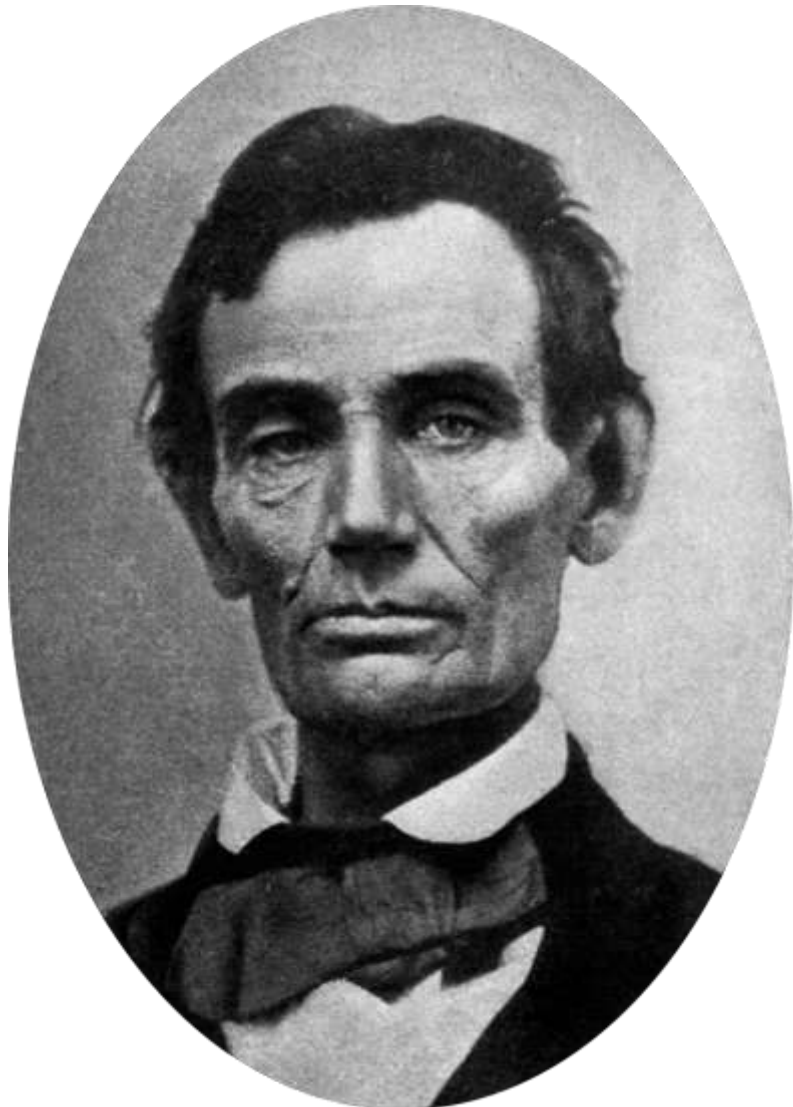


# **Why Everything You Think You Know About the Lincoln Assassination is Wrong**

**David McGowan**



In just a little over a year – in what will be an historic 150-year anniversary – the American people, and likely people all around the world, will come together in remembrance of the man who was once rather preposterously described by a biographer as “the most gentle, most magnanimous, most Christ-like ruler of all time.” That man, of course, was Abraham Lincoln, allegedly the 16th and most beloved President of these United States.

I say “allegedly” here because it is hard to see how someone could be the president of an entity that didn’t actually exist. And the reality is that during Lincoln’s tenure, there was no such thing as the “United” States. There were Northern states presided over by Washington, and there were Confederate states presided over by a parallel government in Richmond, but there certainly weren’t any “united” states. Wouldn’t it then be just as accurate to describe Jefferson Davis as the 16th president of the United States? Just checking.

I also say “allegedly” here because Lincoln was most certainly not, during his lifetime, a beloved man. He was thoroughly despised throughout half the country, and wasn’t even all that popular in the north. He received merely 40% of the popular vote in 1860 and could have, as more honest historians have noted, been very easily defeated had the Democratic Party bothered to field a viable candidate. But Lincoln was clearly the anointed one.

As we all know, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by famed actor and Southern sympathizer John Wilkes Booth on the evening of April 14, 1865 (which happened to be Good Friday) while attending a play at Ford’s Theater in Washington, DC. Just five days earlier, General Robert E. Lee had surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, effectively signaling an end to the unfathomably bloody US Civil War. What is less widely known is that the assassination of Lincoln was allegedly part of a larger plot that was to have included the simultaneous assassinations of General Grant, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State William Seward and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.



*John Wilkes Booth, in a Masonic pose*

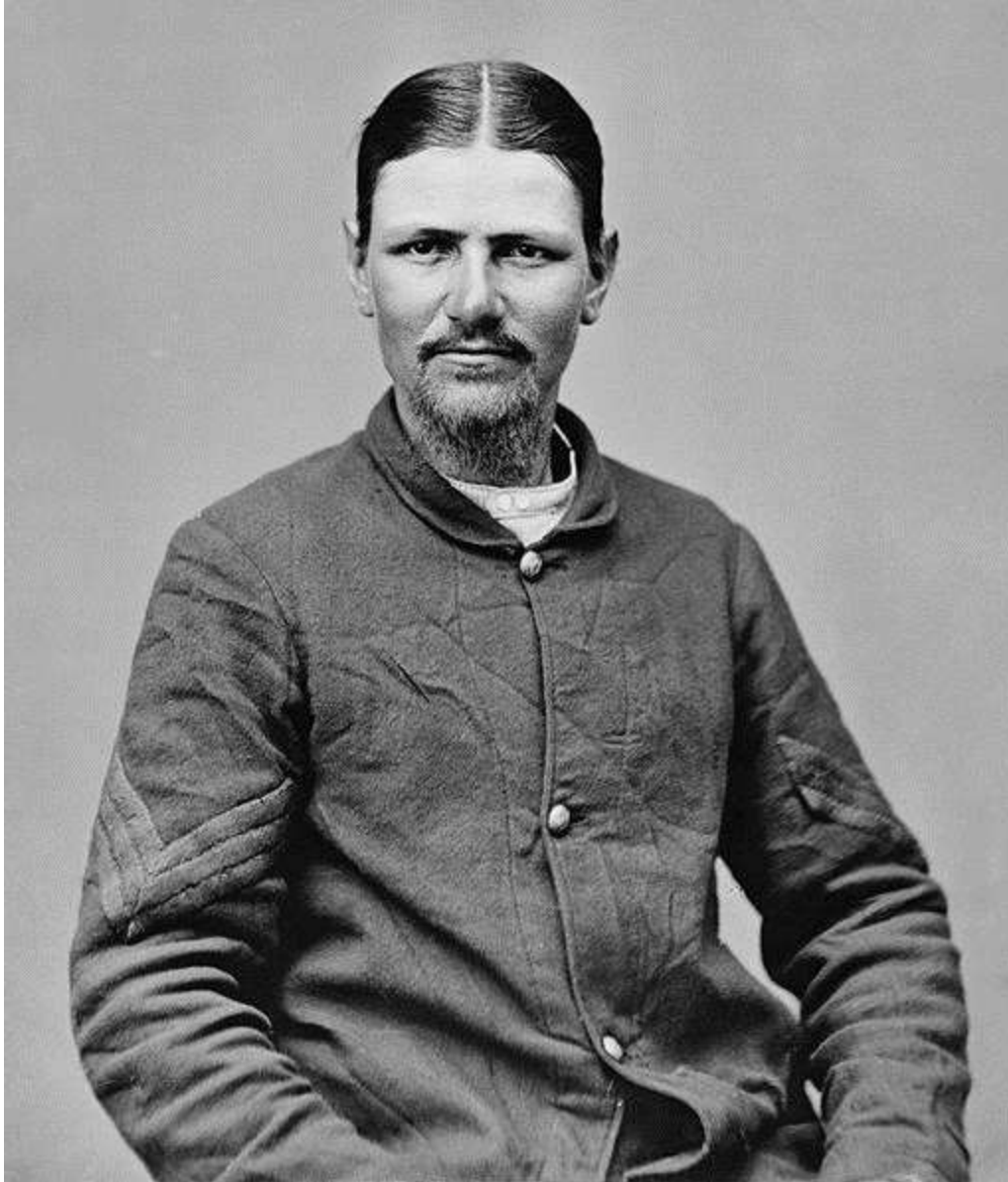
This alleged plot, which is part of the official history of the Lincoln assassination, obviously involved people other than John Wilkes Booth. Nine of those people faced trial as co-conspirators, eight by military tribunal (Mary Surrat, David Herold, George Atzerodt, Dr.

Samuel Mudd, Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Laughlen, Edward Spangler, and Lewis Paine [or Lewis Payne, or Lewis Powell, depending upon who is telling the tale]), and one who later stood trial alone (John Surrat). Four were executed, three received life sentences, one was given a six-year prison term, and one was acquitted. As for Booth, he was captured and gunned down at Garrett's barn on April 26, 1865 and so never made it to trial.

And that, in a nutshell, is the official narrative of the Lincoln assassination. It is an unusual narrative, to be sure, because it explicitly acknowledges a 'conspiracy' surrounding the death of a president. Of course, many of the details are usually left out when the story is told, leading many to think of John Wilkes Booth as just another 'lone nut' assassin. But Booth was hardly a lone nut and there was in fact a conspiracy at the heart of the Lincoln assassination, though the people targeted by the government weren't the real conspirators; the real conspirators were the very people who orchestrated the witch hunt against the scapegoats.

But before we get to that, let's first skip ahead and look at some of the forgotten aftermath of the assassination, because there is always much to be learned by examining the fates that befall those involved to varying degrees in political conspiracies, especially those unfortunate souls whose names are largely consigned to the dustbins of history.

Let's begin with Sergeant Thomas "Boston" Corbett, the Jack Ruby of the Lincoln assassination. Corbett was a strange character if ever there was one. How strange, you ask? Strange enough to have reportedly castrated himself circa 1858, and to have then opted not to seek medical attention until he had tended to other, apparently more important, business. He was widely considered to be mentally unbalanced, shockingly enough, and he often spoke of hearing disembodied voices. He was mockingly referred to by his fellow soldiers as "the Glory to God man" due to his rather unorthodox religious beliefs, which he wasn't shy about sharing.



*Thomas "Boston" Corbett*

Due to his bizarre behavior and his unwillingness, or inability, to follow orders, Corbett had been court-martialed and discharged from the service. For some unexplained reason though, he was allowed to re-enlist in 1863 and he quickly thereafter rose to the rank of sergeant. In April 1865, he was assigned to the elite team that captured Booth and, in defiance of direct orders, he personally shot and killed the man who was said to be Booth. Corbett was never reprimanded or disciplined for his actions and in fact profited handsomely by touring the country for years as "The Man Who Killed Booth."

In 1887, Corbett was appointed as the clerk/doorman of the Kansas state legislature. Things didn't go so well for him after that. According to some reports, one day he just decided to shoot the place up, though other accounts hold that he didn't fire his weapon but merely brandished it and issued threats. Whatever the case, he quickly found himself committed to a mental asylum.

He managed to escape soon enough though and may have briefly surfaced in Texas before never being seen or heard from again.

Let's next turn our attention to Major Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris, the couple who were sharing the presidential box at Ford's Theater with Abe and Mary Lincoln. At the time, Rathbone was dating Harris, who was both Rathbone's stepsister and the daughter of US Senator Ira Harris. Rathbone was reportedly deeply cut when he attempted to disarm and detain Booth, who escaped by leaping over the railing and onto the stage.



*Clara Harris*



*Major Henry Rathbone*

Rathbone later married Harris and the two started a family and moved to Germany, where Rathbone served as the US Consul to Hanover. Things didn't work out so well though for the Rathbones; in December 1883, Henry tried to kill his children and, when thwarted in that effort, instead shot and brutally carved up wife Clara, before turning the knife on himself. Like Corbett, he was sent off to an asylum, but unlike Corbett, Henry Rathbone spent the rest of his life there. Since I mentioned Mary Todd Lincoln just a couple paragraphs ago, I should probably mention that she also ended up in an insane asylum. Always a bit on the crazy side, Mary became considerably crazier after the assassination, exhibiting increasingly erratic behavior and suffering from vivid hallucinations. She was ultimately committed by her own son, Robert Todd Lincoln.

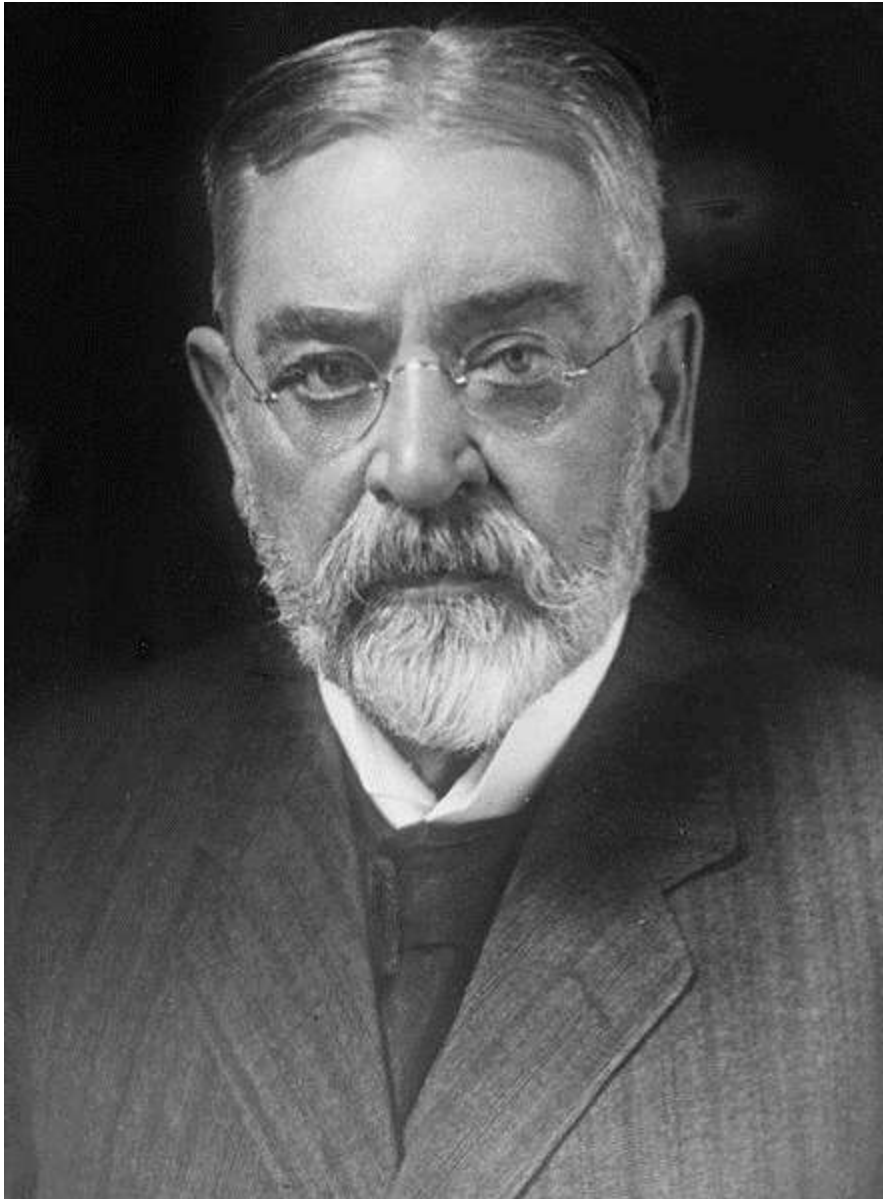


*Mary Todd Lincoln*

To say that Robert Lincoln had some rather unusual aspects to his life story would be quite an understatement. To begin with, we could note that he had the distinction of being the only man in history with direct links to three presidential assassinations. Just twenty-one when his father was gunned down, he subsequently was present at the assassinations of James Garfield in 1881 and William McKinley in 1901. He was also the only Lincoln son to survive his childhood; brother Eddie died at age 3 in 1850, brother Willie at age 11 in 1862, and brother Tad barely made it to age 18 before dying in 1871.

According to Robert Lincoln's own account, he was involved in a truly bizarre incident in late 1864/early 1865, not long before the death of his father. The younger Lincoln was saved from serious injury and possible death when he was pulled to safety by a stranger during a mishap on a train platform. That stranger just happened to be Edwin Booth, an older brother of John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln later maintained a long-term friendship and possible romance with Lucy Hale,

the daughter of US Senator John Hale and a former paramour and fiancé of John Wilkes Booth. Small world, I guess.



*Robert Todd Lincoln*

Speaking of Edwin Booth, on June 9, 1893, just as his casket was being carried for burial (he had died two days earlier), Ford's Theater mysteriously collapsed, killing 22 people and injuring another 68. The building had been converted into a government record storage facility and some of the records of the assassination were lost in the wreckage. Shit happens.

Edwin and John's sister, Rosalie Booth, died under mysterious circumstances in January 1880; rumors at the time spoke of a "mysterious assailant." Edwin Booth Clark, a son of sister Asia Booth and therefore a nephew of John Wilkes Booth, attended Annapolis and became a US Naval officer, but he thereafter disappeared at sea. Officially, he committed suicide by jumping overboard. And Junius Brutus Booth, the patriarch of the Booth clan, is said to have gone insane.



