returned to Springfield in December 1851. *Illinois State Journal*, December 13, 1851. For more on the elder Bradford, see also "Springfield Book Store," *Sangamo Journal*, June 25, 1841; *Illinois State Register*, January 19, 1849; "From California," *Illinois State Register*., February 3, 1849; Anderson, *Donald Robertson*, 51; John Carroll Power, *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois: Centennial Record* (Springfield, Ill.: Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 130–31.

and Fourth Streets, a two-block walk from St. Paul's, then located on the southeast corner of East Adams and Third Streets. Along the way, the threesome often encountered young Robert Lincoln, who also went to Sunday school at St. Paul's. William Bradford and Robert Lincoln were the same age. Ruth mistakenly thought young Robert was only five, but he was seven. Her error is easily explained; Robert was considered small for his age.[21]

Ruth Burns first encountered Abraham and Mary Lincoln in the summer of 1850 when she accompanied Adaline Bradford to Sunday services at St. Paul's. Mr. and Mrs. Bradford had been devoted members of St. Paul's since their arrival in Springfield. Ruth mistakenly thought that Mary Lincoln, too, was a member of St. Paul's because she attended regularly and hosted weekly gatherings of the ladies' Sewing Society of the Episcopal Church to make clothes for the poor. Miss Mary Todd had gone to services there since 1837, well before she befriended the Bradfords and well before she married Lincoln. As was customary for house guests staying for extended periods, Miss Todd had joined her hosts, her older sister Elizabeth Todd Edwards and husband Ninian Wirt Edwards, for services at St. Paul's, where the Edwards family were members. After their wedding, Lincoln, who belonged to no organized sect, went to church sporadically, partly because he was frequently out of town traveling the judicial circuit.[22]

Ruth recalled in her interview that initially Mrs. Bradford sent her over to help Mrs. Lincoln with housework every Saturday. Mrs. Bradford, who had lived across the street from the Lincolns before they left for Congress in November 1847, was well aware of Mary

21. In 1846, Lincoln described his son Robert as "'short and low,' and, I expect, always will be." Abraham Lincoln to Joshua Speed, October 22, 1846, *CW*, 1:389–91. The Bradfords had purchased the frame house on East Jefferson between Third and Fourth Streets in August 1847. They lived there until the Alton and Sangamon Railroad bought the property in 1852. Sangamon County Deed Book Z, 373 and Deed Book HH, 245, Sangamon County Court House, Springfield, Ill. The new St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Third Street, built of stone, was completed in 1848. "The Consecration," *Illinois State Journal*, June 29, 1848.

22. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. Mary Todd grew up as a Presbyterian in Lexington, Kentucky. Church records show Mrs. Lincoln joined the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield in April 1852, after Ruth Burns had departed. Abraham Lincoln subsequently rented a pew and also attended First Presbyterian, although he never became a member of that or any other particular church denomination. Katherine Helm, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1928), 116 (hereafter cited as Helm, *The True Story*); Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet, Ill.: Mayhaven Publishing, 1995), 32–52.

Lincoln's increasing need for domestic assistance. In 1895, Mrs. Bradford told Lincoln biographer Ida Tarbell how the Lincolns had divided up household chores: "Mrs. L. did her own sewing, and before they went to Congress, she sewed all the time, making Mr. L. take care of the baby [Edward (Eddy) Baker Lincoln]. He rolled him up and down in baby carriage in the field beyond Mrs. B's—helped get meals."[23]

Three years later, after returning from Washington, D.C., the Lincoln family's capacity to do housekeeping and child care was much diminished for two intertwined reasons. First, Lincoln abandoned organized politics and earnestly committed himself to making a good living by practicing law. His goal was to increase his income to where it would support the comfortable, middle-class lifestyle to which both he and Mary aspired—a lifestyle that included a grander home, fine furnishings, and servants. Lincoln reckoned that the income earned from his practice in the fourteen-county Eighth Judicial Circuit would be insufficient. In order to increase his income, he would need to diversify his practice and represent more clients from commerce, manufacturing, and railroads. Pursuing these goals meant Lincoln would be away from home for longer periods of time working in his office and traveling to more distant court houses.[24]

