

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Helm Place, historic estate of Lincoln's sister-in-law, for sale for first time since 1912.

Lexington, Kentucky — A Kentucky Historic Landmark with ties to Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln is for sale for the first time in 110 years. Helm Place was the home of Emilie Todd Helm, Mary Lincoln's half-sister and Abraham Lincoln's favorite in-law. But she is most famous for creating political headaches for the 16th president by staying at the White House after the battlefield death of her husband, Confederate Gen. Benjamin Hardin Helm.

The property includes an impressive antebellum mansion, 150 acres of improved horse farmland, horse barns, fields and paddocks. Located minutes from Blue Grass Airport and only seven miles from downtown Lexington, Helm Place exemplifies the beauty of Kentucky's famous Bluegrass horse country and the state's architectural history.

In 1779, on the land where Helm Place now stands, General Levi Todd built a fort known as Todd's Station. He was the grandfather of Mary Todd Lincoln and Emilie Todd Helm.

After Levi Todd abandoned the fort, the property was awarded to Col. Abraham Bowman by military grant. The Bowman family settled there in 1781, establishing a large plantation and a grist mill. Today, Bowman's Mill Road, where Helm Place is located just off Harrodsburg Road, is part of Lexington's only designated rural historic district.

The mansion, originally named Cedar Hall, was constructed by the Bowmans about 1853 and is a high-style example of Kentucky's antebellum Greek Revival architecture. It retains a remarkable degree of architectural integrity, with original hardwood floors, woodwork, mantels, wall presses, pocket doors and even Carpenter rim locks throughout the home.

After the Bowmans sold the property in 1859, it changed hands several times before the Helm family bought it in 1912. Emilie renamed the property Helm Place in honor of her late husband's ancestral home in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Living with Emilie were her three grown children, Katherine, Elodie and Ben Jr.

The Helms renovated the back porch and gallery to create a new dining room, bathroom and kitchen. Decorative touches were added, including chandeliers and wainscoting made from shutters from the Helms' previous home in Louisville. Murals were also painted, with the most impressive being a panoramic mural in the dining room depicting nearby South Elkhorn Creek. The artworks were created by Katherine Helm, an artist trained in New York. Katherine's most famous works are five portraits of her aunt, one of which is in the White House collection and once hung in the Lincoln Bedroom.

A young Emilie was affectionately referred to as "Little Sister" by the future president. In 1856, she married Ben Helm, a West Point graduate and son of a Kentucky governor. When the Civil War began, Helm declined his brother-in-law's offer to become a paymaster in the Union Army and instead joined the Confederate Army. Emilie and their young children followed him south. In 1863, she was in Georgia when her husband was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga.

After her husband's death, Emilie tried to return to family in Kentucky, but refused to take the oath of allegiance required to cross into Union territory. Soldiers, unsure what to do with the president's sister-in-law, telegraphed Lincoln. His response: "Send her to me." She became a guest in the White House, where her visit in December 1863 upset many Washingtonians. Detractors referred to her as the "Rebel in the White House."

Emilie and her children all made their final home at Helm Place. During their residency, they formed a close relationship with William Townsend, a Lexington attorney who was then one of the nation's leading experts on Abraham Lincoln. After Emilie's death in 1930, the Helm siblings, who had no children of their own, sold Helm Place to Townsend and his wife, Genevieve, but maintained life tenancies.

The Townsends' daughter, Mary Genevieve, moved into the mansion in 1946. Mary Genevieve and her husband, Joseph Murphy, Jr., whom she married in 1960, made Helm Place their home for the rest of their lives.

Mary Genevieve placed Helm Place in trust to the Kentucky Mansions Preservation Foundation in 1996. She had been involved with the KMPF for more than 20 years by the time of her death in 2000. A life tenancy was provided for her husband, who died in 2011. Helm Place transferred to the KMPF in 2012.

The property was placed in trust to the nonprofit organization with the hope that it would become a period house museum. Unfortunately, it did not come with funds for its restoration nor an endowment to support its operation as a museum. After years of research and deliberation, the KMPF, which operates the Mary Todd Lincoln House museum in downtown Lexington, reluctantly determined that the restricted use was not sustainable. Following approval from the Kentucky Attorney General's office and Fayette Circuit Court, the KMPF decided to gift historically significant items within Helm Place to other public institutions, ensure the real property was protected and sell the mansion and land to private individuals with the resources to restore and preserve them.

“We are looking for the home’s next steward to care for and enjoy this special property,” said Gwen Thompson, executive director of the Mary Todd Lincoln House.

The property has a conservation easement, a preservation easement on some portions of the mansion’s interior and is designated by the city as a Local Landmark with an historic overlay.

Helm Place is the perfect blend of Bluegrass history, elegance and convenience. The stunning mansion is surrounded by mature trees and large fields. There are 150 acres of improved horse farmland with fertile soils in Lexington’s agricultural-rural zone. Farm improvements include 37 stalls in two horse barns, three large fields and 12 paddocks. The property also includes a “garden house” that may be older than the mansion.

“Helm Place is an historical jewel, and it deserves the best care,” said James C. Klotter, Kentucky’s state historian since 1980. “The sale of the property within the guidelines provides an excellent way to preserve that past.”

This is your chance to own one of Kentucky’s most iconic properties. The property will be open for inspection from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Oct. 8, 15 and 22 or by appointment.

This will be a sealed-bid auction without reserve, with bids due Oct. 31, 2022. See all terms at BiedermanRealEstate.com

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Media folder with photos and additional information available here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1OlvbhMGGBlWMzZkOXsD62wv03hFe4fYv?usp=sharing>