

# Mary Chesnut: News of Lincoln's Assassination

by Mary Boykin Chesnut *from A Diary from Dixie*

*Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut was born into a wealthy South Carolina family in 1823. She married James Chesnut who would later become a Confederate general during the U.S. Civil War. Mary and her husband were well connected, and knew many of the major figures in the Confederacy. As the Civil War began, Mary started a diary to chronicle the events of the war. As the Confederacy began to lose the war, Mary and her friends moved frequently from place to place to avoid battles and Union troops, or "Yankees." This entry from April 22, 1865. In it, she refers to General John Bell Hood, another Confederate general, and U.S. Secretary of State William Henry Seward. Chickamauga refers to the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863.*

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April 22d. –This yellow Confederate quire of paper, my journal, blotted by entries, has been buried three days with the silver sugar-dish, teapot, milk-jug, and a few spoons and forks that follow my fortunes as I wander. With these valuables was Hood's silver cup, which was partly crushed when he was wounded at Chickamauga.

It has been a wild three days, with aides galloping around with messages, Yankees hanging over us like a sword of Damocles. We have been in queer straits. We sat up at Mrs. Bedon's dressed, without once going to bed for forty-eight hours, and we were weary.

Colonel Cadwallader Jones came with a despatch, a sealed secret despatch. It was for General Chesnut. I opened it. Lincoln, old Abe Lincoln, has been killed, murdered, and Seward wounded! Why? By whom? It is simply maddening, all this.

I sent off messenger after messenger for General Chesnut. I have not the faintest idea where he is, but I know this foul murder will bring upon us worse miseries. Mary Darby says, "But they murdered him themselves. No Confederates are in Washington." "But if they see fit to accuse us of instigating it?" "Who murdered him? Who knows?" "See if they don't take vengeance on us, now that we are ruined and can not repel them any longer."

The death of Lincoln I call a warning to tyrants. He will not be the last President put to death in the capital, though he is the first.

**Questions**

1. Why do you think Mary buried the silver and her journal?
2. What does *instigating* mean here: "But if they see fit to accuse us of instigating it?"
3. What three adjectives would you use to describe the mood of this entry?
4. How do you think Mary felt about the death of Lincoln? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. tyrants
2. vengeance
3. faintest
4. valuables
5. blotted
6. despatch/dispatch

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**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "The death of Lincoln I call a warning to **tyrants**."

- a. hard workers    b. evil followers    c. other presidents    d. evil leaders

2) "See if they don't take **vengeance** on us, now that we are ruined and can not repel them any longer."

- a. revenge    b. pity    c. mercy    d. pain

3) "I have not the **faintest** idea where he is..."

- a. strongest    b. weakest    c. detailed    d. craziest

4) "With these **valuables** was Hood's silver cup..."

- a. garbage bags    b. collections    c. treasures    d. toys

5) "This yellow Confederate quire of paper, my journal, **blotted** by entries, has been buried three days..."

- a. emptied    b. confused    c. marked    d. messed up

6) "Colonel Cadwallader Jones came with a **despatch**, a sealed secret **despatch**."

- a. photograph    b. message    c. gift    d. puzzle