23. *Illinois State Journal*, January 25, 1895; Note on Mrs. Bradford and Mary Todd Lincoln and the Shields duel, n.d., Ida M. Tarbell Collection of Lincolniana, Allegheny College, Meadville, Penn., https://dspace.allegheny.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/9340593c-10c5-4f25-8805-8f1ca5db6ac4/content. In 1846, the Bradfords rented from Thomas and Jemima Lushbaugh the small house at the northwest corner of Eighth and Jackson Streets. The house became known as the Burch House after William S. Burch bought it from the Lushbaughs in 1859. The structure was demolished in 1918. RATIO Architects et al., *Burch House: Lincoln National Historic Site, Springfield, Illinois, Historic Structure Report* (Omaha, Neb.: National Park Service, 2006), 15. On the spelling of Eddy's name, see Samuel P. Wheeler, "Solving a Lincoln Literary Mystery, 'Little Eddie,'" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 33 (Summer 2012), 43.

24. On Abraham Lincoln's exclusive focus on his law practice, see Guy C. Fraker, *Lincoln's Ladder to the Presidency: The Eighth Judicial Circuit* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 149; and Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1:309–10. While boarding with Mary and the boys at the Sprigg House in Washington, D.C., Abraham concluded that servants were essential in affording his wife a comfortable lifestyle. Abraham Lincoln to Mary Lincoln, Washington, D.C., July 2, 1848, *CW*, 1:496. Fellow circuit-riding attorney Anthony Thornton recalled in an interview that, at best, an attorney's income from circuit work was stagnant. "As a Lawyer on the Circuit," *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 1900. Circuit judge and Lincoln's traveling companion David Davis counseled lawyers to move to cities where manufacturing and commercial business was done in order to make a decent living. David Davis to William P. Walker, November 16, 1840, Davis Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.

The second reason for the Lincolns' diminished capacity to do housework stemmed from a recent cluster of deaths of several loved ones that left both Abraham and Mary in a state of profound grief. Their despair began in July 1849 when Mrs. Lincoln's father, Robert Smith Todd, died unexpectedly from cholera in Lexington. Robert Todd's death was followed by the deaths of a Springfield neighbor, Henry Christian Remann, whose wife and mother of four small children had formed a sisterly bond with Mrs. Lincoln, and of Mary Lincoln's much loved indulgent maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Porter Parker. Lastly and emotionally most excruciating of all came the death of the Lincolns' son Eddy, who, like Henry Remann, succumbed to chronic consumption (today known as tuberculosis) on February 1, 1850. Eddy's passing was extremely painful for the Lincolns because they were aware of the risks, symptoms, and near-certain prognosis of death for those who contracted chronic consumption.[25]

Through his work, Mr. Lincoln was able to deflect some of his sorrow, but his wife could not. The burdensome weeks that Mrs. Lincoln spent caring for Eddy had drained her emotionally. She became extremely depressed. Mrs. John Todd Stuart, the wife of Mary's first cousin, remembered that for weeks after Eddy's death, Mrs. Lincoln remained in bed and refused to eat. Beginning in the summer, pregnancy-induced weight gain physically taxed her stamina. Mary Lincoln was unable to do all house cleaning, cooking, washing, and sewing on her own.[26]

25. "Died," *Illinois Daily Journal*, February 2, 1850. Lincoln believed he was predisposed to contracting consumption. David Davis, Interview, September 20, 1866, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 349 (hereafter cited as *HI*). Chronic consumption was the cause of death the Lincolns reported to the census taker in 1850. Non Population Census Schedules for Illinois, 1850–1880, T1133, Roll 58, 787, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. The Remanns lived one block north of the Lincolns on the corner of Eighth and Market Streets. U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 120A, 20. Biographer Jennifer Fleischner maintains that the deaths of Mrs. Lincoln's father, grandmother, and son made her increasingly anxious and more irritable. Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 171.

26. Abraham Lincoln wrote to his stepbrother that Eddy was sick for fifty-two days before he died. Abraham Lincoln to John D. Johnston, February 23, 1850, *CW*, 2:77; Account of Mary Virginia Nash Stuart (Mrs. John Todd Stuart) in "Plans After Presidency," *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 1900; Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 108 (hereafter cited as Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*).