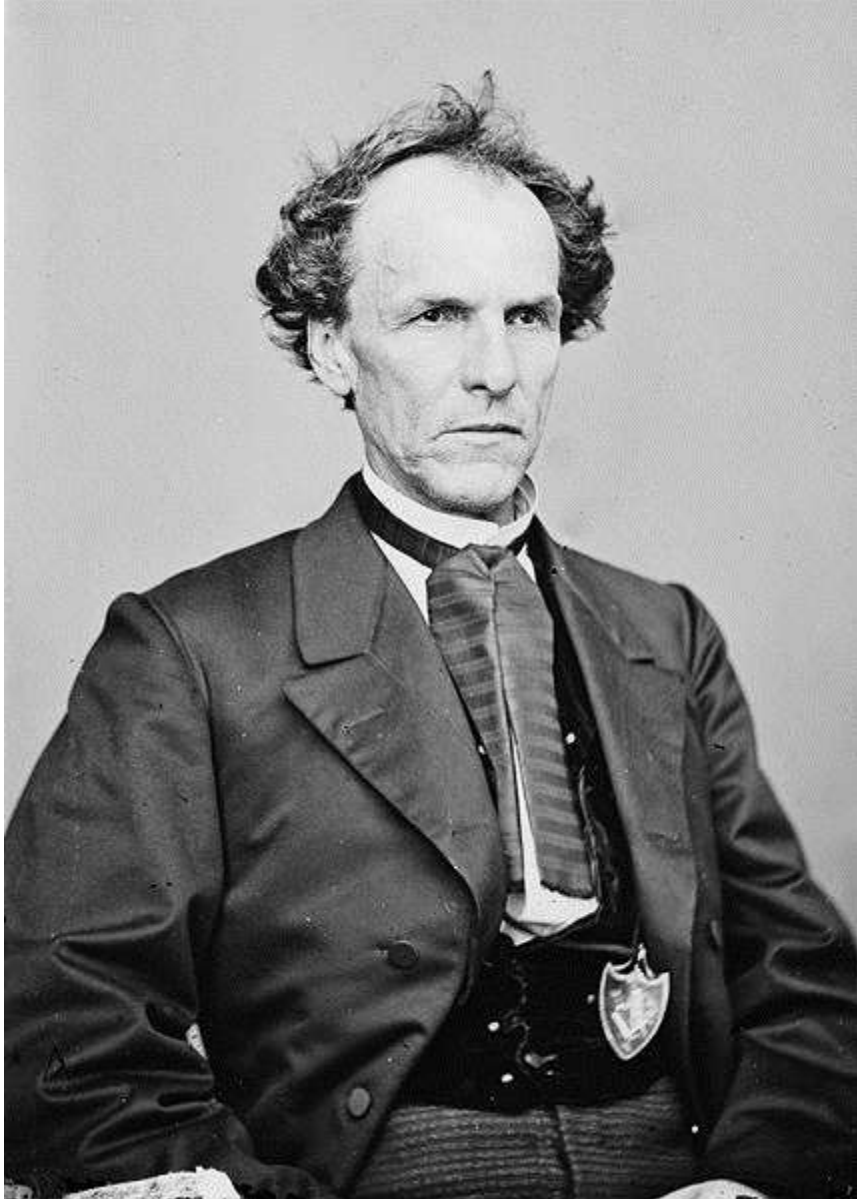


*The Booth siblings – John Wilkes, Edwin and Junius, Jr.*

US Senator Preston King, credited with being one of the guys who supposedly prevented a mercy petition on behalf of Mary Surrat from reaching President Andrew Johnson, decided on November 12, 1865 to go swimming in New York with a bag of bullets tied around his neck. Officially, his death was a very innovative suicide. US Senator James Lane, the other guy credited with supposedly preventing the mercy petition on behalf of Surrat from reaching Johnson, shot himself in the head while jumping from a carriage in Leavenworth, Kansas on July 1, 1866. Or else he slit his own throat. Whichever sounds better to you.

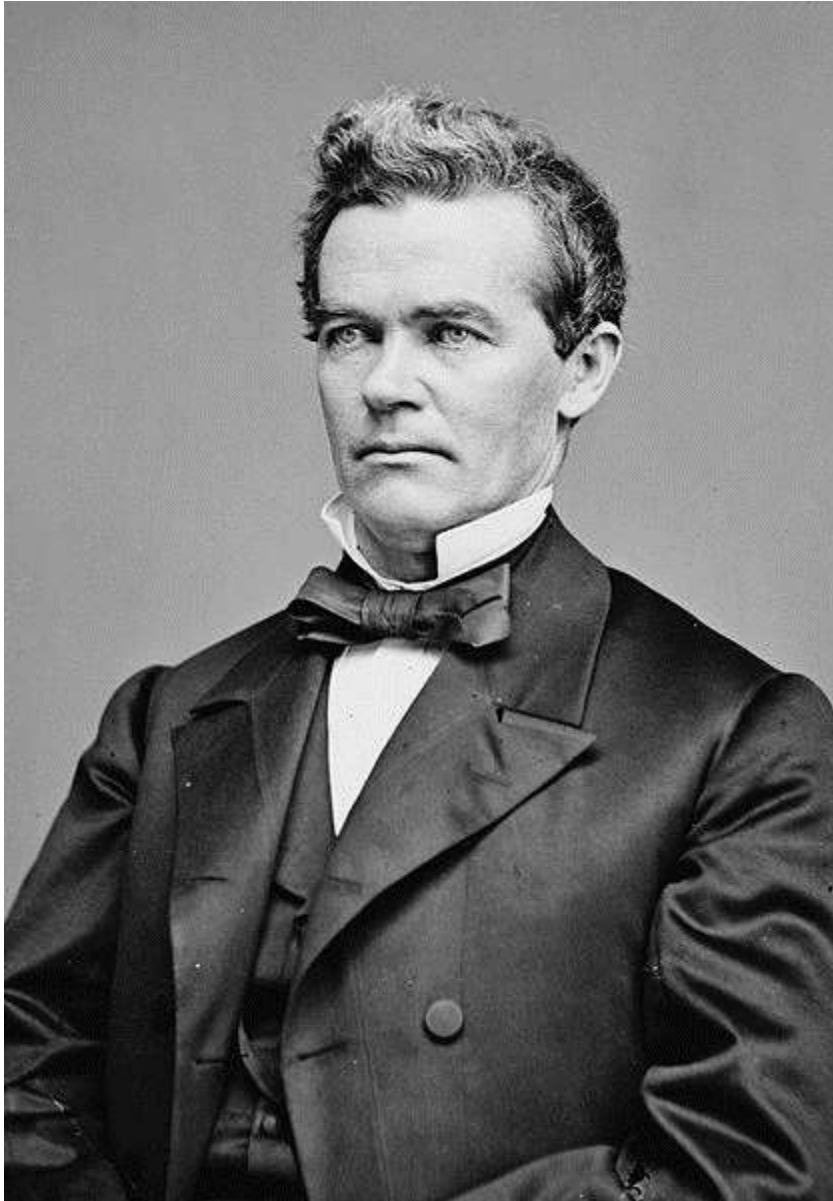


*Senator Preston King*



*Senator James Lane*

US Senator John Conness, a likely conspirator and a pallbearer at Lincoln's funeral, was committed to an insane asylum, where he later died. There was a lot of that sort of thing going around in those days. The body of William Peterson – the owner of the boardinghouse where Lincoln was taken immediately after being shot, and where he died the next morning – was found on the grounds of the Smithsonian loaded with the drug laudanum. His death, needless to say, was ruled a suicide.



*Senator John Conness*

Colonel William Browning, who was Vice President Andrew Johnson's personal secretary as well as being a personal friend to John Wilkes Booth (Browning claimed that Johnson was close to Booth as well), is believed to have been murdered, though details are sketchy. Less sketchy were the murders of Frank Boyle and William Watson, both of whom had the misfortune of physically resembling John Wilkes Booth. Both of their bodies were turned over to the War Department by overzealous vigilantes for the reward that was being offered. Stanton's department covered up the murders by unceremoniously disposing of the bodies, one of which was dumped into the Potomac River.

Frances Adeline Seward and Frances Adeline "Fanny" Seward had the misfortune of bearing witness to the staged attack on William Seward, sitting Secretary of State and the husband of Frances and the father of Fanny. Frances died of a reported heart attack on June 21, 1865, the summer solstice, just two months after the assassination of Lincoln and the alleged attempt on

her husband's life. Fanny died the next year, on October 29, 1866, just before Halloween. She was just twenty-one; the cause of her death remains unknown. A few years later, in 1870, William Seward legally 'adopted' his young 'companion,' Olive Risley, as his 'daughter.' Risley was 26 at the time and Seward was 69.



*William Seward, in a Masonic pose, with daughter Fanny*

Lafayette Baker was undoubtedly one of the central conspirators involved in the Lincoln assassination. As 'Honest' Abe's spymaster and head of the NDP, forerunner of the US Secret Service, Baker had instituted a reign of terror, just as he had previously done as a member of San Francisco's Vigilance Committee, running roughshod over the US Constitution. Under Baker's (and Stanton's) tyrannical watch, there were 260,000 dubious arrests made and some 38,000 people held without trial as political prisoners. Baker also introduced such

innovations as midnight raids, forced entry without warrants, imprisonment without bail, and summary arrests.

Circa 1867, Baker published a book revealing the existence of what was said to be Booth's suppressed diary. He subsequently barricaded himself in his home and told friends that a secret cabal was intent on killing him. Press reports from December 1867 through February 1868 tell of repeated attempts made on his life; he was shot at twice, stabbed on his own front porch, and beaten by three or four men who attempted to abduct him. Nevertheless, when he turned up dead on July 3, 1868, the cause of death was said to be meningitis, necessitating an immediate, sealed burial. A later exhumation though indicated that the cause of death was actually arsenic poisoning. Baker left behind cryptic notes alluding to a conspiracy behind the Lincoln assassination involving eleven members of Congress, twelve US Army officers, three US Navy officers, one governor, five bankers, three nationally known newspapermen, and eleven wealthy industrialists.

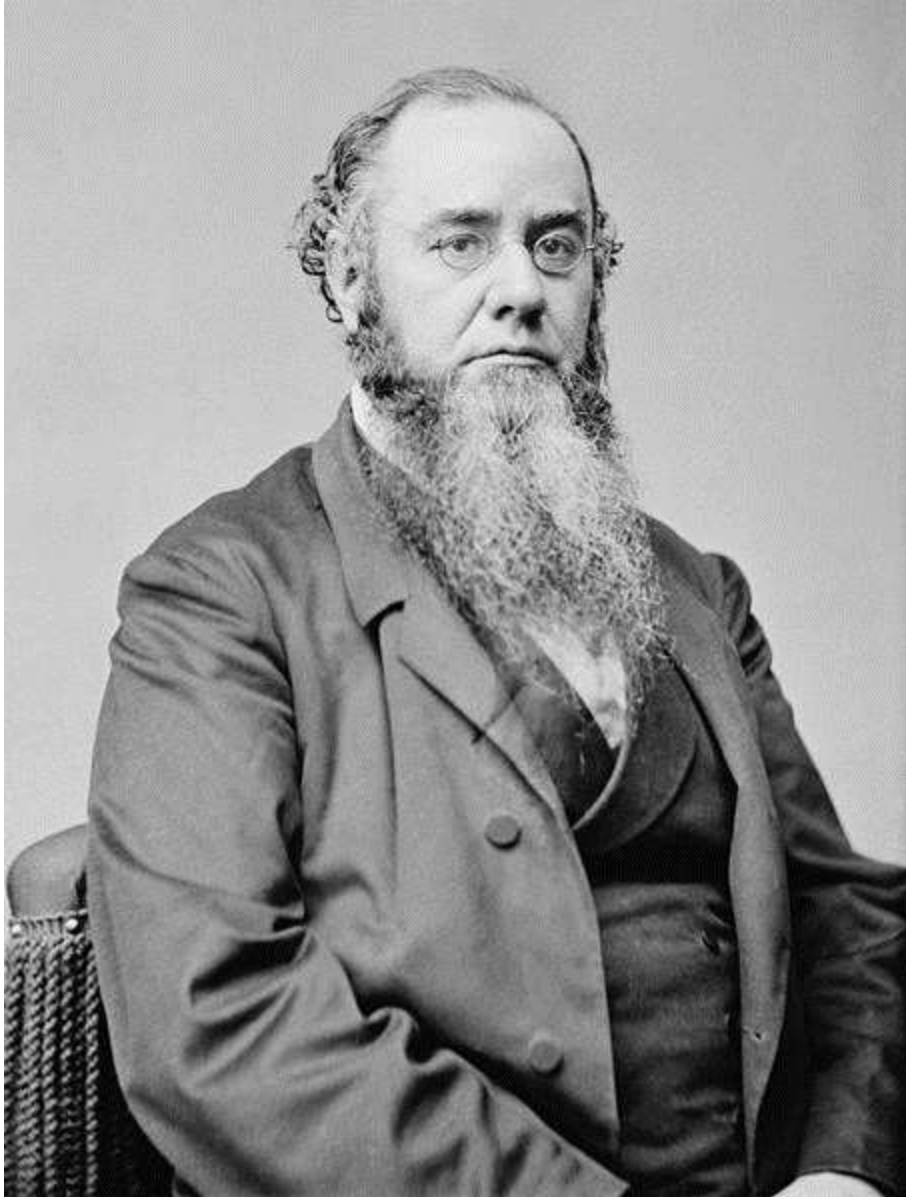


### *Lafayette Baker*

Police officer John F. Parker had the dubious distinction of being the guy who was supposed to be guarding Lincoln at the time of the assassination, except that he instead opted to wander over next door to get good and drunk. Parker had a seriously checkered history with the department, having been written up on multiple occasions for conduct unbecoming an officer, the use of insolent language, visiting a house of prostitution, inappropriately discharging his weapon, sleeping on duty, and being drunk on duty. He was nevertheless assigned the task of guarding the president, a development that historians have been unable to explain. And he was assigned that task just in time to be neglecting his duties when Lincoln was shot.

Parker was never reprimanded in any way for abandoning his post and leaving the president vulnerable. In fact, he was returned to duty at the White House, an honor usually reserved for senior officers with unblemished records. He was released from duty though in 1868, just after Stanton relinquished his post as Secretary of War. Parker was never seen or heard from again, and it is believed that he was either killed or went into hiding to avoid being killed.

Next up is Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War and a seriously deranged individual. Prior to his emergence on the national scene, Stanton's greatest claim-to-fame was securing an acquittal for US Representative Daniel Sickles on murder charges. On February 27, 1859, Sickles had gunned down the unarmed Philip Barton Key II, US Attorney for the District of Columbia and the son of famed composer Francis Scott Key. Stanton argued a temporary insanity defense for the first time in US history.



*Edwin Stanton*

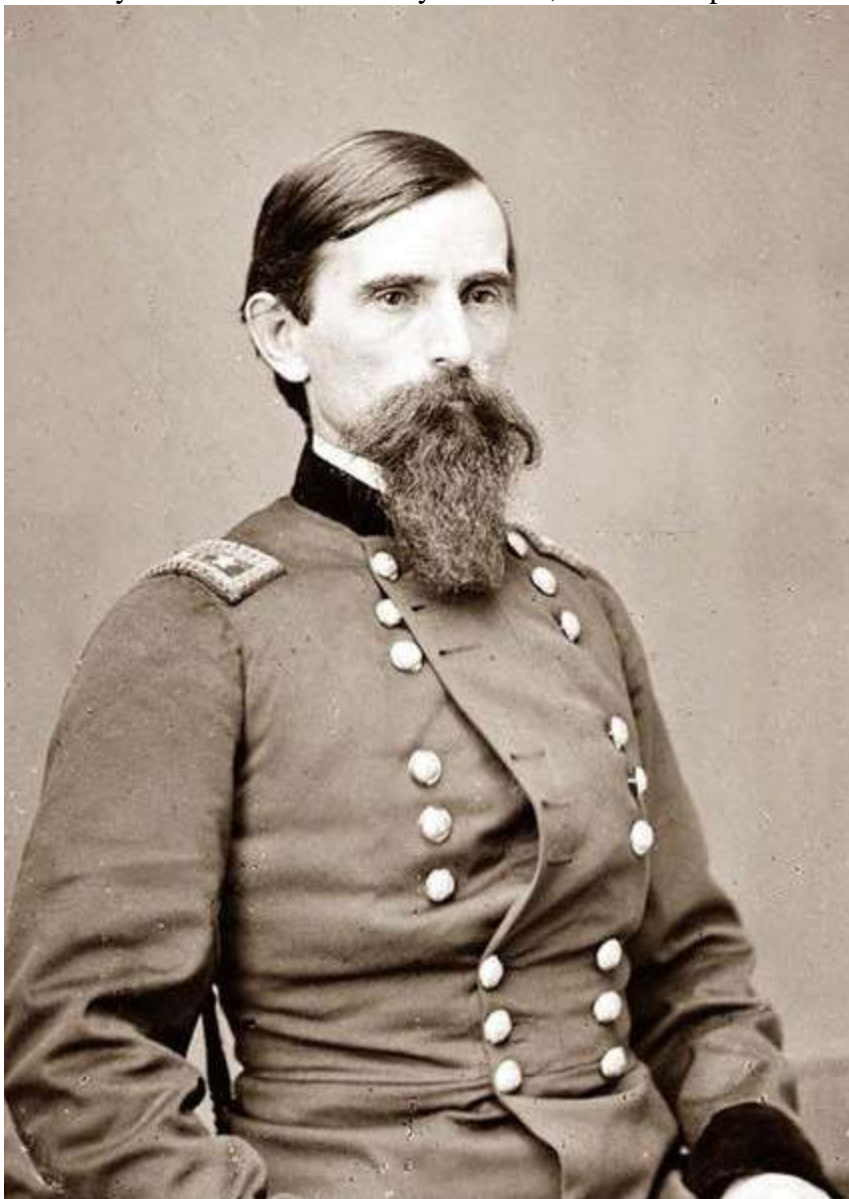
The media, apparently every bit as corrupt in those days as it is today, overwhelmingly supported Sickles while vilifying both Key and Sickles' wife, who had reportedly been having an affair. Though standing trial for a capital offense, Sickles was allowed to stay in his jailer's apartment, have unlimited visitors, and, most amazingly, retain his weapon. As already stated, Sickles was acquitted and was subsequently allowed to retain his seat in the House of Representatives. He later became a Civil War general and the US Minister to Spain.

Elsewhere in Stanton's biography, we find that at various times in his life he personally ordered the exhumation of at least two bodies, one of them being his daughter Lucy, who was dug up circa 1842. According to reports, Stanton kept his daughter's decomposing corpse in a special container in his home for at least a year. Nothing there that would cause anyone to question his fitness to serve as Secretary of War.



