TAD Chest
Research Archive

Public Edition, October 2026

American Empire chest of drawers
with twisted columns and "TAD" carved on top

Owner: Michael Brian Ellison

https://thomastadlincoln.com

Research through early November 2026. Prepared November 3, 2026.

Nothing in this document proves Lincoln ownership or use of this chest. Every theory and interpretation is marked UNCONFIRMED. Private contact details, outreach in progress, logins and payment details have been removed.

1. The object

- American Empire chest of drawers. The 2012 auction sold it as a **"cherry chest of drawers."**
- Style dating: roughly c. 1835-1855. No maker's label has been found.
- Twisted (barley-twist) columns on the lower case; twisted carving also along the bottom rail.
- Drawers: three small drawers across the top (a tiny center drawer with a keyhole), one deeper drawer, then three long drawers; wooden knobs.
- The letters **"TAD"** are carved on the top, each about 2-2.5 cm tall, with rough knife cuts.
- Weight about 200 lb.
- Each leg has a hole about 3/8 inch across in the bottom center, probably caster sockets. Whether casters were original is **UNCONFIRMED**.
- **Wood: UNCONFIRMED.** An old gouge in the top shows continuous grain with no veneer layer, read from photos in October 2026 as solid mahogany. In November 2026 a conservator, looking at photos only, guessed **figured cherry** (see §5). Only an in-person examination can settle it.

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2. How the owner acquired it

Field	Fact	Confidence
Auction house	Mountaineer Auctions, Clendenin, WV	Confirmed
Sale date	December 29, 2012	Confirmed
How billed	"cherry chest of drawers"	Confirmed
Consignor of this piece	Greg Hoover, an Ohio dealer (items tagged "GH"), not the Betty Sweet Ness estate	Confirmed (owner)
Preview evidence	iPad photo of a GH-tagged Victorian hair mourning wreath, dated Dec 28, 2012 (preview evening)	Confirmed
Newspaper ad	*The Classifieds*, Charleston, Dec 23, 2012, "Tremendous Estate Auction, Saturday December 29th, 2012." Lists a "Cherry Sheraton chest" and an "Early Cherry chest"; no twist-column chest and no Lincoln claim	Confirmed (copy from WV Archives & History)

Some 2022 press said "about 2013." Later research settled the sale date as Dec 29, 2012.

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3. Ownership chain: known and unknown

Known: before Dec 29, 2012 the chest was with dealer Greg Hoover (Ohio); on Dec 29, 2012 it was sold at Mountaineer Auctions to the present owner.

Unknown (the gap): where Hoover got the chest, and any paper trail naming this exact piece before 2012.

Candidate sources (all UNCONFIRMED):

- **Beckwith estate sale, Woodstock (Hartfield, VA), Nov 2010, lot 340** (Sold, Inc. / Cannon's): "Empire Dresser, Mahogany, Protruding Drawer over Three Drawers, Scrolled Column, American, Ca. 1835-1850." The columns are called "scrolled," not twisted, and small top drawers are not mentioned. No photos seen yet.
- **Kiko Auctioneers, Kent, Ohio, Oct 9, 2012:** listed a "Cherry Empire chest." No link to Hoover found.
- **Betty Sweet Ness estate: DEAD END** for this chest (GH items were marked separately).

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4. Theories (all UNCONFIRMED)

Theory A: Tad Lincoln carved "TAD" (owner's working theory) - UNCONFIRMED

The owner's theory is that this may have been furniture used by the Lincoln family (possibly from Abraham Lincoln's room, or later household furniture in Chicago) and that Tad carved "TAD" and the other figures on it. The owner believes the carvings were made after April 1865 as Tad's personal memorial. **None of this is established.**

Context that is real but is **not** proof:

- The letters "TAD" are carved on the top (physical fact).
- Published memoirs describe Tad damaging furniture with tools (for example Noah Brooks, *St. Nicholas*, Nov 1882).
- A child's rocker said to be Tad's, with "TAD" carved on the back, is at the Lincoln Heritage Museum, Lincoln, IL. Its provenance and accession number have not been found.
- The Lincolns stored some furniture in Springfield in 1861 (1983 NPS Lincoln Home Historic Furnishings Report). No record of that stored furniture after 1865 has been found.

Against, or gaps:

- No archive, museum, newspaper, inventory or auction catalog has been found that documents **this** chest as a Lincoln piece.
- White House furniture was government property; most Springfield household furniture was sold in 1861.
- A conservator's photo-based opinion (Nov 2026) dates the chest to about 1830-40, roughly 20 years before Tad's birth in 1853. An older piece could still have been used later, but this is no evidence of Lincoln use.
- The May 26, 1865 "Inventory taken at President's House" (NARA Microfilm M371, Roll 27, pp. 313-320) names no Willie or Tad room and lists no "mahogany bureau" or "chest of drawers." It neither supports nor rules out a White House origin.