To supplement her homemaking labors, Mrs. Lincoln had hired a piecemeal succession—in terms of experience and availability—of part-time domestics. In mid-1849, the Lincolns employed Mary Hogan, a seventeen-year-old Irish immigrant, as their maid of all work. At the end of the year, Miss Hogan left her employment with the Lincolns to marry Michael Kelly. In 1850, two Springfield African-American women worked part-time for the Lincolns: Jane Pelham, an elderly washerwoman who lived nearby with her daughter and son-in-law, and Mariah Bartlett Vance, a cook and housekeeper, who was married and had five children.[27]

In the summer of 1850, the Lincolns decided to hire a live-in companion for Mrs. Lincoln. A legal proceeding obliged Lincoln to appear in Chicago for what promised to be a lengthy trial, his first in that city. He had joined the defense in Parker v. Hoyt, an important case involving a wealthy mill owner's alleged infringement of a patent on water-wheel design. The case originally was on the docket for the July 1849 term in the U.S. Circuit Court in Springfield, but Lincoln requested and was granted a continuance, which he needed in order to prepare himself and defense witnesses on the hydraulics of water-wheel operations. The Chicago proceeding ended in a draw, and years later, Lincoln ultimately succeeded in having the plaintiff's request for a retrial dismissed.[28]

Mrs. Lincoln was uneasy with her husband having to travel to a distant, unfamiliar place. She was by nature disposed to anxiety attacks, and thunderstorms terrified her. The thought of being alone after dark

27. Keeping track of the Lincolns' servants in the early 1850s is a difficult challenge. The 1850 U.S. Census (127, 124B, 28) lists a Mrs. Hogan, likely Mary Hogan's mother, and her two children living in the home of Father Philip Conlon, pastor for Springfield's first Roman Catholic Church. Newlyweds Mary and Michael Kelly immediately left Springfield to live on a farm in Menard County. "A Menard County Couple, Married Fifty Years Ago," *The Observer* (Petersburg, Ill.), January 13, 1900. In an interview with Jesse Weik, Margaret Ryan, who became a live-in servant for the Lincolns when Mrs. Lincoln was expecting Thomas "Tad" Lincoln (1853–1871), identified washerwoman Jane Pelham, whose name Ryan mistakenly thought was Jane Jenkins. Margaret Ryan, Interview, October 27, 1886, *HI*, 597; U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 118A, 33. In 1903, Mariah Bartlett Vance claimed that she had worked for the Lincolns in the 1850s: "Oldest Person Born in County," *Illinois State Journal*, July 13, 1903; U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 97A, 7.

28. On Lincoln's pretrial preparation, see Thomas Lewis, "A New Light on Lincoln's Life," *Leslie's Weekly*, 88 (February 16, 1899), 134. Grant Goodrich to Abraham Lincoln, May 24, 1849 and May 28, 1849—both Papers of Abraham Lincoln, Library of Congress; Abraham Lincoln to Charles Hoyt, July 10, 1855, Parker v. Hoyt, Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis et al., eds., *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition*, http://www.lawpracticeofabrahamlincoln.org/Details.aspx?case=137697.

during her period of confinement, with only seven-year-old Robert at home, amplified her nervousness.[29]

To address Mrs. Lincoln's unease, in late spring 1850 the Lincolns hired eighteen-year-old, Irish-born Catherine Gordon as a part-time, live-in companion for Mary. Miss Gordon's main duty was to stay overnight as Mrs. Lincoln's attendant when Lincoln was away. Miss Gordon likely worked for a small wage and sustenance, which was inadequate at the small rooming house where she and her younger sister, Ann, were tenants of the owner, an Irish-born matron, Jane Murphy, aged thirty. When Lincoln was home, Miss Gordon stayed at the rooming house, which was her primary residence. In mid-November, Lincoln concluded his travels for the fall session of the Eighth Judicial Circuit and returned to Springfield for the December session of the Illinois Supreme Court. It is doubtful the Lincolns employed Miss Gordon after November.[30] Lincoln was home for Willie's birth on December 21 and remained in Springfield until the following March 1851.