Stanton became a national figure when he was appointed by President Buchanan to serve as Attorney General on December 20, 1860, just weeks before Lincoln took office. He went on to wield considerable power in both the Lincoln and Johnson Administrations. Indeed, Johnson's attempted dismissal of Stanton led directly to the impeachment proceedings begun against him. Stanton's reign came to an end though on December 24, 1869, when he turned up dead of unstated causes (though some reports allude to suicide, just as his brother had reportedly done in 1846). He had been nominated for a seat on the US Supreme Court by President Grant and confirmed by the US Senate, but he died before he could take that seat.

That is a whole lot of tragedy to befall a lot of people who were in a position to know more about the Lincoln assassination than they should have. There was though at least one guy who saw his fortunes rise. Major General Lew Wallace was a member of the hopelessly corrupt military tribunal that sat in judgment of Mary Surrat and others. In 1880, he became far better known as a writer of historical fiction when he wrote and published *Ben Hur*, the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century. Well over a hundred years later, it is still in print.



*Lew Wallace*

I know what you must be thinking here: “How the hell could you leave Francis Tumblety out of the previous post? Compared to him, guys like Boston Corbett, Henry Rathbone and Edwin Stanton seem perfectly sane. And whose name was in the news in a weirder way in the years following the assassination than the esteemed Dr. Francis Tumblety? And in addition, doesn’t he deserve honorable mention for the ridiculous facial hair alone?”

I can’t really argue much with any of that. I think it was probably a subconscious omission so that I would have something really good to start this post with. Because as stories go, the Francis Tumblety story is pretty damn good. And seriously strange. But before getting to that, I must also quickly add Father Wiget to the list. Not much can be dug up on him other than that he was assigned as Mary Surrat’s spiritual adviser during the brief period that she sat in her cell waiting to be executed, and he died shortly thereafter.

Moving on now to the man of the hour, Francis Tumblety was arrested on May 5, 1865, on suspicion of being complicit in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. Tumblety was an associate of – and by some reports a sometime employer of – executed conspirator David Herold. His arrest was ordered by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. To be fair to Tumblety though, it should be noted that he was only one of some 2,000 people who were arrested as possible conspirators. That’s how things work in a democracy, you see – falsely imprison first, ask questions later.



*The esteemed Dr. Francis Tumblety*

In any event, Tumblety was held for nearly a month before being released on May 30, 1865. Prior to his arrest, he had lived a very colorful life. Born circa 1833 and raised in New York, Tumblety was widely viewed as a charlatan and a kook. While still a minor, he reportedly peddled pornographic materials. He soon transformed into a quack “Indian herb doctor” who was run out of various parts of the country for running cons. In one reported case, he was directly involved in the death of a ‘patient,’ though he suffered no repercussions for his actions. According to one account, he kept a collection of human uteruses on display in his Washington, DC home.

Some twenty-three years after his arrest in Washington, Tumblety took up lodging in, of all places, a boardinghouse in London’s Whitechapel district. He was identified at that time, and has been identified by various researchers since that time, as being a prime suspect in the still

unsolved Jack the Ripper murders. Following an arrest on November 7, 1888 for “gross indecency,” Tumblety fled the country on November 20 under an assumed name and quickly made his way back to the US, where he died some five years later.

What are the odds, one wonders, that the very same guy would be suspected of involvement in two such completely different and seemingly unconnected crimes? Two crimes separated by a vast ocean and the passage of nearly two-and-a-half decades? Probably about the same odds that a guy like [John Phillips would have connections to both the Black Dahlia murder and the Manson bloodbath.](#)

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Pictured below is the single-shot derringer that, according to the legend we all know so well, John Wilkes Booth used to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. One of the most iconic pieces of historical memorabilia that this country has to offer, it has been displayed for decades, viewed by millions, and written about by thousands. But after the passage of 149 years, it doesn't appear that anyone has ever thought to question why Booth, an intelligent and educated man by all accounts, would choose such a ridiculous weapon to take with him on his mission.



Let's imagine that it is the evening of April 14, 1865, and you are John Wilkes Booth. Your mission is to assassinate the president. In a crowded theater. In the middle of Washington, which, at the time, is heavily fortified and militarized. Because there is, you know, a war going on. And the enemy's base of operations – in Richmond, Virginia – is only 100 miles away. So the nation's capital is crawling with armed military personnel, armed police patrols, and armed thugs in the employ of Baker and Stanton.

Your mission then is not going to be an easy one. The president is under armed guard, or at least he's supposed to be. He's also supposed to be in the company of General Ulysses S. Grant, who is known to always be armed. Of course, Grant has fortuitously opted to get the hell out of Dodge just hours before he was to have accompanied the Lincolns to the theater, but you shouldn't have any way of knowing that, just as you shouldn't have any way of knowing that Parker will desert his post. And there will be no shortage of other armed personnel in Ford's Theater, including Army Captain Theodore McGowan (no relation), who is seated very near the door to Lincoln's box seats.

So you have to assume that you're going to have to get past at least two armed attendants, and probably more, to get to the president. And you're going to have to do that without firing a shot, since you only have one and you will need to save that for Abe. And since the only realistic chance you have of actually killing Lincoln with your wildly inaccurate weapon is by sneaking up behind him and delivering a contact wound to his head, you're going to have to get past any guards without making any noise. And since Grant is supposedly also on the hit list, you're going to have to kill him as well, which I guess you'll have to do by bludgeoning him with your empty gun. That should work out pretty well.



*Ford's Theater, circa 1865*

You're not on a suicide mission, by the way, so even if you somehow manage to successfully assassinate the president, and presumably General Grant as well, you're still going to have some major problems on your hands. First of all, you're going to have to make your escape from a theater full of people, many of them armed. Because in April 1865, the beginning of the era that will be mythologized as the 'Wild West' days, there are guns everywhere and everyone is packing heat. And you, of course, will have blown your wad and will be unarmed. If you somehow manage to make your way out of the theater, then you will face the daunting prospect of making your way out of the city and across the Potomac. And as I may have mentioned, DC is swarming with armed soldiers, armed spies and armed police, as well as armed



citizens. And your only means of defending yourself will be with a dagger, which probably isn't going to be very effective.

Your goal is to reach the Navy Yard Bridge, which will get you across the Potomac and to relative safety. But even if you reach it, you've still got a big hurdle to overcome: the bridge has a strict curfew and the armed guard is under standing orders not to allow anyone to cross without explicit authorization. If you attempt to cross without anyway, you will be shot. A gun might come in handy, but you won't have one.



*The Navy Yard Bridge, John Wilkes Booth's passage out of town*

To recap then, you have set a very ambitious goal for yourself. You must first get to the president, who is sitting in a private box in a crowded theater with at least two armed attendants. You must then kill the president with a single shot, because your weapon doesn't allow for second chances, and also somehow kill General Grant. You must then, in an unarmed state, make an escape first from the theater and then from the city, and you must get past an armed guard at the bridge. And you have to do all of that with just one bullet. It's hard to see how anything could go wrong with such a brilliant plan.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. There are other weapons available. Weapons better suited to your mission. And as an alleged Southern operative, you should surely know that. It was, after all, Confederate guerilla groups that pioneered the shock-and-awe tactic of using overwhelming force in the form of multiple revolvers. We've all seen images of Wild West gunslingers riding hard with their reins in their teeth, six-shooters blazing in both hands. It's only natural to dismiss such images as a hackneyed Hollywood creation. But strangely enough, it's actually not. Rebel groups like Mosby's Rangers and Quantrill's Raiders really did train to do exactly that. And they wore custom-made holsters that could hold as many as six revolvers, three

on each side. That allowed them to get off as many as 36 shots before their overwhelmed Union adversaries, armed with muskets, could reload and get off so much as a second shot. Those semi-mythical figures in American history that we know as Frank and Jesse James, and Jim, Bob, John and Cole Younger, and Bill, Grat, Bob and Emmett Dalton, learned the skills they later employed as Wild West ‘outlaws’ while riding with the likes of William Quantrill and “Bloody Bill” Anderson. But that’s not really the point here – the point here is that revolvers are easy to come by and might serve you better than a nearly-worthless single-shot derringer. And according to the official story, you definitely have access to at least two of them (pictured below).



There are other things you might want to consider as well, such as not committing the crime as John Wilkes Booth. You are, after all, a famous stage actor, which means that you are also a wardrobe and makeup guy. Because in your era, you and your contemporaries have to handle

those duties yourselves, so you travel with a couple large trunks full of stuff like wigs and fake beards. You could easily don a convincing disguise so as not to be easily recognized. Then you don't have to worry about getting out of the city alive; all you have to do is make it out of the theater, quickly ditch the disguise, and then you can circle around and rejoin the crowd at Ford's without arousing any suspicion at all.

And you do, after all, have a lot at stake. Even if you manage to make an escape from DC, your lifestyle and career will be distant memories. All the fame, all the female adoration, all the success, all the wealth ... it will all be gone if you commit the crime as John Wilkes Booth. So you might want to put on a disguise. And replace that derringer with a revolver or two. And maybe bring an accomplice or two along for additional firepower. You have quite a few co-conspirators to choose from.

You also might want to reconsider whether Ford's Theater is the best place to do this. According to numerous historians, Lincoln has a bad habit of ignoring advice from aides and strolling around Washington unescorted at times, leaving him seriously vulnerable. That might make it a bit easier to successfully pull this off.





FANNY BROWN  
(‘Pretty Fay Brown’)

*Fanny Brown, one of Booth’s many paramours*

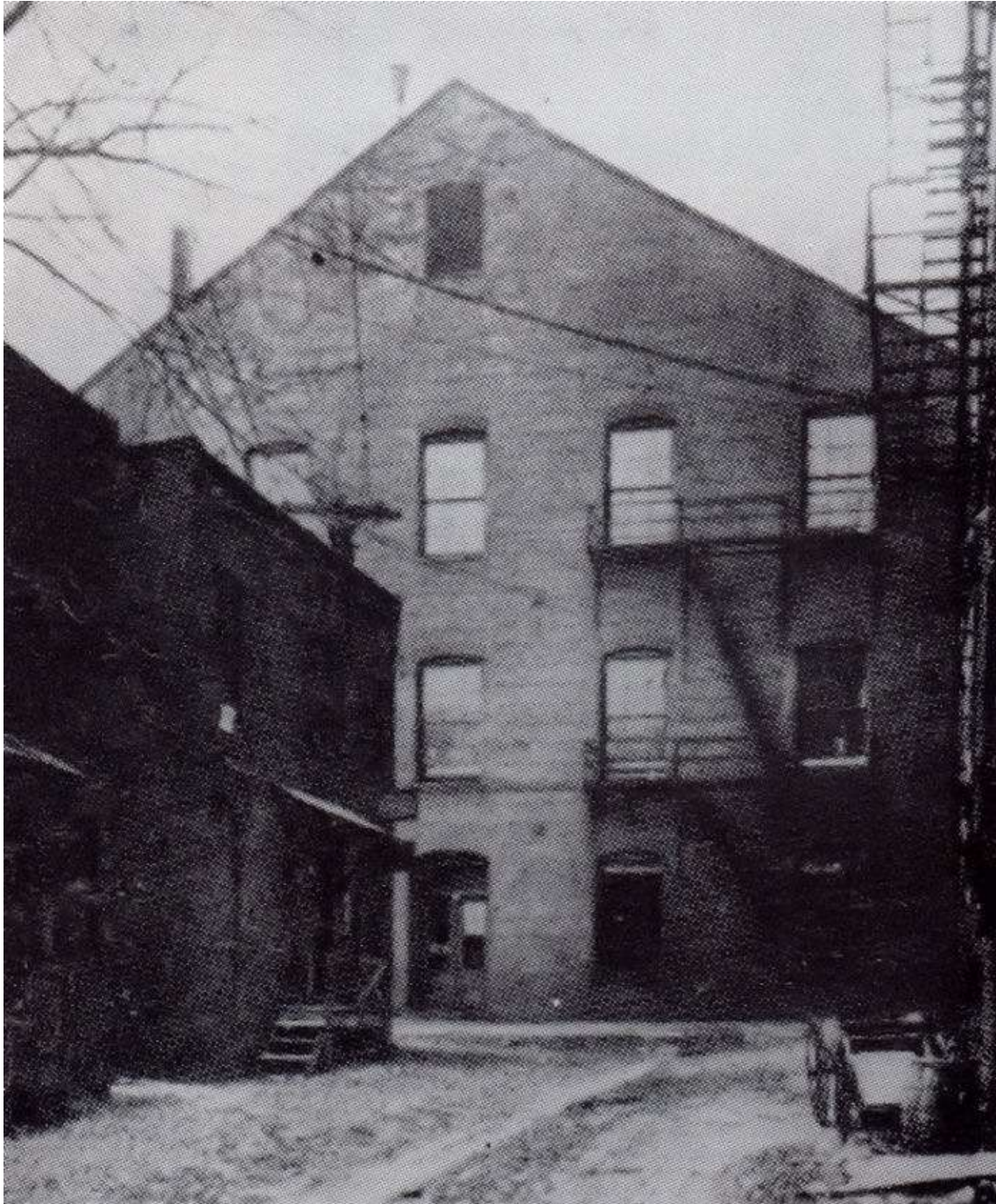
In summary then, your best bet is probably to make the attempt on Lincoln’s life when he is alone and unprotected. And you should probably bring along some more impressive firepower, just in case. If you are determined to do it in the theater, you should don a disguise and bring along a couple other gunmen in case one or more of you are killed or physically prevented from



reaching the president. The dumbest thing you could probably do would be to go it alone, as John Wilkes Booth, and arm yourself only with a derringer. But I guess you can't argue with success ... right?

Meanwhile, one of your comrades-in-arms, Lewis Paine/Payne/Powell, has a difficult task ahead of him as well. His goal is to kill Lincoln's Secretary of State, William Seward, who is recuperating at his stately manor in the heart of DC after being severely injured in a fall from a horse-drawn carriage just nine days earlier. Seward had suffered a broken lower jaw, a fractured right arm, torn ligaments in his foot, and heavy bruising over much of his body.

The 63-year-old secretary is therefore physically vulnerable, but assassinating him is still not going to be easy. For starters, Paine is going to have to gain access to the estate. Then he's going to have to find Seward without knowing the layout of the home or which floor or which of the many rooms the secretary is in. And he's going to have to get past a lot of people, because there are no less than eight other able-bodied adults in the home, five of them men, two of whom are military personnel. And there are readily accessible weapons in the home. And, as I may have mentioned, there are armed patrols all over the city, and they are quite capable of quickly responding to any signs of a disturbance at the Secretary of State's residence.



*The rear view of Ford's Theater and 'Baptist Alley'*

The attack on Seward has been all but written out of our history books, but in 1865 it was portrayed as an integral component of the plot against Lincoln, particularly during the show trial of the alleged conspirators. It is now mentioned only in passing, if at all. Which is probably because the story doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

In the home are: William Seward, the injured Secretary of State; William Bell, Seward's black servant; Frederick Seward, William's son as well as his Assistant Secretary of State; Major Augustus Seward, another son and a career Army officer (who will be promoted in a few weeks to lieutenant colonel); Private George Robinson, Seward's personal attendant (who will be

promoted to sergeant in a few weeks); Emerick Hansell, a US State Department courier; Frances Seward, the secretary's wife (who will be dead very soon); Fanny Seward, his daughter (who will be dead fairly soon); and, finally, the wife of one of the Seward sons.

Payne of course is going it alone, just like Booth, for reasons that have apparently never required an explanation. The five able-bodied men in the house, at least a couple of whom are likely armed, will pose a physical challenge. The three women will pose less of a physical threat, but one or more of them are very likely to run out into the street to summon any nearby patrols. And just the fact that there are so many people in the way will make it extremely difficult for Powell to control the situation.





*Another of*

*Booth's paramours, this one unidentified*

Paine's mission is not unlike Booth's; he must enter the building, work his way past any resistance to get to his target, take out his target, work his way back out of the building past any resistance, and then somehow find his way out of Washington. But unlike Booth, Payne won't have even a single bullet to work with. Instead, he is going in armed only with a bludgeon and a knife. And he'll be coming out with nothing but the clothes on his back.