Other owner ideas, all **UNCONFIRMED** and not yet sourced: that the chest may have been made in Springfield in the 1840s-50s; that it was sold around the time of "Tad's chamber set" in 1867; that Racine, Wisconsin (where Tad is commonly said to have been at school about 1867-68) could be where it stayed; and that one carving shows a child's-eye view of the casket.

Theory B: Isham family / Parke-Bernet dispersal - UNCONFIRMED, no match found

- 1939 Parke-Bernet (Lincoln Isham lots): no match. **DEAD END.**
- Feb 19, 1972 Parke-Bernet sale 3318: no Empire chest. **DEAD END.**
- Feb 23, 1972 Parke-Bernet sale 191 (Lincoln Isham estate): no Empire chest, no "Tad." **DEAD END.**

Theory C: Hildene / Mary Lincoln "Peggy" Beckwith - UNCONFIRMED, likely dead end

- The 1975 Masterson-O'Connell appraisal lists a "mahogany chest of drawers formerly surmounted by a mirror... molded frieze drawer above three deep drawers." The drawer layout does not match.
- The Bennington probate file names no matching chest. Inventories for the Christian Science bequest are unavailable.

Theory D: Beckwith 2010 lot 340 reached Hoover - UNCONFIRMED

The strongest auction candidate by period and form, but the wording differs (see §3). Newspaper ads for that sale give no item descriptions.

Theory E: Alston / Benedict parlor suite - documented, but a different object

Documented: Chicago merchant John Alston bought Mary Lincoln's rosewood front parlor suite on Nov 1, 1867 ($2,094.50 net, bill signed "Mrs. A. Lincoln"). In Feb 1927 Henry Ford bought a six-piece suite for $3,000 through Toronto auctioneer W. Ward Price, acting for "C. L. Benedict of Perth" (Benson Ford Research Center files, accession 27.56). The sofa and couch were later lost in a 1970 fire; chairs and a center table survive at The Henry Ford. The museum's 1981 research concluded the suite was most probably bought for the Chicago home in 1866, not Springfield. John Alston's will and estate appraisement name no bureau.

This trail concerns parlor furniture, not this chest. Any link to the chest is **UNCONFIRMED**, and none has been shown.

Theory F: an ordinary antique with unrelated initials - always possible

The chest may be an ordinary 1830s-50s chest, with "TAD" as later graffiti or unrelated initials. No maker's mark has been identified.

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5. Physical examination notes

Construction

- Square (cut) nails in the interior framing, consistent with an original pre-1890 frame.
- Later repairs: pale strips with round-headed wire nails on two drawers (after about 1890); drawer bottoms have been reattached.
- Drawer fronts: a thick (about 1/2 inch) show-wood facing over a pale, curly-figured backing board (curly maple or figured poplar, **UNCONFIRMED**), with hand-cut, widely spaced dovetails.
- Barley-twist columns: each reported as one solid, fully round, hand-carved piece (owner's observation).
- Back: frame-and-panel construction.
- **Nov 2026 (owner's reported observations, details still being documented):** pocket-screw construction has been noted, and holes along the back of the top that may relate to a missing backsplash (see the conservator opinion below). Neither has been examined by a specialist. **UNCONFIRMED.**

Conservator opinion (Nov 2, 2026; photos only)

Tom Heller, Heller Conservation Services (Tennessee), wrote that he would guess **figured cherry**, made about **1830-40**, possibly by a western Pennsylvania or Ohio maker, possibly **missing a splashboard** at the back of the top, and "very likely" made about 20 years before Tad's birth. He said no examination could prove or disprove a Lincoln association. This is his stated opinion from photographs, not a finding from an in-person examination. **Wood identification is pending.**

He also described a **crackle test**: if the finish down in a carving shows the same crackle as the surface finish, the carving was cut before that finish went on. The TAD letters were cleaned in October 2026, so the test is compromised there, but it can still be tried on the untouched carvings.

Possible mark: a faded ink stencil about the width of a dime, unreadable. It could be a lumber, shipping or dealer mark. A 365 nm UV photo is planned.

Drawer locks: only the 2nd and 3rd drawers have locks, held by four square nails. An antique barrel key turns slightly; the bolt appears stuck, not a dummy. The stamped mark on the lock plate is unreadable (**DEAD END**). The lock will not be removed or forced.

Carvings (owner's readings; all UNCONFIRMED)

- "TAD" on top: the owner reads the T as an osprey with talons in a fish, the A with a climbing caterpillar, and the D holding a fish (a "figural alphabet"). A shellac fill over the letters was removed with alcohol.
- Back panel: large initials read as "TRL" or "TL," a possible fishing scene, and many knife scratches. Filtered photos show at most a possible pole and hanging fish.