Ruth Burns's weekly visits to assist Mary with house cleaning likely began during Mary's period of confinement with Willie. At fourteen, Miss Burns was one of the youngest and least experienced girls ever to do housework for Mrs. Lincoln. Doing chores at the Lincolns one day a week enabled her to learn gradually what Mrs. Lincoln's expectations were in doing housework.[31]

There is no evidence the Lincolns employed a live-in servant before then. Some believed that in 1844 they had hired Lincoln's eighteen-year-old step-niece, Harriet Hanks, whom they had invited to live with

29. James Gourley, Interview, February 9, 1866, *HI*, 452; Helm, *The True Story,* 120.

30. The 1850 U.S. Census lists an eighteen-year-old, Irish-born woman named Catherine Gordon living in the Lincoln household. Some have presumed that because Miss Gordon lived with the Lincolns she was their maid, but there is no indication of what, if any, housework Catherine did while staying with Mrs. Lincoln. Jean Baker's branding Gordon a "feckless" and lazy housemaid is unsupported. U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 120B, 32; Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 107. The second census entry for Catherine Gordon has gone unnoticed. The woman in this entry was also Irish-born, but her age was twenty. Because there were no families with the name Gordon in Springfield in 1850, and because it was considered improper for a single young woman to live by herself, the two listings in all likelihood are for the same person. U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 100A, 9. The Lincolns may have wanted Miss Gordon to continue as their housemaid, but the young lady was eager to marry. On January 7, 1851, she wed William H. Batterton, a twenty-two-year-old gunsmith. Sangamon County Marriage Index, January 7, 1851; U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 103B, 3.

31. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894.

them while she attended school in Springfield. The Lincolns had only the one son at the time, and there was ample space to accommodate Miss Hanks.[32] The strongminded Mrs. Lincoln may have insisted that the teenager help with the housework as a courtesy for being a long-term guest. Based on correspondence between William H. Herndon, Lincoln's last law partner, and Harriet Hanks Chapman, Lincoln biographer Albert Beveridge extrapolated that Mrs. Lincoln treated Miss Hanks as a servant.[33]

In Springfield in the early 1850s, young women willing to work as live-in servants were very scarce. Weekly wages for domestic servants were between fifty cents and one dollar, much lower than the wages paid for working in factories as seamstresses or book-folders. In addition, factory employment as a shift-worker meant working fewer hours per week, although often under harsher conditions. Part-time domestic workers were more abundant; they were typically older and better skilled in doing specific domestic chores such as cooking; and generally they were more efficient in completing chores than were their live-in counterparts. Many part-timers were married—typically not permitted for live-in servants—and benefitted from the experience of looking after their own homes and children.[34]

With Catherine Gordon's departure, there was a sleeping room available for a live-in servant. Ruth Burns's arrival at the Lincoln home, initiated by Mrs. Bradford's thoughtfulness, apparently occurred after Willie's birth, an event she should have easily remembered but did not

32. In an interview with Jesse Weik conducted in 1886 or 1887, Harriet Hanks Chapman revealed when she lived with the Lincolns. Harriet Hanks Chapman, Interview, ca. 1886–1887, *HI*, 646. Mrs. Chapman was the daughter of Sarah Elizabeth Johnston Hanks, Lincoln's stepsister, and Dennis F. Hanks, his second cousin. *HI*, 743.

33. After Lincoln's death, William Herndon wrote to Harriet Hanks Chapman requesting information about the Lincolns' home environment for his collaboration with Jesse Weik in writing a biography of Lincoln. Mrs. Chapman answered that she and Mary Lincoln had different approaches to homemaking, but she never contended that Mrs. Lincoln treated her as a servant. Harriet Hanks Chapman to William Herndon, November 21, 1866 and December 10, 1866—both *HI*, 407, 512; Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1928), 2:212; Charles Coleman, *Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1955), 69.