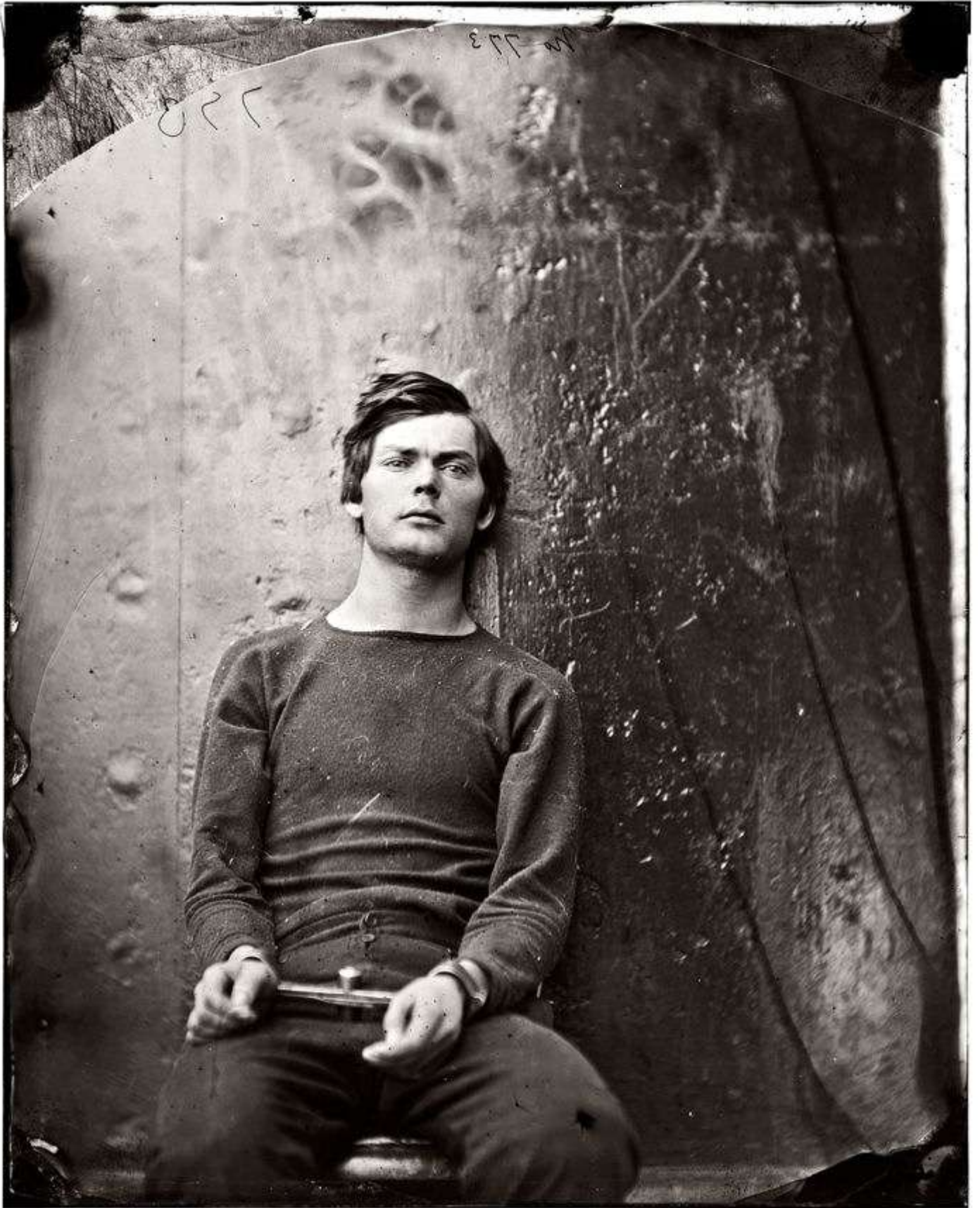
Technically speaking, he will be carrying a gun, but it doesn't work and so is only useful as a bludgeon. In a city overflowing with guns, Paine has chosen to bring one that doesn't work. Which means that, luckily for the Swards, no one is going to die.

Paine though is going to leave quite a trail of destruction once he enters the estate, which sits just a half-dozen blocks from Ford's Theater. Frederick Seward will be left gravely injured, with his head reportedly split open and his skull fractured in two places. Major Augustus Seward will also receive severe head injuries, with one report claiming that he was half scalped. Private Robinson will also be seriously wounded, with deep stab wounds to his chest. Emerick Hansell will receive at least one deep, very serious chest wound as well. Fanny Seward will be wounded as well, in some unspecified manner. And William Seward – who is lying in bed on his back, unable to defend himself – will be brutally stabbed about the head and neck, but will, despite his already weakened condition, miraculously survive.

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It is difficult to believe that the attack on Secretary of State Seward ever took place at all. Lewis Paine supposedly gravely wounded six people in hand-to-hand combat, four of them able-bodied men, and yet, as photos taken soon after his arrest just days later reveal, he didn't have so much as a scratch on him. He supposedly left his hat, gun and knife behind, creating a handy evidence trail, but why would he leave his only weapons behind? He also allegedly left a bloodstained coat with gloves and a fake moustache in the pocket in the woods just outside of DC. Lewis Paine was apparently a very considerate attempted assassin.

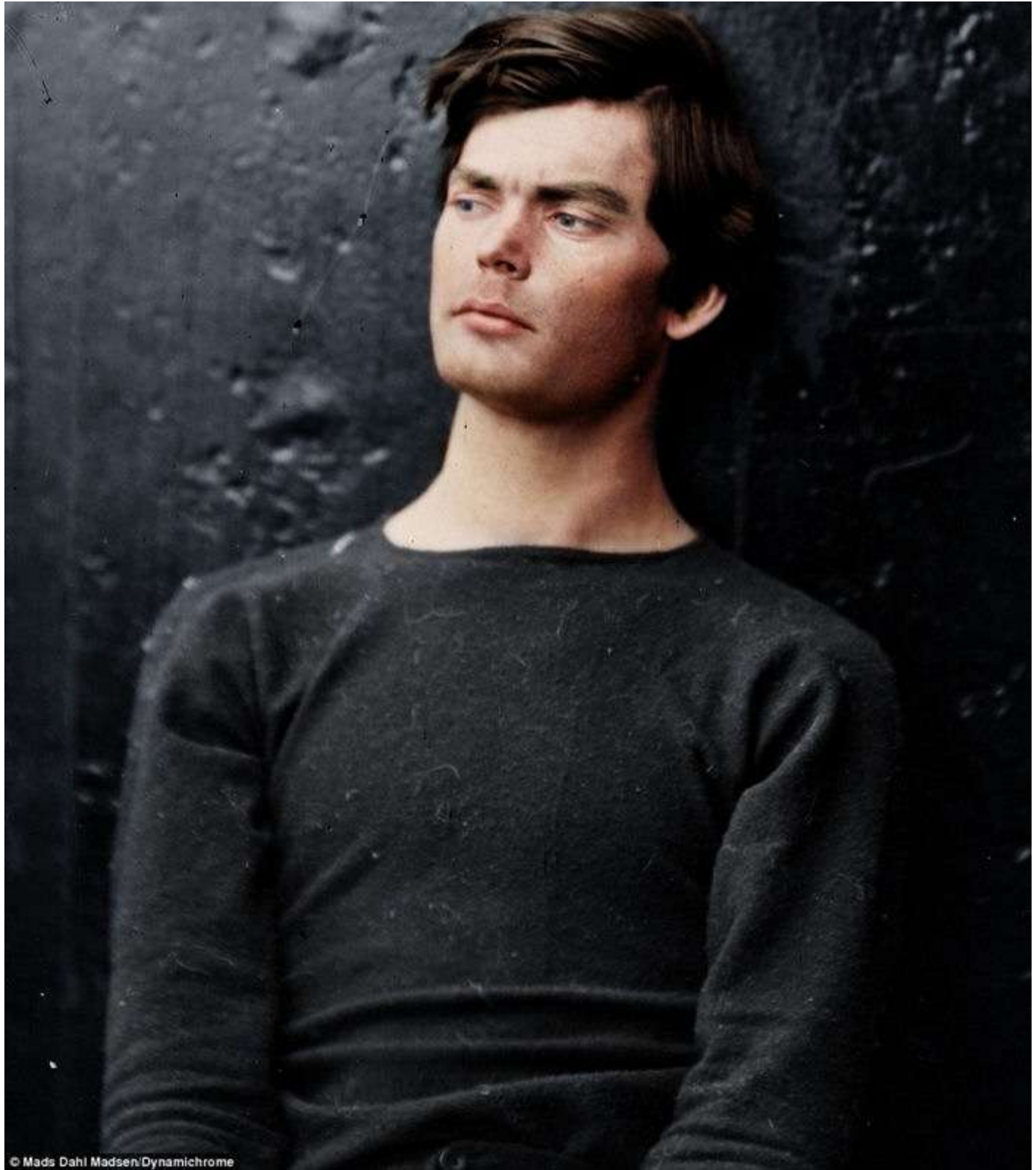




*Lewis Paine, April 1865*

The descriptions of the conditions of the victims came from the first three people to conveniently arrive at the crime scene: Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, and Surgeon General Joseph Barnes. You know, just your typical first responders. None of them reported seeing Augustus there. Stanton initially claimed that only William Seward, Fred Seward and George Robinson were injured; Augustus Seward, Emerick Hansell and Fanny Seward were later added to the victim list, apparently so that the prosecution would have suitable witnesses. It was an entire month before Fanny Seward came forward with her account of the attack.

Augustus was later presented at trial as both a victim of and an eyewitness to the attack – the attack that very likely didn't take place, in the home he wasn't actually in at the time. His testimony was wildly at odds with that of Robinson, with both men claiming that they had been in the room and personally witnessed the attack on William Seward. Not only did their accounts significantly differ, but neither really explained why it was that with the two of them in the room, and with Frederick and Hansell in the home as well, they were unable to defend the secretary.



© Mads Dahl Madsen/Dynamichrome

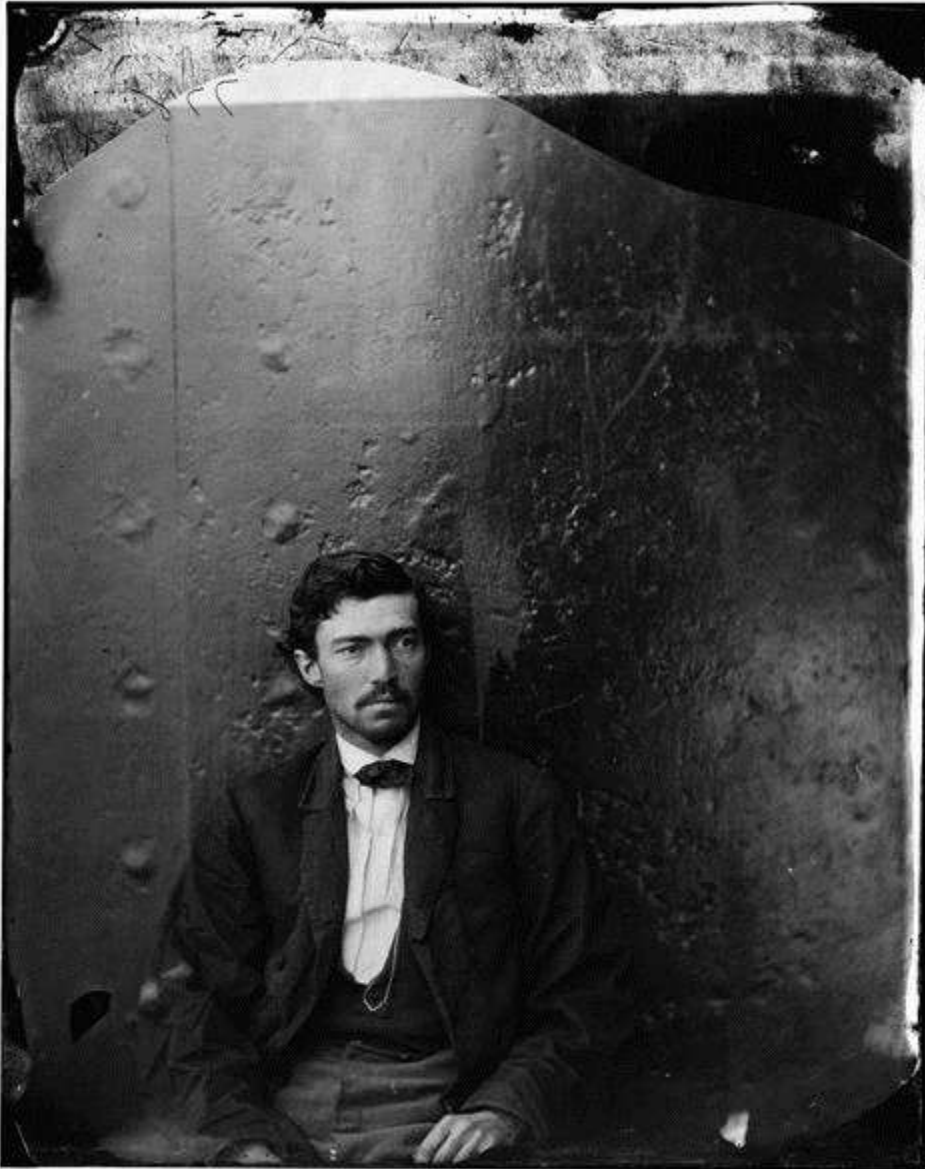
*This remarkable image of Paine, captured in April 1865, has been lovingly colorized*  
It is impossible to determine whether the alleged attack ever took place, but it appears extremely unlikely. It does not seem logistically possible for one barely armed man to have done what



Paine is supposed to have done. And it doesn't seem physically possible for him to have done so without sustaining a single visible injury. There is no tangible evidence that Paine ever entered the home. The only 'evidence' that has ever existed is the dubious (and conflicting) accounts told by the alleged victims and by the high-ranking cabinet officials who just happened to be first on the scene.

Let's now briefly review the key elements of this story: two assassins; three targets; numerous people to get through to get to those targets; numerous other people to get by to flee the scene; a city essentially under martial law; and one – exactly one – bullet. Anyone see anything wrong with that scenario?

Anyone notice anything peculiar about the two images of Lewis Powell in my last post? Anything at all? Other than, of course, the fact that one of them had been colorized, making it appear unsettlingly contemporary? Because they are, to be sure, very unusual images. There's really nothing else like them in all of recorded history – except for, that is, the remarkable images that also exist of most of his alleged co-conspirators. And perhaps it is time for us to now meet those alleged conspirators, beginning with the rather dashing gentleman pictured below, Mr. Samuel Bland Arnold, who looks almost like he could be a 21st century actor posing for a publicity photo for his latest blockbuster film.



Arnold was thirty at the time of the assassination and was working as a commissary clerk at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. He was said to be a former Confederate soldier, though it seems very likely that he was actually a Union operative (as appears to be the case with almost all of Booth's alleged accomplices). The files of the Bureau of Military Justice (a misnomer if ever there was one) contain the following tidbits of information on Arnold:

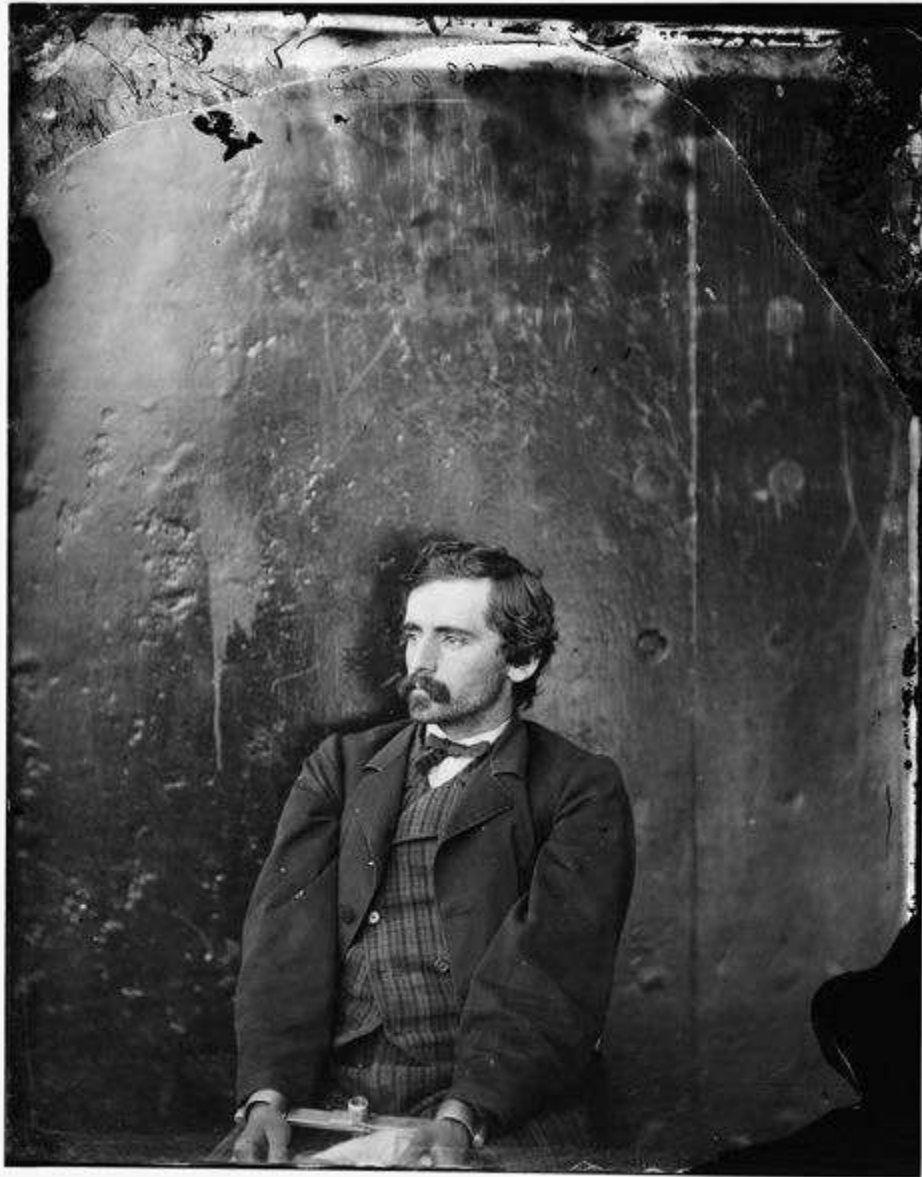
"Samuel B. Arnold was born at Georgetown, D.C., of highly respectable parents ... He was first sent to be educated at Georgetown College, from there he was sent to the Reverend J.H. Dashills, [in] Baltimore County, his parents having removed from Georgetown to Baltimore. He was one year in Rockingham County, Virginia, under the charge of the Reverend Mr. Gibbins, and afterward sent to Saint Timothy Hall, Catonsville, Maryland, and place[d] under the Rev. L. Vanbakelin."

The picture painted here is of a well educated young man who had a rather privileged upbringing in and around the nation's capital. Not at all the kind of guy you would expect to have donned a Confederate uniform, unless he did so as a covert Union operative. Arnold was convicted of

complicity in the plot to kill Lincoln and was handed a life sentence by the military tribunal. He served only four years though before being pardoned by President Johnson and released in 1869. Arnold lived to the ripe old age of seventy-two, passing away on the autumnal equinox of 1906.

Next up is Michael O'Laughlin (or O'Laughlen – the two are used interchangeably throughout the literature on the assassination), who, like Arnold, was a ruggedly handsome, well dressed young man from a well-to-do family. Just twenty-four when Lincoln was shot, O'Laughlin had known Booth since childhood, when they had lived across the street from each other in Baltimore (Arnold had also been a childhood friend of Mr. Booth). The Bureau of Military Justice files reveal the following about O'Laughlin:

“Michael O'Laughlin was born in the City of Baltimore ... He was educated at a School conducted by a highly respectable Teacher at the corner of Front and LaFayette Sts., and after leaving School learned the trade of ornamental Plaster work, and also acquired the art of Engraving. The company he was in the habit of associating with was not of a character that a person indisposed to evil would have made choice of. His appearance was generally of a genteel character.”