- A possible scene of a figure in a long coat with the head snapped back, and a round hole near the waist. Caution: Lincoln was shot in the head, and a round hole could be an old nail, screw or peg hole.
- "DOG" with two X's scratched on the front.
- A faint ink drawing the owner reads as Mary Todd Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley; the photo shows two tall dark figures facing each other.
- Comparison with the Lincoln Heritage Museum rocker: the letter layouts are similar, but the cutting styles differ, so the photos do **not** show one carver.

6. Records checked

Record	Result
Cook County probate, John Alston, case 26-3218	Will and appraisement: parlor furniture only, no bureau or Lincoln item
Bennington probate, Mary Lincoln Beckwith	Listed chest does not match
Parke-Bernet Isham catalogs (1939; Feb 19, 1972; Feb 23, 1972)	No matching chest
Newberry Library: Chicago Times, June 8, 1867 sale report	No buyers, woods or Tad set named
Chicago Tribune, June 7, 1867, p. 4	Mary Lincoln furniture auction, Wm. A. Butters & Co., June 7, 1867, 375 W. Washington St.; reports list "Tad's chamber set" $150, wood not stated
Mary Baker Eddy Library	Bequest inventories unavailable
NARA M371, Roll 27, pp. 313-320 (President's House inventory, May 26, 1865)	No Tad room, no mahogany bureau
Benson Ford Research Center, accession 27.56	Documents the Benedict parlor suite purchase (1927)
WV Archives & History	Dec 23, 2012 auction ad (see §2)
Lincoln Financial Foundation "Curios and Relics: Furniture" files	No TAD-carved bureau. A 1936 file records a mahogany sideboard said to be bought from Lincoln in 1858 (a sideboard, not this chest)
1983 NPS Lincoln Home Historic Furnishings Report	Confirms some furniture was stored in Springfield in 1861
WVInfoDepot (EBSCO) databases	No hits for "Tad Lincoln" with chest or furniture
Ancestry Sisters (Lincoln Heritage Museum photos, May 2026)	No bureau or mirror match

7. Dead ends

These were checked and should not be reopened without new evidence: the Ness estate as the source; the Alston will and appraisement; Hildene and the Christian Science bequest inventories; the 1939 and 1972 Parke-Bernet Isham sales; the 1975 Hildene chest (wrong drawers); the Beckwith Bennington probate; Lincoln Home bureau LIHO 60 as a twin (plain columns); the lock-plate mark; newspaper item descriptions for the 2010 Beckwith sale; newspaper ads for the Dec 2012 sale; the 1865 President's House inventory; the Lincoln Financial Foundation furniture files; the WVInfoDepot databases; Henry Wilton's 1861 Springfield purchases (no bureau); the 1864 order to "fix up the room of Master Tad Lincoln" (no furniture link); an older Pinterest pin of the chest, which came from the owner's own Chairish listing of about 2016 and is not an independent sighting.

8. Research still to be done

- Photos of the 2010 Beckwith lot 340, to compare with this chest.
- In-person wood identification and dating by a conservator (pending).
- UV and crackle-test photos of the untouched carvings before any cleaning; a 365 nm UV photo of the ink stencil.

- Unfiltered color raking-light close-ups with a coin for scale.
- Archival records of Tad Lincoln's guardianship (1867-1872) that might list furniture or household goods.
- Any earlier sale record for the chest before Dec 2012.

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9. Press and public materials

- Parkersburg *News and Sentinel*, Aug 20, 2022, Jess Mancini, "Knock on Wood."
- Canton *Repository*, Jan 19, 2026, Gary Brown, "Hunt on for Stark ex-owner of Abraham Lincoln's dresser."
- Marietta *Times*, Oct 8, 2026, Jess Mancini, "Reedy man continues to look for proof he has Tad Lincoln's chest of drawers."
- An appraiser quoted in 2022 said proving Lincoln ownership would need letters or signed documents linking the piece. That is not an authentication.
- Owner's site, thomastadlincoln.com, and X account @TadLincoln_WV. These are the owner's own accounts and claims to test, not third-party confirmation.

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10. Photographs referred to

Site and archive photos include: the chest front (flash), the TAD letters on the top, the rear-top etching, the bird-shaped T ("osprey talon"), the multi-blade etching macro, prints under a drawer, the ink stencil ("maker's mark" with a dime for scale), the faint ink drawing of two figures, a "mystery" macro, and photo sheets of the back panel, lock mortise, twist columns, carved base rail, turned feet and hand-cut dovetails. The captions on the website are the owner's interpretations and are **UNCONFIRMED**.

Public edition prepared November 3, 2026 from the private research archive (last updated Nov 2, 2026). If you have information about this chest's history before December 2012, please use the contact method on thomastadlincoln.com.