34. Information is sketchy on what the Lincolns paid domestic help in the early 1850s. Wages for live-in servants probably did not exceed seventy-five cents per week, the amount Abraham Lincoln offered Margaret Ryan in 1852. Harry Pratt's estimate of $1.50 per week as the prevailing pay for "girls doing housework" in Springfield in the early 1850s is likely too high. Harry Pratt, *The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, Ill.: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943), 85 (hereafter cited as Pratt, *Personal Finances*).

mention in her interview with the *Post-Dispatch.* Mrs. Stanton remembered Mary Lincoln's demeanor as being relatively pleasant and her temper restrained. Although Mrs. Lincoln was well known as being very temperamental, high-strung, and sharp-tongued, Ruth Burns's work experience with her mistress appears to have been notably more agreeable than that of many other servants who maintained that Mrs. Lincoln had mistreated them. There were numerous reports from former servants and neighbors of Mrs. Lincoln exploding unpredictably in anger and lashing out with verbal and, on occasion, physical abuse against the help for seemingly minor infractions to her instructions for housework. But in her interview, Mrs. Stanton remembered, "Mrs. Lincoln was a very nice lady. She worked hard."[35]

Mary Lincoln's temperament may have been somewhat subdued during the time Ruth Burns lived with her. Mrs. Lincoln may have been suffering from what is today called postpartum depression following Willie's birth. Three weeks following his new son's birth, Lincoln wrote to stepbrother John D. Johnston that Mrs. Lincoln was sick abed with baby sickness.[36] Despite the apprentice's inexperience in nearly every dimension of domestic service, Mrs. Lincoln did not resort to heavy-handed disciplining as she had often deemed necessary for older servants. Fourteen-year-old Ruth Burns, someone who was sent as a favor to help, occupied a different station in the Lincoln household. Perhaps Mrs. Lincoln realized she needed to treat the young servant kindly in deference to Mrs. Bradford's generosity.

In Mrs. Stanton's recollections, the wife of Abraham Lincoln stood out as an impressive figure—a woman of significant domestic accomplishments. For one thing, Mary Lincoln was an excellent and prolific seamstress. During the time Ruth Burns lived in the Lincoln home, Mrs. Lincoln made all apparel for herself and her sons. She kept on hand an inventory of mainly inexpensive cotton fabrics: calico, gimp, cambric, gingham, muslin, and trimmings and buttons. Of these, Mrs. Lincoln preferred calico, which was generally the least expensive, especially for her summer dresses. During the years of Ruth's stay in Springfield—1850 and 1851, the Lincoln's family's store account at John Williams & Company lists purchases of 10 yards of calico, more

35. Michael Burlingame, *An American Marriage: The Untold Story of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd* (New York and London: Pegasus Books, 2021), 61–66; "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894.

36. Abraham Lincoln to John D. Johnston, January 12, 1851, *CW*, 2:96–97.

than any other material. At two yards per dress, Mrs. Lincoln bought enough calico to make herself a small wardrobe of house dresses.[37]

Mrs. Stanton recalled the unvarying work routine in the six-room Lincoln cottage: "I scrubbed the floors and waited on the table and helped Mrs. Lincoln to clean the dishes and do the washing. She did all the up-stairs work, made clothes for the boys . . . and cooked the meals." It is unlikely that after forty years, she would have remembered the precise number of rooms—four on the first floor and two on the second—unless she had repeatedly cleaned them according to Mrs. Lincoln's detailed instructions. Mary Lincoln was a painstaking and exquisite housekeeper. Mrs. Stanton appears to be the first person to have described the interior of the Lincoln cottage, thus providing credible evidence she both worked and lived there.[38]

During her stay with the Lincolns, Ruth remembered occasions when she played with Robert and Willie. She recalled playing around the streets where she joined white children in throwing stones at "the colored children . . . because I lived so much with white people I thought I was white." The black children Ruth Burns threw stones at were probably the sons and daughters of Jameson Jenkins and his brother-in-law, James Blanks, who lived in adjacent houses a few doors south of the Lincolns on Eighth Street. One of the Blanks daughters was the same age as Ruth Burns. Miss Burns may have thought that her status was somewhat elevated in doing the same menial tasks for a white mistress that the Blankses' daughter did for her mother.[39]

When Ruth Burns left the Lincoln household, the couple did not immediately hire a replacement for her. Mary Lincoln likely did not have another live-in servant to help her until very early in 1853. On November 14, 1852, Lincoln went directly from Decatur to Taylorville, Illinois, for the fall session of Christian County Court without returning first to Springfield. While there he met and hired Margaret Ryan, fourteen years old, like Ruth Burns, to live in the Lincoln home. Mrs. Lincoln was pregnant again, and Lincoln employed Miss Ryan for

37. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894; transcribed entries for the Lincoln family's store account at John Williams & Company, Springfield, 1851–1860, Pratt, *Personal Finances*, 145.

38. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. On Mrs. Lincoln's housekeeping see Helm, *The True Story*, 115. The historiography of Ruth's description of the interior of the Lincoln cottage is discussed in George Provenzano, "The First Person to Describe the Lincolns' Cottage Was . . .," *For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 24 (Summer 2022), 1.

39. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894; U.S. Census, 1850, 127, 118A, 31 and 36.

the same purpose that Catherine Gordon had served, namely, to stay with Mrs. Lincoln during her confinement for Thomas (Tad) Lincoln, born April 4, 1853.[40]

After Ruth Burns returned to the household of Mrs. Adaline Semple Bradford, her subsequent residence in Springfield was relatively brief. She was back in the orbit of the Semple family, who had moved to Jersey County. On Christmas Day 1854, Napoleon Mulliken married James Semple's oldest daughter, Ada, at Trevue, a home Semple had built as part of a larger land development venture at Jersey Landing, later renamed Elsah, about ten miles up the Mississippi River from Alton, Illinois. Mulliken was an up-and-coming executive for the Keokuk Packet Company, a large steamboat company prominently connected with the river business of St. Louis. Several times each week, Keokuk's packet boats steamed on a regular schedule up and down the Mississippi River from St. Louis to Keokuk, Iowa, stopping in Alton, Elsah, and other places along the way to drop off and pick up passengers, mail, and freight.[41] Following their wedding, the Mullikens made their residence in St. Louis in plush rooms at the fashionable Barnum Hotel. Ruth Burns had turned eighteen; her apprenticeship with James Semple had ended, and she was legally permitted to leave Illinois and work for wages in other states. She accompanied the newlywed couple to St. Louis as their chambermaid.[42]

Illinois-born Mulliken grew up in St. Louis and became an experienced slave owner. At age eighteen, he inherited two slaves from his father. He sold one and emancipated the other, a woman housekeeper, aged thirty-five to forty, after marrying Ada Semple. To operate the packet boats, Mulliken acquired slaves who worked as deck hands, roustabouts, and boilermakers. These were typically the occupations for hardworking and hard-drinking enslaved crew members who

40. Margaret Ryan, Interview, October 27, 1886, *HI*, 596–97.

41. Jersey County Marriage Register, Jersey County Clerk, Jerseyville, Ill., Vol. A (1854), 22. Many historic buildings, including a two-room stone schoolhouse James Semple presented to the village in 1857, have been preserved in Elsah. Trevue no longer exists. Most of Semple's agricultural land holdings are now owned by Principia College. "Cronology of James Semple"; Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. and Paul O. Williams, *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook*, 3rd ed. (Elsah, Ill.: Historic Elsah Foundation, 1972); Burton, "James Semple," 81–82. On the Keokuk Packet Company, see *Kennedy's Saint Louis City Directory for the Year, 1859* (St. Louis, Mo.: R.V. Kennedy, 1859), 343.

42. Ruth Burns's older sister Mary, after reaching age eighteen, had also gone to St. Louis to work as a house servant for one of James Semple's business associates. U.S. Census, 1860, 651, 260, 21.

lived on the boats they operated.[43] Despite being a slave owner, Mulliken regarded Ruth Burns as being free. He did so even after his wife died in April 1858, when he might have claimed the chambermaid as his property, i.e., a slave bequeathed to him from his wife's estate.[44] Instead, Mulliken continued to employ Ruth and encouraged her to become a cook, a service occupation that was in high demand.