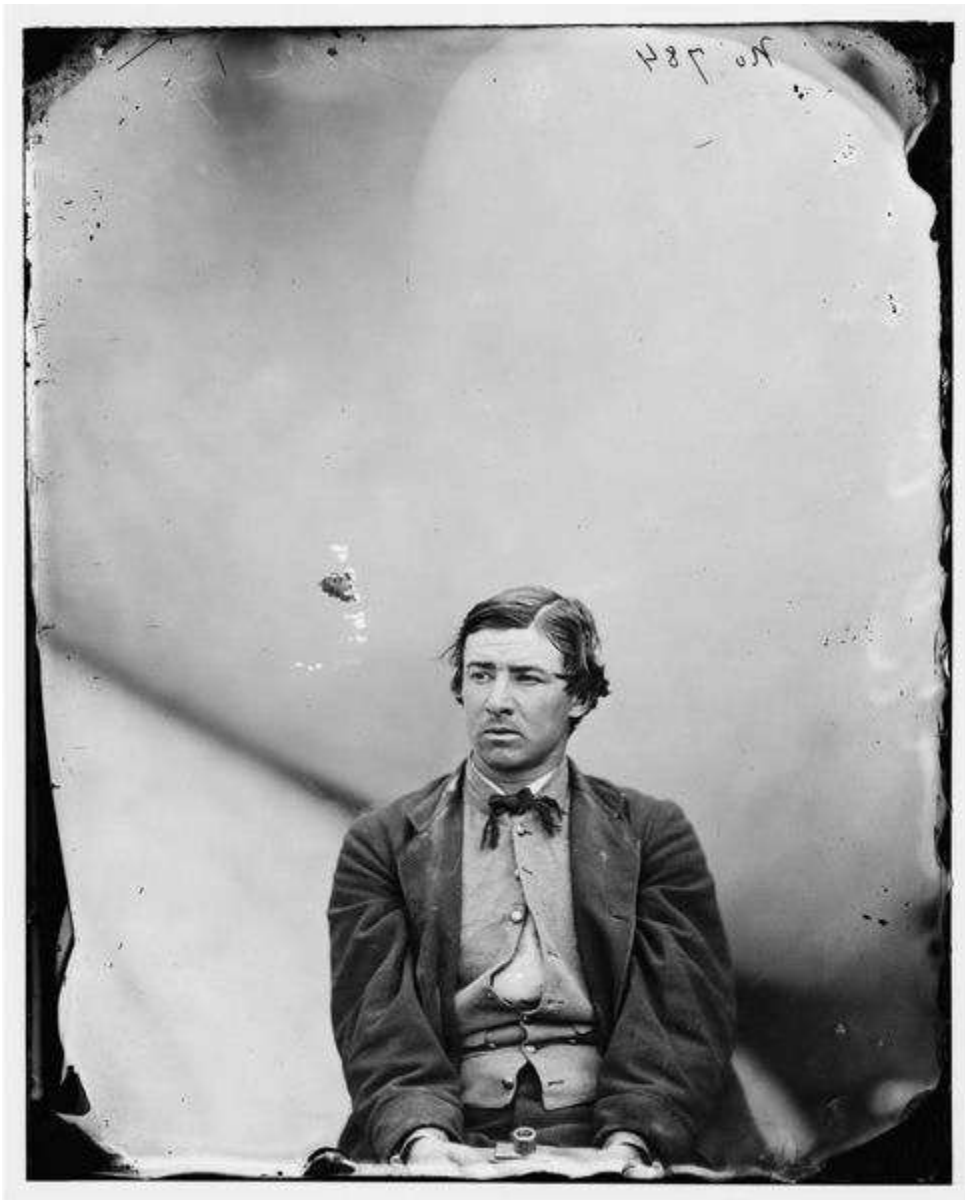


In 1865, O'Laughlin was working for his older brother as a clerk in a Baltimore feed store. That brother, according to government files, was a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle. Testimony before the military tribunal indicated that Michael likely was as well. Convicted by that tribunal, O'Laughlin was given a life sentence, which proved to be a death sentence when he contracted yellow fever in prison and died, strangely enough, on or about the autumnal equinox of 1867. His remains are interred in the same Baltimore cemetery where Arnold and Booth can be found.

Like Arnold and O'Laughlin (and Booth), David Edgar Herold (frequently identified in print as David Herald) was a well educated young man from an upscale family. Herold was born in Maryland and raised in – where else? – Washington, DC. His father was the chief clerk at the Washington Navy Yard store – the same Washington Navy Yard whose guarded bridge Booth and Herold were inexplicably allowed to cross on the night of April 14, 1865.

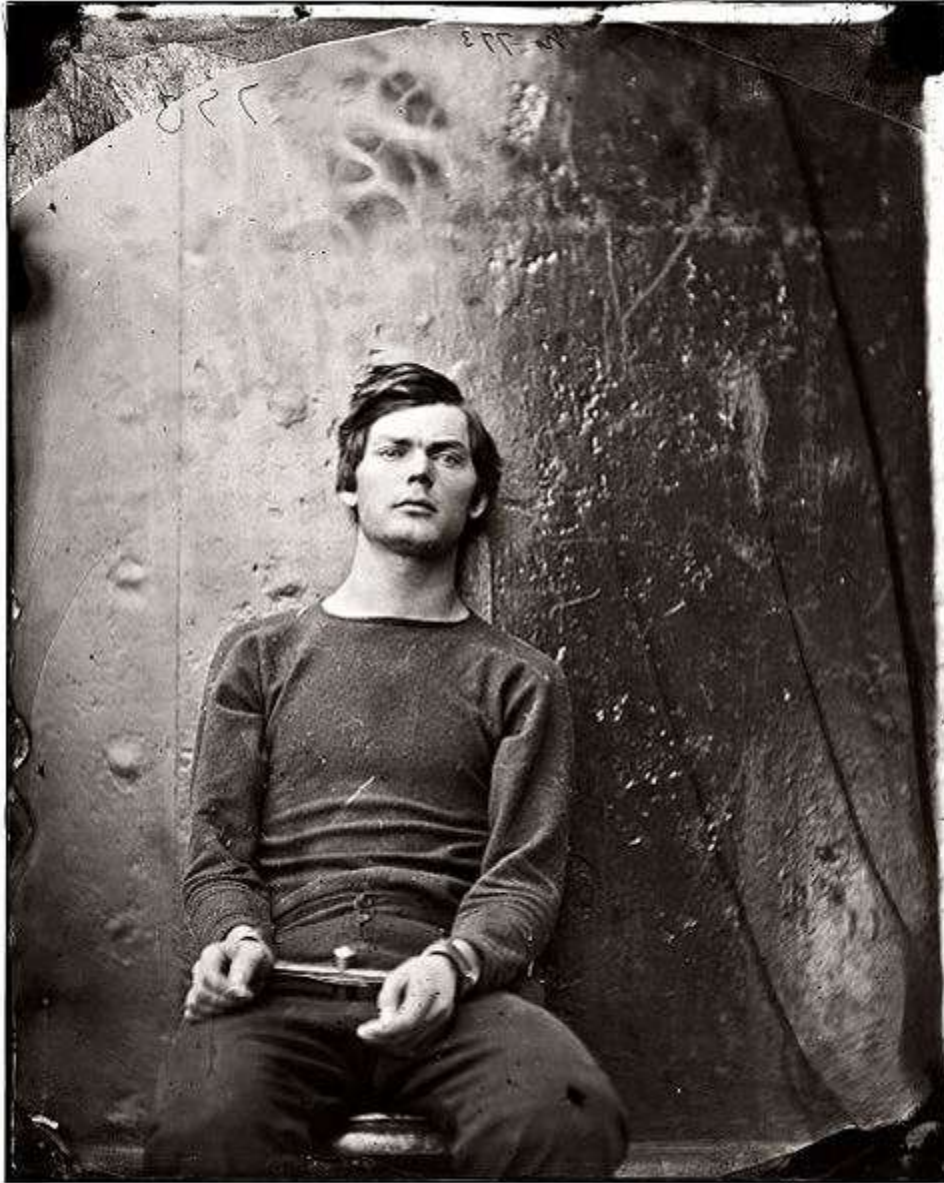
Herold attended Georgetown College, followed by the Rittenhouse Academy and then the prestigious Charlotte Hall Military Academy. He later went to work for various pharmacists and doctors, including our old friend "Dr." Francis Tumblety. On one occasion in 1863, when he was dispatched to the White House to deliver a bottle of castor oil, Herold had the honor of personally meeting President Lincoln.





Tried along with seven of his alleged co-conspirators, Herold was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. That sentence was carried out on July 7, 1865, just after Herold's twenty-third birthday. He is, as would be expected, buried in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, DC. Thus far we have met four lads (Booth, Herold, McLaughlin, and Arnold) who all were raised in and lived and worked in the Baltimore/Washington DC area. Considering that the conspiracy to kill Lincoln, to the extent that it is acknowledged at all, is invariably cast as a Confederate conspiracy, there don't appear to have been too many southerners in the crowd. There was at least one though – our old friend Lewis Thornton Powell.

The youngest of the alleged conspirators – just twenty at the time of the assassination – Powell was also known as Lewis Paine, Lewis Payne, Reverend Wood, The Reverend, James Wood, Mosby, and Kincheloe, among other aliases. As his shadowy identities would seem to imply, he was by many accounts an intelligence operative. Raised in Alabama, Georgia and Florida, Powell was educated by his father, the Reverend George C. Powell.



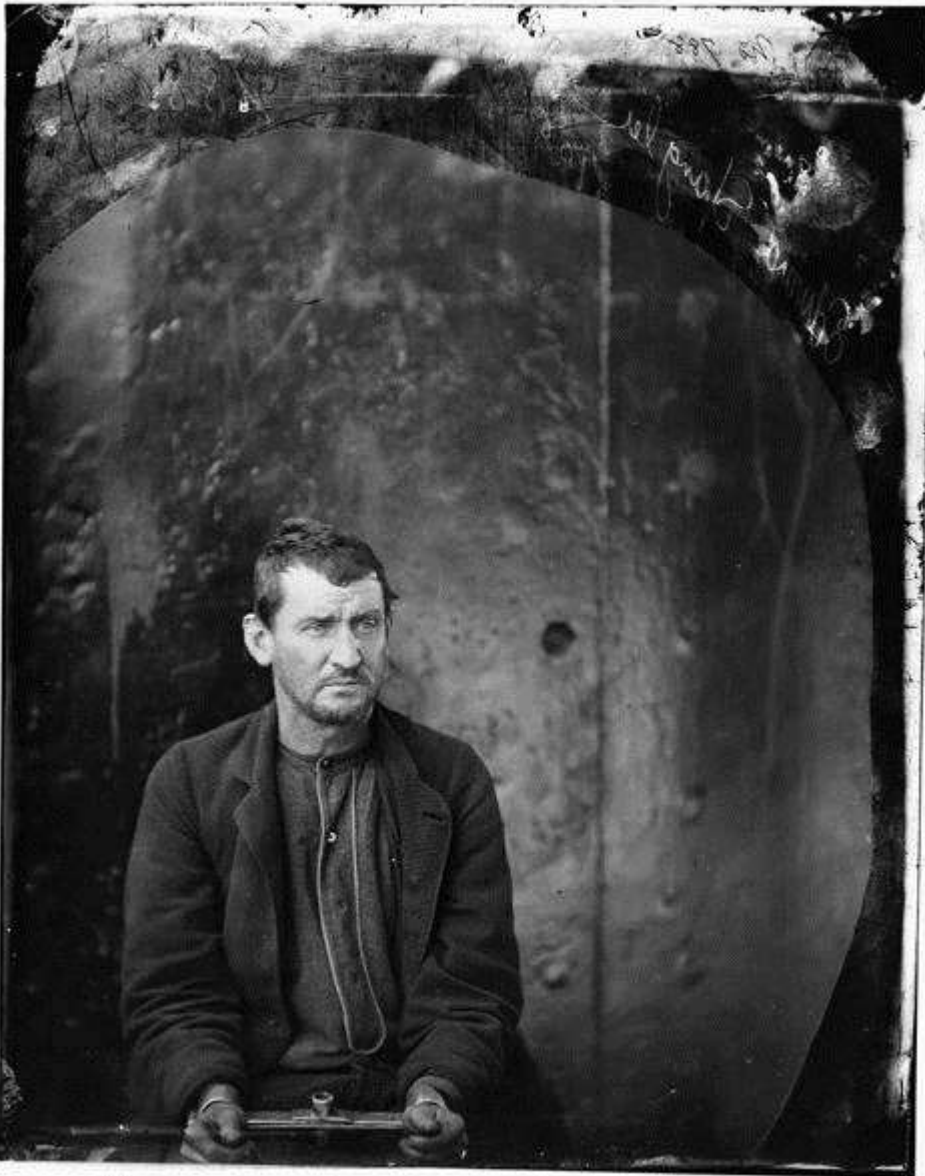
Lewis entered the service at a young age – either sixteen or seventeen, depending upon the source. Powell’s two older brothers enlisted as well, with all three serving with the 2nd Florida Infantry. Lewis was the only one of the three to survive the Civil War. Wounded at Gettysburg in early July 1863, he was taken prisoner and sent to a POW hospital. Following his recovery, he was put to work as a male nurse in a hospital in Baltimore, from where he reportedly escaped, apparently by basically walking out the door.

After that, according to historian Theodore Roscoe (*The Web of Conspiracy*), his “movements are hard to follow.” Author Jim Bishop added, in *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*, that “There is an unexplained hitch in his [military] records.” According to various accounts, he went to work with the paramilitary forces serving under John Singleton Mosby. In January 1865, he turned up in a boardinghouse in Baltimore, Maryland and allegedly became a Lincoln assassination conspirator. On July 7, 1865, he was hanged.



There is scant evidence that Powell knew Booth at all, though an apocryphal tale is often told of a very young Lewis meeting Booth in a theater following a performance by the acclaimed actor. There doesn't appear to be any evidence at all linking him to the other alleged conspirators. He photographed really well though.

Moving back up north, we next meet the hapless Ned Spangler, also known as Ed Spangler, Edward Spangler, Edman Spangler, and Edmund Spangler. The oldest of the alleged male conspirators at thirty-nine, Spangler was a journeyman carpenter originally from Pennsylvania, though he had spent the majority of his life in the Baltimore area. During the Civil War, he was living in Washington, DC, where he was employed at Ford's Theater as a carpenter and stagehand.

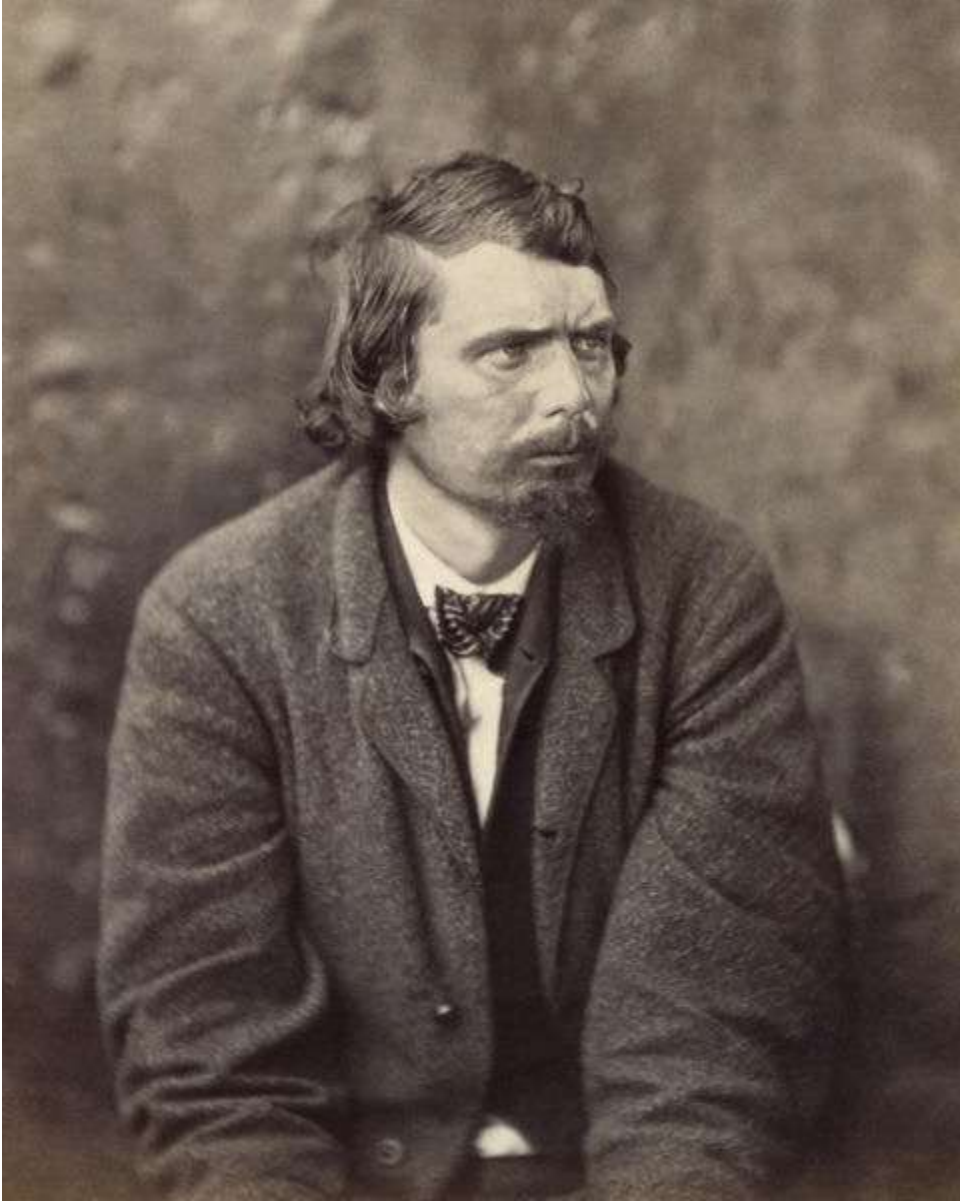






Spangler had met Booth many years earlier when he worked on the Booth family's Tudor mansion. In the aftermath of the Lincoln assassination, he was accused of holding Booth's horse and aiding and abetting the actor's escape from the theater. The charges though were dubious at best. Sentenced to a six-year prison term, the most lenient sentence handed down by the military tribunal, he was pardoned four years later by President Andrew Johnson. Spangler died on February 7, 1875, reportedly of tuberculosis.

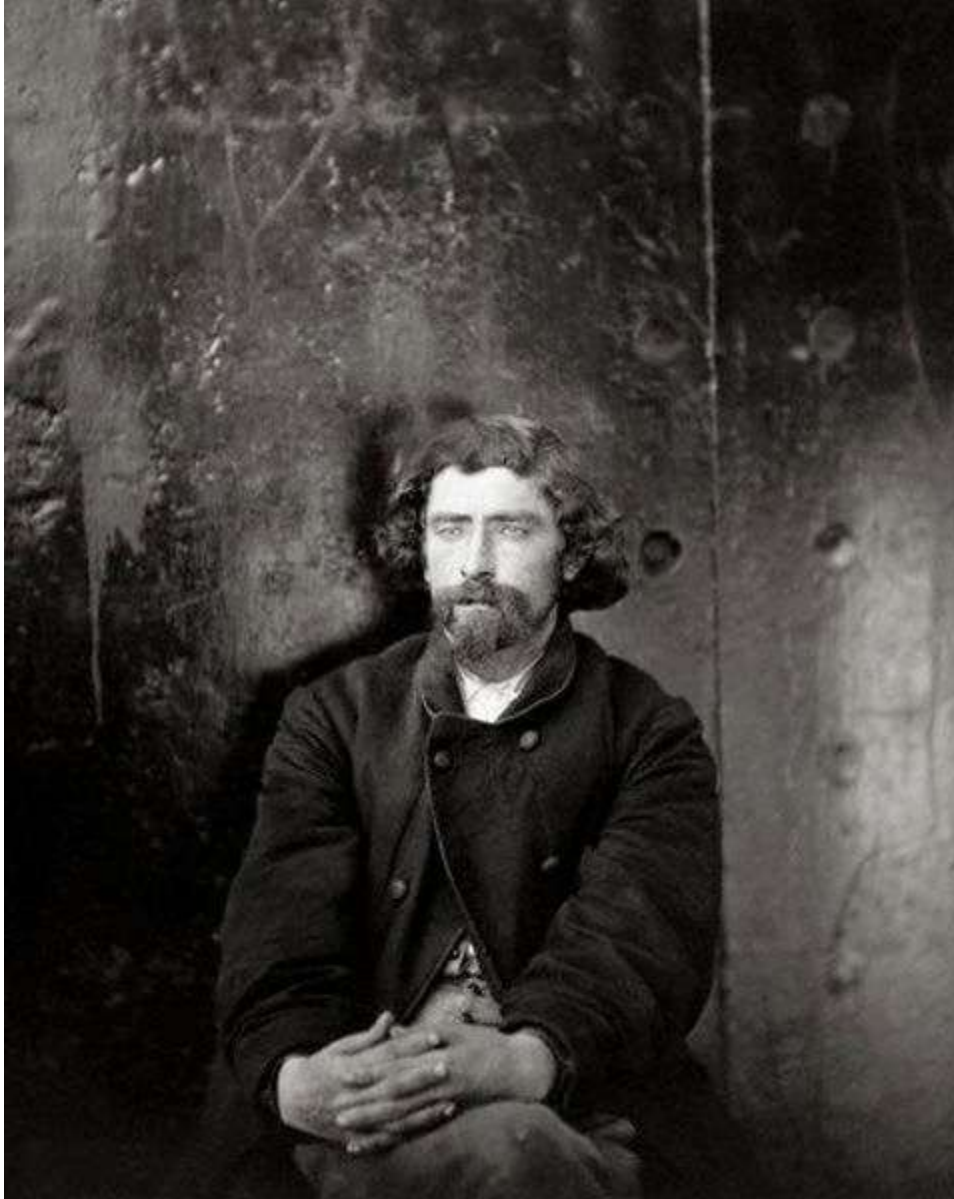
Next up is the only foreign national in the group, George Andrew Atzerodt, who was brought over to America from Germany when he was eight. Raised in, of course, Maryland, Atzerodt and his brother owned a carriage repair shop where George worked as a painter. At the time of the assassination, he was twenty-nine.





The military tribunal maintained that Atzerodt had been assigned the task of assassinating newly-installed Vice President Andrew Johnson, but he had allegedly lost his nerve and failed to carry out the assignment. In truth, there is no real evidence that Johnson, who was likely involved or at least had knowledge of the plot, was ever targeted. As with Stanton, this was a case of the conspirators themselves claiming to be intended victims. Atzerodt was found guilty of his alleged crimes and was hanged on July 7, 1865.

The seventh of the alleged conspirators was Dr. Samuel Mudd, yet another Marylander. Like many of the others, Mudd was born into a large, well-to-do family and he was well educated, having graduated from both Georgetown College in DC and the medical school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. Mudd worked as both a country doctor and a tobacco farmer, and was reportedly a slave owner who harbored southern sympathies.

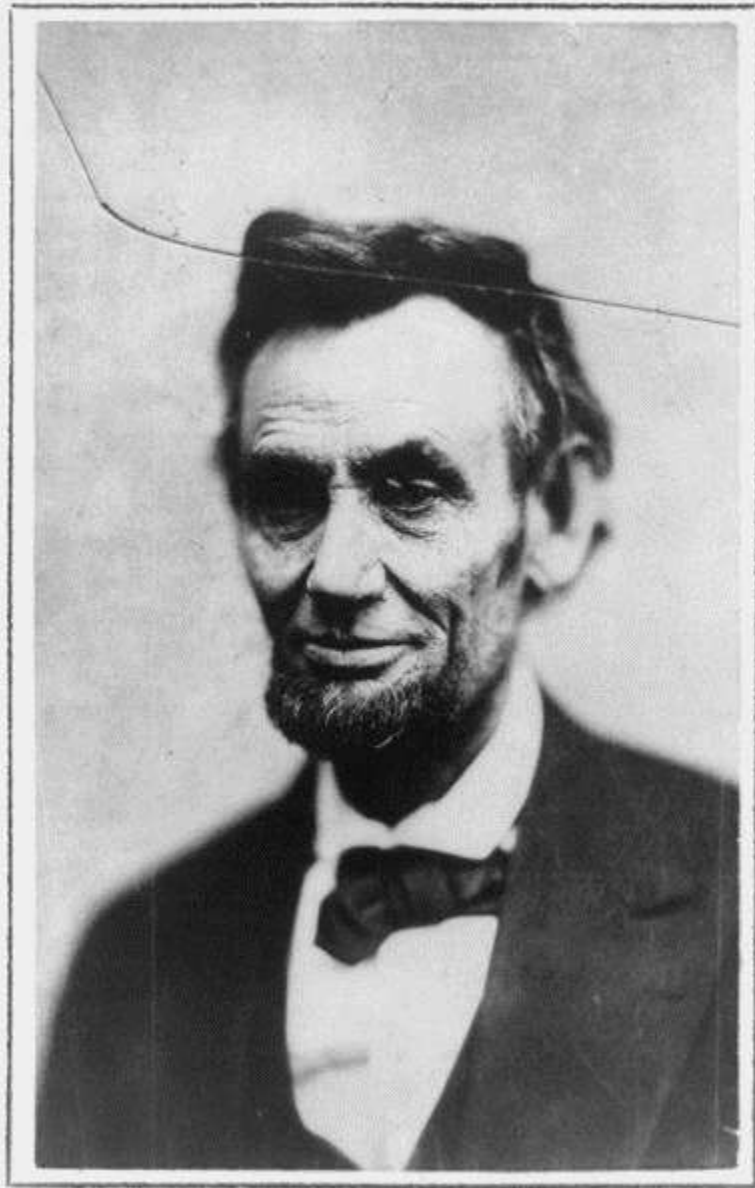


Mudd, thirty-two at the time, stood trial along with the others on charges of having aided and abetted Booth's plot and having offered medical aid to the injured actor. His actual role has been fiercely debated by mainstream historians, all of whom have grossly misrepresented the Lincoln assassination. Convicted by the tribunal, Mudd was sentenced to life in prison but was pardoned just four years later by Johnson.

Having now met seven of the nine people who stood trial as Booth's alleged co-conspirators, is there anything that stands out as unusual about the images adorning this post? Anything at all? And keep in mind that these are official booking photos, otherwise known as mugshots. But they certainly don't look like any other mugshots ever taken. We certainly have no such images of Lee Harvey Oswald. Or Sirhan Sirhan. Or Charles Guiteau. Or Leon Czolgosz. Or James Earl Ray. Or John Hinckley. Or Mark David Chapman. Or any other alleged assassin or attempted assassin. Or anyone ever arrested on suspicion of having committed any crime.

No one else, you see, had one of the top professional photographers of the era come by to take their mugshots. No one else had the benefit of dramatic backdrops, professional lighting, and flattering poses and camera angles. And no one else was photographed by the very same guy, Alexander Gardner, who was long credited as being the guy who took the last known images of President Abraham Lincoln.

When called upon to photograph the people accused of plotting against that president, Gardner certainly rose to the occasion. The images of the alleged Lincoln conspirators are arguably the finest work that the Civil War photographer ever did. The portraits of the conspirators' victim, taken not long before Lincoln's death, are rather lackluster in comparison.







The very same Alexander Gardner was also the guy who, just weeks after lovingly photographing the alleged conspirators, photographed several of those same conspirators being led to the gallows and hanged. And the guy who officially photographed Lincoln's funeral. And the guy who took the only image of what was claimed to be the body of John Wilkes Booth, after the actor had allegedly been gunned down and transported back to Washington.





*Left to right: Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, David Herold, and George Atzerodt*

That image though won't be displayed here, for reasons explained by author W.C. Jameson (*Return of Assassin*): "Following the work of the identification committee, the body was photographed by Alexander Gardner, one of the members. Gardner conducted his work in the presence of War Department detective James A. Wardell. Gardner was allowed to take only one photograph and was quickly hastened to a darkroom to develop it. Wardell stood by his side the entire time, and when the picture was finished, Wardell took possession of it, along with the plate ... Moments later, Lafayette Baker took the photographic plate from Wardell. In response to subsequent inquiries, the government denied that any photographs were ever taken of the body ... To this day, no one knows what became of either the picture or the plate."

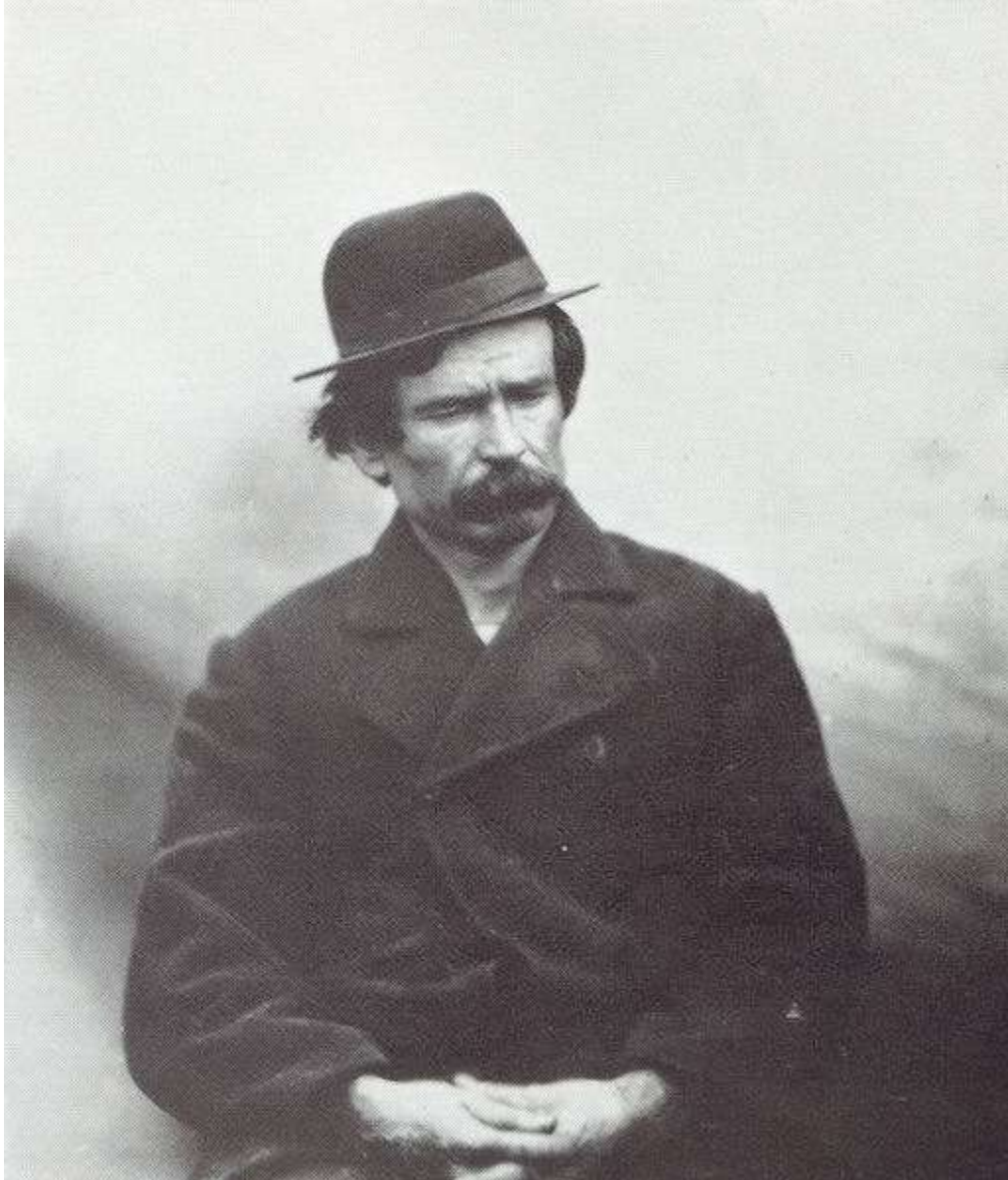
Theodore Roscoe adds that, "Undoubtedly Gardner gave the glass plate to Lafayette Baker or to Stanton. But the Secret Service Chief made no mention of it in his history. Stanton never mentioned it. War Department records are absolutely silent on the subject. The photograph never reached public domain."

Nothing unusual about any of that. Returning now to the collection of the world's most glamorous mugshots, it should be noted that there are, beyond their mere existence, other curiosities concerning these photos. Like the fact that the photo of Dr. Mudd that was officially released, and presented above, isn't actually Dr. Mudd at all. It appears to be Hartmann Richter, a cousin of George Atzerodt who was never charged with any complicity in the assassination plot. The real Dr. Mudd is pictured below.





And then there is the guy in the next image, officially photographed as a conspirator yet never charged, tried or even identified. The government just pretended as though he never existed.



The appearance of the alleged conspirators in these striking images stands in stark contrast to their treatment throughout their confinement, which can only be described as barbaric. The suspects' ankles and wrists were kept shackled at all times. They were forced to wear specially-designed heavy leather hoods at all times other than when they were in court. The hoods were very tightly fit and featured pads that put tremendous pressure on the prisoners' eyes, causing intense pain in addition to subjecting the wearers to extreme and prolonged sensory deprivation. Some of the prisoners were also fitted with iron collars attached to a heavy ball and chain. These also had to be worn at all times.

All suspects were confined to tiny solitary cells outfitted with just a thin straw mattress, a worn army blanket, and an open bucket to use as a toilet. They were allowed no visitors and their guards were even forbidden from speaking to them. Armed sentries kept watch at all times to ensure that the prisoners had no human interaction whatsoever. Each suspect was assigned to a

cluster of three cells, insuring that they had no neighbors to interact with. It was widely rumored that they were being tortured in more overt ways as well, which was undoubtedly the case. No attorneys were provided for the defendants; they had to retain their own counsel, despite being completely cut off from the outside world. Consequently, some of them began the proceedings with no representation. Even after obtaining counsel, they were not allowed to have any private consultations with their attorneys. And they were not allowed to testify or speak in court at all, nor could any statements made by them be introduced. But other than all that – and numerous other factors, which will be discussed later – the conspirators were given a fair trial. Let's now close out this edition by meeting the last of the alleged conspirators who were tried by military tribunal – the one who, without explanation, was not photographed by Mr. Gardner. That would be, of course, Mary Surratt, the first woman to be executed in these United States.



Surratt was, shockingly, a native Marylander from a rather wealthy family. Born sometime in the early 1820s (no one seems to know exactly when), she was educated at a private Catholic boarding school in Alexandria, Virginia, at a time when, as Theodore Roscoe noted, “higher learning for females was frowned upon as radical.” At fifteen (or sixteen, or nineteen), she married John Surratt, with whom she had three offspring, Isaac, Anna, and John, Jr. The Surratts did well for themselves for a number of years. At one time, John owned as many as 1,200 acres of land and a number of businesses, including a hotel, a tavern and a boardinghouse. Much of that land straddled the border between DC and Maryland, just thirteen miles from downtown Washington, DC. The settlement there soon came to be known as Surrattsville, which is frequently claimed to have been heavily involved in Confederate espionage activities. Spy-master Lafayette Baker, accompanied by some 300 Union soldiers, converged on Surrattsville in late 1861 to launch a full investigation of the Surratt family and various others suspected of involvement in the Confederate underground. According to pseudo-historian Roy Chamlee, Jr. (*Lincoln’s Assassins*), Baker’s team unearthed compelling evidence of a vast network of covert Confederate operations. They made though only a few token arrests, which, given that thousands elsewhere were rounded up by Baker’s thugs in mass arrests based on far less evidence than what was found in Surrattsville, strongly suggests that the operations in Surrattsville weren’t actually aimed at aiding the south. In any event, John Surratt died in 1862 and his widow fell upon hard times. She was nevertheless able to finance a costly move to the heart of DC in late 1864, taking possession of a boardinghouse just four blocks from Ford’s Theater. It was in that boardinghouse that Booth and the others allegedly plotted first the kidnapping of, and then the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Found guilty by the military tribunal, Mary Surratt was hanged on July 7, 1865.