In the weeks between Lincoln's first inauguration and the bombardment of Fort Sumter, southern sympathizers in St. Louis feared outbreaks of mob violence from the city's black population. The Missouri State Police Commission at the direction of Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson, who favored secession, imposed martial law aimed primarily at controlling large gatherings of African Americans in St. Louis. Crowds were not permitted to assemble on major city streets; black church services were summarily banned unless a police officer was present; and under the provisions of an 1845 Missouri law, free African Americans were required to keep with them at all times a valid license (registration) to reside in Missouri. Those who did not possess a license were ordered to leave the state immediately.[45]

Many free blacks did not have requisite licenses because a proper registration entailed having a white citizen post a security bond and swear respectively to the applicant's good behavior. Each day the abrupt and unexpected threat of enforcement of severe penalties against those not licensed brought scores of free black men and women to the St. Louis County Court House to register. To keep Ruth Burns in St. Louis and in his employment, while at the same time documenting her status, Mulliken posted a free Negro bond of $500 for her on April 23, 1861. To confirm her free status at registration, either Miss Burns or Mulliken added "Semple" after her surname to indicate that she had previously resided in the household of General James Semple in Illinois, where slavery was illegal. As a result, Ruth

43. Bob Moore and Kris Zapalac, "Emancipations Registered in St. Louis Circuit Court, 1817–1865," n.d., Missouri Historical Archives, St. Louis. In the 1850 census, Mulliken was listed as the owner of eighteen enslaved crew members, ages sixteen to forty, for the steamer *Die Vernon*. U.S. Census, 1850, Missouri, Slave Schedules, 424, 555, 1.

44. On Ada Semple Mulliken's death, see *Illinois State Journal*, April 19, 1858.

45. Free blacks caught without licenses were fined, jailed for thirty days, and lashed ('whipped out') when released. "Sunday Law Operations," *Missouri Daily Democrat*, April 15, 1861; "The Free Negros," *Missouri Daily Democrat*, April 22, 1861.

Burns became Ruth Semple, a name she kept until she married William Stanton around 1880.[46]

After the Civil War, Ruth Semple remained close to James Semple's married daughters, Lucy Semple Ames and Julia Semple Scott, who were well-to-do and lived in St. Louis. It is difficult to trace where Ruth Semple worked and lived from 1865 to 1885, but circumstances strongly suggest she worked directly or indirectly for Mrs. Ames, who became a widow with four young children in 1867, during most of this time. In the 1880 census, however, she was enumerated as being forty-five years old and working as the live-in cook for the family of Ashley and Julia Scott. The Scotts were renting Mrs. Ames's elegant eighteen-room mansion at 1615 Lucas Place, one of the most prestigious neighborhoods (today's Central West End) in St. Louis. A seamstress, a coachman, and an errand boy also lived with the Scotts. In 1876, Mrs. Ames, her four children, their governess, a nurse, and housemaid embarked on a four-year grand tour of Europe. Mrs. Ames likely included in the lease the services of Ruth and the rest of the domestic staff, although that document has not been found. In her newspaper interview, Ruth Burns Semple said she also lived with the family of Henry Semple Ames, which occurred after Mrs. Lucy Ames and her children returned from Europe to St. Louis in 1880.[47]

Evidence of Ruth's marriage to William Stanton suggests it occurred around 1880 and not during the Civil War, as the *Post-Dispatch* interview stated. In an 1880 census listing made in June for the Ashley Scott family, Ruth Semple reported she was married and widowed,

46. Free Negro Bond for Ruth Burnes Semple, April 23, 1861, Dexter P. Tiffany Collection, Box 63, Folder 2, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. Ruth Semple's sister Mary also obtained a Free Negro Bond. See Free Negro Bond for Mary Burnes Semple, April 16, 1861, Tiffany Collection.