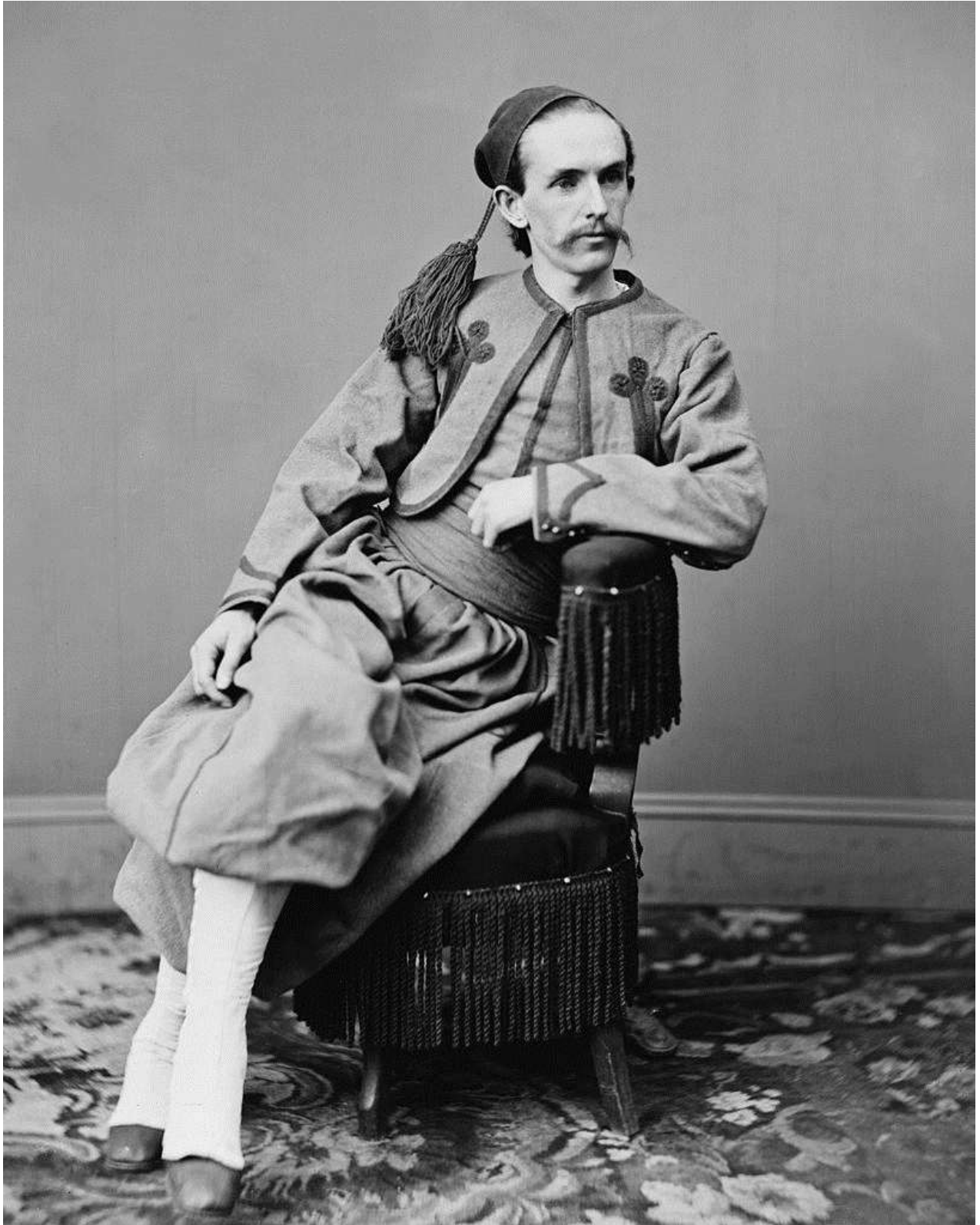
In the last installment, we met the seven men and one woman who faced trial by military tribunal for their alleged roles in the plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. But there were two others involved in the supposed conspiracy: the mastermind and assassin, John Wilkes Booth, and his alleged right-hand man, John Harrison Surratt, Jr., son of the executed Mary Surratt. Like most of his alleged co-conspirators, Surratt was a well educated, good looking young man from a well-to-do Northern family. He was born in April 1844 to John and Mary Surratt, and was baptized at St. Peter’s Church in – where else? – Washington, DC. He was educated at St. Charles College in, naturally enough, Maryland. At the tender age of eighteen, following the death of his father, Surratt became the Postmaster of Surrattsville. Beyond that, little is known about the early life of the man cast by the government as Booth’s primary accomplice. As Theodore Roscoe wrote in *The Web of Conspiracy*: “Official records on John Harrison Surratt, Jr., are similarly devoid of depth ... He passes through Washington like a shadow. His appearances in the house on H Street are shadowy. Now he is glimpsed in Richmond. Next he is glimpsed in Canada. The authorities can never quite lay their hands on him, and neither can the historians. Of the immediate members of Booth’s coterie, least is known about John Harrison Surratt, Jr.”



*John Harrison Surratt, Jr., as sketched by an artist for Harper's Weekly*

Roscoe claims, as have many other historians, that Surratt “operated as spy and as message-bearer, conveying Confederate dispatches between Richmond, Washington, and Montreal, Canada. By the time Mrs. Surratt’s boardinghouse was well established in Washington, John H. Surratt had become a well paid and highly adept operator in the Secret Service of the C.S.A. [Confederate States of America]” Maybe so. It seems far more likely though, given various facts of the case, that he was actually a Union operative posing as a Confederate operative. Or that the two ‘sides’ were actually one and the same, as seems likely. Of the ten alleged conspirators, Surratt, who celebrated his 21st birthday just one day before Lincoln was gunned down, was the only one not to be captured or killed in the massive manhunt that followed the assassination. He quickly made his way to Canada, where he found sanctuary with a Catholic priest during the time that his mother was being tried, sentenced and hanged. He left Canada in early September, some two months after the executions had been carried out. From that point on, the US government appears to have been well aware of his movements and whereabouts.





*John Surratt in his Papal Zouave uniform*

On March 4, 1867, the *Washington Daily Morning Chronicle* summarized the findings of an investigation by the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives as follows: "It appears

that Surratt sailed from Canada in September 1865, and landed in Liverpool on the 27th of the same month; that the fact of his landing was communicated to Secretary Seward by the American vice consul, Mr. Wilding. No steps were taken by the President or Secretary of State to secure his arrest. No demand was made upon England for his return to this country, nor is there any evidence of the procurement or attempted procurement of an indictment against him.” Surratt himself would later say that, “While I was in London, Liverpool and Birmingham, our consuls at those ports knew who I was and advised our State Department of my whereabouts, but nothing was done.” Curious behavior indeed for a government that had, just months earlier, aggressively prosecuted and executed lesser conspirators.

On November 24, 1865, two months into Surratt’s leisurely stay in England, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton abruptly withdrew the standing reward on Surratt’s head, clearly signaling to Europe and elsewhere that the US wasn’t all that interested in pursuing the capture and prosecution of the alleged conspirator. Stanton, needless to say, offered no explanation for his unusual actions.

In April 1866, Surratt sailed from England to Italy, arriving in Rome, where he was almost immediately assigned a position with the Pope’s elite Papal Zouave military guard. On April 21, a fellow Zouave, Henri de Sainte-Marie, who happened to be an old friend from Maryland, informed America’s minister to Rome, General Rufus King, of Surratt’s whereabouts and true identity. A Cardinal Antonelli explained to King that “if the American government desired the surrender of the criminal there would be no difficulty in the way.” The US government, nevertheless, chose to look the other way.

Returning once again to the summary of the findings of the House Committee, we find that “news of [Surratt’s] presence in Rome did reach the ears of minister King. He was informed by another than the Secretary of State that Surratt was in the military service of the Pope, and communicated the fact by letter, dated August 8, 1866, to his department. Notwithstanding this, no steps were taken to identify or secure the arrest of the *supposed* conspirator and assassin ...” [emphasis added]

No explanation was given, of course, for the nearly four-month delay in drafting and sending the letter. On November 11, 1866, after Surratt had been going about his business in Rome for some seven months, making no effort to disguise himself, Papal authorities ordered his arrest. He allegedly then leapt from a cliff and made his escape, somehow supposedly surviving a 100-foot drop and evading at least 50 soldiers who were in hot pursuit within minutes. He then casually made his way across Italy, keeping a low profile by continuing to wear the garishly colored uniform of the Papal Zouave.



*Barracks at Veroli, Italy, from where John Surrat purportedly escaped*

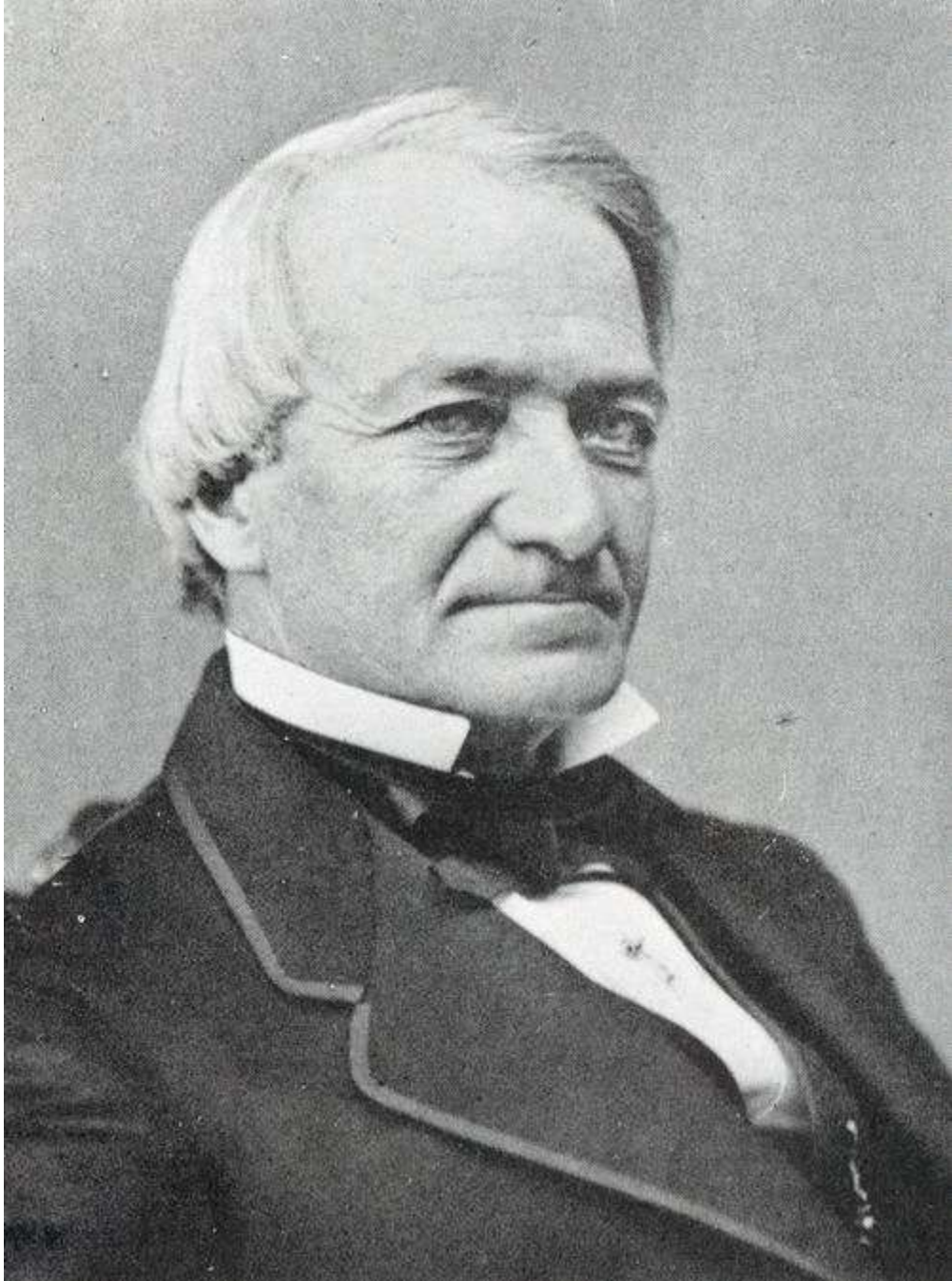
After making his way to Naples, where he was sheltered by the local police and allowed to sleep at the station as a non-paying guest for three nights, he booked passage first to Malta and then to Alexandria, Egypt. On November 27, 1866, he was finally arrested by US authorities. It was almost another full month though before he was dispatched back to the US aboard the *Swatara*, a US Navy vessel, which set sail on the winter solstice, December 21, 1866.



That return voyage took unusually long to reach the states, nearly a month and a half. Had a paddleboat been available, Washington likely would have opted to use that. Upon reaching US shores, the vessel was delayed for another few weeks while the crew waited for ice to melt on the Potomac. There were, of course, other ports available from which Surratt could have been quickly transported by train to Washington, but authorities chose to delay his arrival for as long as possible.

As researcher Vaughan Shelton (*Mask for Treason*) wrote, “When the papal government in Rome finally forced the issue by arresting Surratt, every possible tactic was used to delay his return.” Otto Eisenschiml (*In the Shadow of Lincoln’s Death*) concurred, noting that “Stanton had tried his utmost to keep Surratt from being brought back at all ...”

On February 4, 1867, the Grand Jury of the District of Columbia indicted John Surratt, who was still being held aboard the *Swatara* at the mouth of the Potomac. On February 19, the *Swatara* finally anchored at the Washington Navy Yard and Surratt set foot on US soil for the first time in nearly two years. A bench warrant for his arrest was issued that same day. Four days later, on February 23, Surratt was brought to court to enter a plea.



*Lead defense attorney Joseph H. Bradley*



*Co-counsel*

*Richard T. Merrick*

On April 18, 1867, Surratt's defense attorneys filed a motion to set a date for the start of the trial, saying they were fully prepared to proceed. On that very same day, the district attorney's office filed a motion for a continuance. It was just the first of many attempts by the state to delay the onset of the trial. The *New York Herald* reported, on May 19, 1867, that the "prisoner's legal representatives have over and over again reported themselves ready, but, contrary to the general ruling, the prosecution, after six months of preparation, has never yet been able to say, 'We are prepared to proceed with the trial.'" Ten days later, the *Baltimore Sun* added that it "is hinted that, for reasons not made public, the trial of Surratt is not at all desirable."

The question that most obviously comes to mind throughout this sordid chapter of US history is why the government suddenly lost the desire to aggressively pursue and prosecute the last alleged Lincoln conspirator? The primary reason is that, with the war over, Washington no longer had any justification for seeking 'justice' through a military tribunal and would have to rely instead on civilian courts. And that meant that the proceedings couldn't be controlled and corrupted to nearly the extent that they had been throughout the first mock trial.

That presented Washington with a huge problem. Without the muzzling of the defendant, and without the wholesale introduction of perjured testimony and manufactured evidence, and with the requirement that actual rules of law be followed, the state had little chance for a conviction. And given that eight others had already been either executed or exiled to America's version of Siberia, despite the fact that they had played lesser roles in the alleged conspiracy, it wasn't going to look very good to have John Surratt walk out of the courtroom a free man.

In addition, the government had pulled out all the stops to lay the assassination to rest as quickly as possible. The other alleged conspirators had been rounded up, indicted, tried, convicted, sentenced, and executed/imprisoned in less than three months, primarily because Washington had a vested interest in wrapping things up as quickly as possible, before too many troubling questions could be raised. The last thing they now wanted to do was reopen the case to public scrutiny.

Given little choice though in the matter, the case proceeded to trial in June 1867. And true to form, the state did its very best to rig the proceedings. As America's first Secret Service chief, William P. Wood, later wrote, Surratt was "confronted with an abundance of perjured testimony." He was also confronted with an abundance of bogus evidence, including a document that had supposedly been in the water for six weeks before being recovered, but which showed no signs of exposure whatsoever.

And then there were the laughably biased jury instructions delivered by presiding Judge George Fisher, which kicked off with the immortal words: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed. So spake the Almighty." One would have to search far and wide through the annals of American jurisprudence to find a more wildly inappropriate set of jury instructions.





*Presiding Judge George P. Fisher*

To insure that the trial was properly rigged, Secretary of State William Seward hired Edwards Pierrepont, an old friend of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, to assist the prosecution, although neither the State Department nor the War Department should have had anything to do with what was ostensibly a civil trial. Pierrepont was a descendant of James Pierrepont, a cofounder of Yale University. Also hired by Seward, to assist Pierrepont, was Albert G. Riddle. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles' diary would later reveal that Riddle "had been employed by Seward to hunt up, or manufacture, testimony against Surratt."

One of the most bizarre aspects of the Surratt trial was the testimony delivered by our old friend Henry Rathbone, who was called to the stand, as he had been at the military trial, to provide eyewitness testimony as to the shooting of Lincoln. Although it was not commented upon at the



time, or for decades after, Rathbone was clearly not spontaneously recalling events as they had happened, but rather was reciting his testimony from a memorized script.