47. U.S. Census, 1880, 720, 9, 38; "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. The Ames house on Lucas Place and a summer mansion called Notch Cliff on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi, east of Elsah, were designed by the prominent St. Louis architect George I. Barnett. David Simmons, "Residences of George I. Barnett," *The Society of Architectural Historians: Missouri Valley Chapter*, 18, No. 3B (2012), 6. Mrs. Ames's youngest daughter, Mary Semple Ames Cushman, kept a diary of the family's grand tour of Europe, which was later published as *She Wrote It All Down* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936). Henry Semple Ames, after graduating from Yale in 1886, worked as manager of the Ames Realty Company and an officer in the Mississippi Valley Trust Company. He handled railroad and construction financing. He never married. As the male head of household, his family consisted of his mother and two younger siblings. "Obituary Record of Yale Graduates, 1915–1916," *Bulletin of Yale University*, 12th Series, No. 9 (June 1916), 116.

indicating the marriage to William was her second. In a second census listing made in November 1880 census, "Ruth Sample," an African-American woman of the same age and occupation was enumerated as married and living with William Sample at 711 North 14th Street, two blocks east of the Mrs. Lucy Ames's Lucas Place mansion. Sample, an African American, sixty-two years old, was employed as a porter. The scant availability of nineteenth-century marriage records for African Americans makes it difficult to confirm this second purported marriage. It may not have existed. A second listing for William Sample in the 1880 census also shows him working as a porter and living by himself in a small rooming house at 511 Pine Street in the heart of the St. Louis business district. There can be no doubt that William Sample was William Stanton. It is unclear why he chose to list himself using Ruth's misspelled surname two times for the 1880 census and again for his entry in the city directory for 1880. In 1882, William (Sample) Stanton worked as a janitor in the Freund Building, a few doors east of the rooming house at 511 Pine Street. The following year, he became the janitor at the Fruin Building on the northeast corner of Pine and 6th Streets, a few doors west of 511 Pine. He worked in the Fruin Building until his health gave out. He died of cirrhosis of the liver on July 5, 1885.[48]

As noted in the *Post-Dispatch* interview, Ruth Stanton inherited her husband's job in the Fruin Building. She subsequently moved to the rooming house at 511 Pine Street, where she lived until 1895. City directories from 1887 to 1895 list Margaret R. Stanton, widow of William, living at that address. For unknown reasons, Ruth Stanton began calling herself Margaret in the early 1880s after she married William Stanton. Semple family members never called her by that name. In the late 1890s, Ruth's job as janitress ended when the Fruin Building

48. "She Nursed Bob Lincoln," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894. The census enumerator incorrectly entered Sample for William's surname. U.S. Census, 1880, 730, 47B, 34. The 1880 city directory lists William Semple, a porter, as living at 711 North 14th Street. The 1881 directory lists William Stanton, a porter living at 711 North 14th Street. U.S. Census, 1880, 717, 165B, 23; *Gould's St. Louis Directory for 1880* (St. Louis: David B. Gould, 1880), 939 (hereafter cited as *Gould's*, year, page); *Gould's*, 1881, 1061. As the janitor for the Freund Building, Stanton was questioned about a suicide there in August 1882. "The McMahon Mystery," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 8, 1882. The *Post-Dispatch* reporter erroneously said Stanton had died eight years before Mrs. Stanton's interview; it was nine. City of St. Louis, *Register of Deaths*, No. 3994, July 5, 1885, 112.

was torn down. As shown in the final entry for her in a city directory, she moved to a small rooming house on Wash Street in 1899.[49]

Ruth Burns Stanton died in her home in St. Louis on May 20, 1900. The physician who signed her death certificate recorded her cause of death as vascular disease of the heart and rheumatism. He also noted that she was a widow, living alone, and entered the same birthplace and birthdate that Ruth had disclosed to the *Post-Dispatch* six years earlier.[50] Mrs. Stanton and her husband are buried in Greenwood Cemetery, the first non-denominational cemetery for African Americans in St. Louis. At present, cemetery caretakers are uncertain about where their grave sites are located.[51]

49. *Gould's*, 1899, 1658. St. Louis city directories listed names of single women and widows but not names of wives. *Gould's*, 1887, 1131; *Gould's*, 1895, 1412. It is unlikely that Ruth Stanton knew the Fruin Building was revered in St. Louis as the site where the first Confederate flag was flown in April 1861. "Thirteen Bronze Tablets," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 9, 1904.

50. St. Louis Health Department, Death Certificate No. 4172, May 24, 1900, *Missouri Death Records*, Missouri State Archives, microfilm; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 24, 1900.

51. Personal communication from Shelley Morris, Greenwood Cemetery Preservation Association, St. Louis, May 18, 2020.