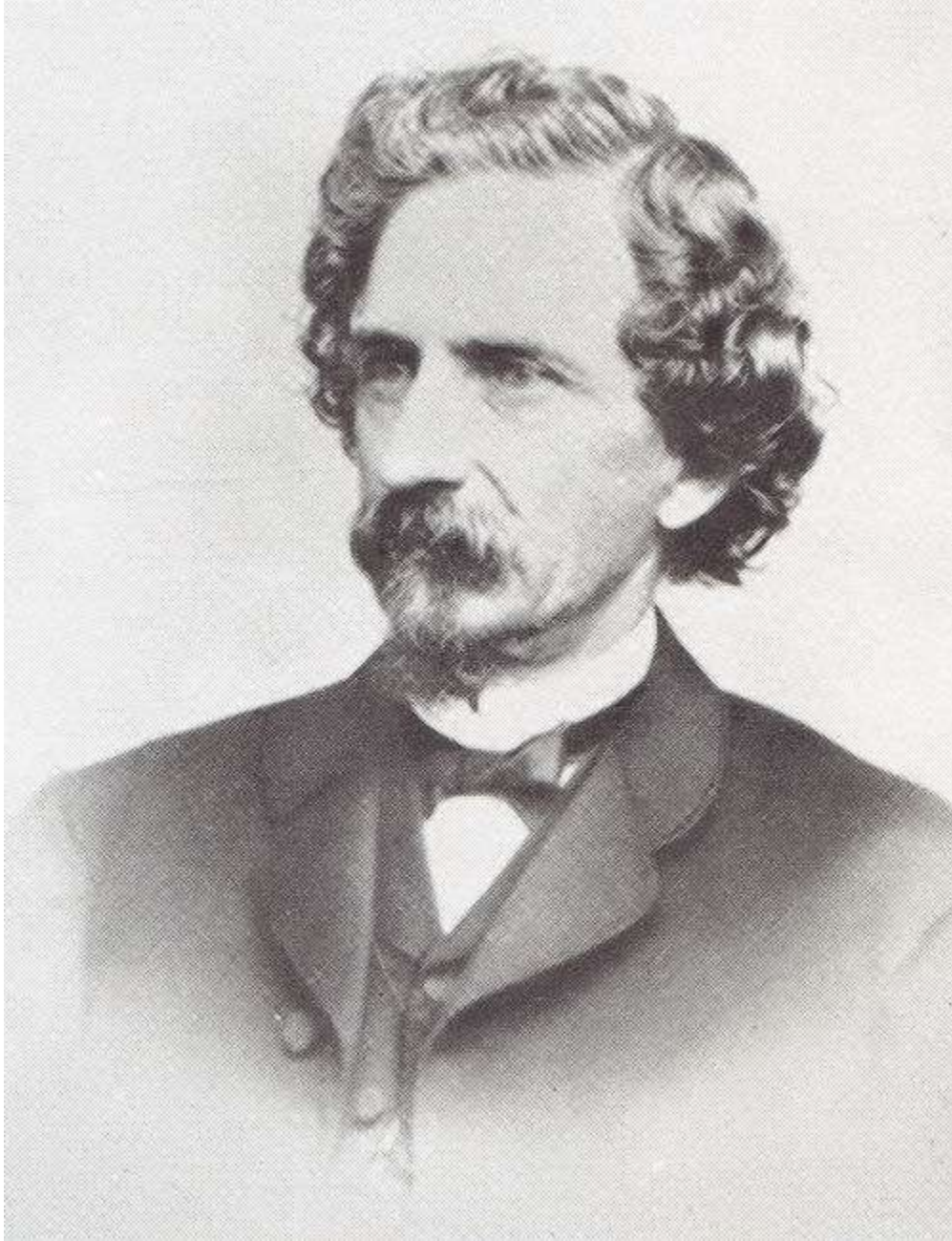
That script appears to have been created on April 17, 1865, two days after Lincoln died, when Rathbone was purportedly deposed. A portion of that alleged deposition reads as follows: “That on April 14th, 1865, at about 20 minutes past 8 o’clock in the evening, he, with Miss Clara H. Harris, left his residence, at the corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them in their carriage to Ford’s Theater, in Tenth Street ... When the party entered the box, a cushioned armchair was standing at the end of the box farthest from the stage and nearest the audience ... When the second scene of the third act was being performed, and while this deponent was intently observing the proceedings upon the stage, with his back toward the door, he heard the discharge of a pistol behind him, and looking around, saw, through the smoke, a man between the door and the President ... This deponent instantly sprang toward him and seized him; he wrested himself from the grasp, and made a violent thrust at the breast of deponent with a large knife. Deponent parried the blow by striking it up, and received a wound several inches deep in his left arm, between the elbow and the shoulder ...”

One month later, on May 15, 1865, Rathbone testified before the military tribunal. With the exception of delivering his testimony in the first person, it was a nearly verbatim recital of the script prepared the month before, and went a little something like this: “On the evening of the 14th of April last, at about 20 minutes past 8 o’clock, I, in company with Miss Harris, left my residence at the corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them, in their carriage, to Ford’s Theater in Tenth Street ... On entering the box there was a large armchair that was placed nearest the audience, farthest from the stage ... When the second scene of the third act was being performed, and while I was intently observing the proceedings upon the stage, with my back towards the door, I heard the discharge of a pistol behind me, and, looking round, saw, through the smoke, a man between the door and the President ... I instantly sprang towards him, and seized him. He wrested himself from my grasp, and made a violent thrust at my breast with a large knife. I parried the blow by striking it up, and received a wound several inches deep in my left arm, between the elbow and the shoulder ...”

A little over two years later, on June 17, 1867, Rathbone dusted off his script and delivered the following testimony at the trial of John Surratt: “On the evening of the 14th of April, at about 20 minutes past 8, I, in company with Miss Harris, left my residence at the corner of Fifteenth and H streets, and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them in their carriage to Ford’s Theater, on Tenth street ... On entering the box there was a large armchair placed nearest the audience, and furthest from the stage ... When the second scene of the third act was being performed, and while I was intently observing the performance on the stage, I heard the report of a pistol from behind me, and on looking round saw dimly through the smoke the form of a man between the President and the door ... I immediately sprung towards him and seized him. He wrested himself from my grasp, and at the same time made a violent thrust at me with a large knife. I parried the blow by striking it up, and received it on my left arm, between the elbow and the shoulder, and received a deep wound ...”



*State Department/War Department representatives Edwards Pierrepont*



*Albert G. Riddle*

In the end though, the government's brazen attempts to corrupt the proceedings failed to pay dividends and the jury was left hung 8-4 in favor of acquittal. Even with the obviously perjured testimony, the manufactured evidence, and the wildly inappropriate jury instructions, the state was only able to secure four votes for conviction. And Surratt had found himself a number of new fans. As Eisenschiml noted, "The ladies of Washington considered him quite attractive and thronged the courtroom."

John Harrison Surratt walked out of court a free man, and the state quietly opted not to further pursue the charges. Five years later, he married Mary Victorine Hunter, a second cousin of none other than Francis Scott Key, whose son's murderer, it will be recalled, was defended by Edwin

Stanton. Key's great-great-granddaughter Pauline Potter, by the way, later married Baron Philippe de Rothschild, of the infamous Rothschild banking family.

Surratt lived to the ripe old age of 72, passing away, curiously enough, on April 21, 1916, precisely 50 years to the day from when he had been identified in Rome as a member of the Papal Zouave. It is said that he had penned a biography, but he supposedly opted to burn it a few days before his death. In a similar vein, Robert Todd Lincoln is said to have burned all his father's private papers shortly before his own death – because, I suppose, one wouldn't want the truth about the assassination of one's father to reach the public domain.

Defense attorney Joseph H. Bradley, whom we met in the last installment, had this to say to the jury and spectators at John Surratt's trial: "Who was John Wilkes Booth? ... He was a man of polished exterior, pleasing address, highly respectable in every regard, received into the best circles of society; his company sought after; exceedingly bold, courteous, and considered generous to a fault; a warm and liberal-hearted friend, a man who had obtained a reputation upon the stage."

The woman who once reported him for rape in Philadelphia, and the irate, jealous husband who once severely throttled him in Syracuse, New York, might disagree.

Francis Wilson, one of Booth's biographers (*John Wilkes Booth: Fact and Fiction of Lincoln's Assassination*), posed the following question: "How was it possible for Booth to obtain such power over a fellow human being as to command him to perform an act of murder and to know that that command would be enthusiastically obeyed?" A little over a century after the assassination of Lincoln, prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi would ponder the very same question about a guy by the name of Charlie Manson: "I tend to think that there is something more, some missing link that enabled him to so rape and bastardize the minds of his followers that they would go against the most ingrained of all commandments, Thou shalt not kill, and willingly, even eagerly, murder at his command."

A friend of Booth's from childhood, John Deery, said that the John Wilkes Booth that he knew "cast a spell over most men with whom he came in contact, and I believe all women without exception."





*Junius Brutus Booth, father of John Wilkes Booth*

So who was this charismatic enigma known as John Wilkes Booth – the man known to history as possibly the most famous assassin who ever lived? Just about everyone knows that he was an actor, one of the finest and arguably the most popular of his generation. But he was much more than just that, a fact obscured by the century-and-a-half focus on John Wilkes Booth the actor. In reality, John Wilkes Booth, and the Booth family in general, were very deeply tied to the power



structures in Washington and London, and had been for a very, very long time. And they still are today.

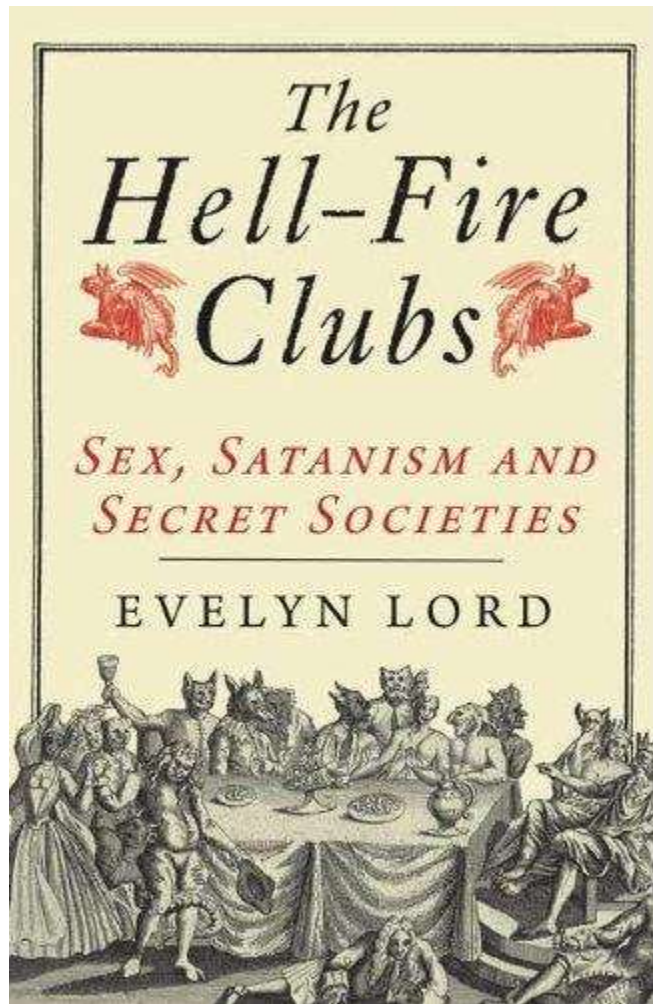
Booth's most famous ancestor was undoubtedly his namesake, John Wilkes, who lived from October 17, 1725 until December 26, 1797. Throughout his life, Wilkes served as a Member of Parliament, a judge, a journalist and essayist, and the Lord Mayor of London. A revered statesman, Wilkes was also a member of the Hellfire Club and a noted libertine (other notable libertines throughout history include the Marquis de Sade, Aleister Crowley, and Anton LaVey). That would be the same Hellfire Club that included as a member a 'Founding Father' by the name of Benjamin Franklin. And that would be the same Benjamin Franklin whose London home from that era yielded the remains of at least ten bodies, six of them children.



*Lord Mayor of London John Wilkes*

It was the Hellfire Club, by the way, that first coined the phrase “Do what thou wilt,” which was later appropriated by Aleister Crowley. And it was the Hellfire Club that was widely rumored during its heyday to be conducting black masses and other occult/Satanic rituals, along with drunken orgies and various other acts of debauchery.

John Wilkes was also notable for being considered during his lifetime the ugliest man in all of England. He never though suffered from a shortage of beautiful female companions. Aside from a nine-year marriage, Wilkes remained single for his 72 years on this planet and was considered quite the ladies man, fathering an unknown number of children. Like his descendent and namesake, Wilkes apparently had a knack for “cast[ing] a spell” over women.



Two other of John Wilkes Booth’s famous ancestors were Henry Booth, the 1st Earl of Warrington, who lived from 1652 to 1694, and his son George Booth, who lived from 1675 to 1758 and succeeded his father as the 2nd (and last) Earl of Warrington. At various times during his life, Henry Booth served as a Member of Parliament, a member of the Privy Council of England, a noted writer, and a mayor.

John Wilkes Booth was also descended from Barton Booth, who lived from 1681 to 1733 and who was described by one biographer as the “most popular actor with the English royalty known to history.” Many generations later, namesake Sydney Barton Booth, a son of Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., would become an actor and writer of some renown before passing away in 1937.







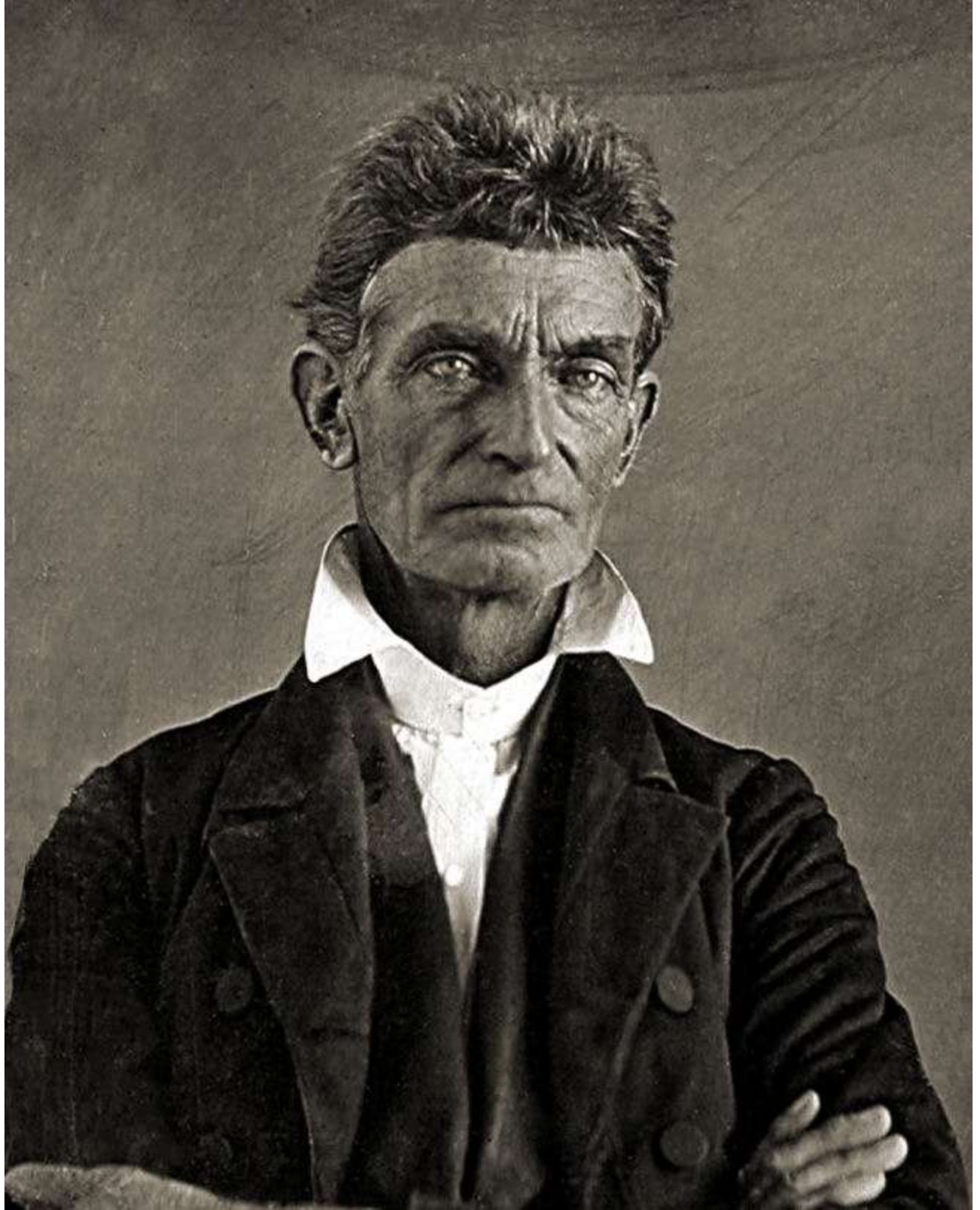
*Henry and George Booth, the 1st and 2nd Earls of Warrington*

The alleged assassin's grandfather was Richard Booth, an eccentric English barrister with a fondness for alcohol – a fondness that would be shared by his son, Junius Brutus Booth, and his grandson, John Wilkes Booth. Junius was born in London in 1796 and was performing on stage by the age of seventeen. At nineteen, he married Marie Christine Adelaide Delannoy. Less than five months later, she bore him his first child, who died in infancy, as would a number of Junius Brutus Booth's offspring.

In June 1821, at the age of twenty-five, Junius set sail for America with his mistress, Mary Ann Holmes, leaving behind his wife and only surviving child, Richard Junius Booth. Junius and Mary Ann would pose as man and wife for the next thirty years, producing no fewer than ten illegitimate offspring, four of whom didn't make it through childhood. The pair weren't actually married until 1851, the year Junius finally divorced his actual wife, and were married just one year before Junius passed away in November 1852.



During his lifetime, Junius was considered to be one of the finest actors of his generation. He was also regarded as a playwright, scholar, philosopher and linguist. Named for one of the most notorious assassins of all time, Junius once set a fine example for son John by sending a letter to then-President Andrew Jackson threatening to slit his throat and/or have him burned at the stake. And he thoughtfully signed that letter and included a return address. It was, nevertheless, dismissed as either a hoax or a joke.



*John Brown*

Junius and Mary Ann purchased a 150-acre estate in Maryland that would ultimately feature a large pool, stables, and a Gothic home known as Tudor Hall, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Junius began construction on the home shortly before his death and so never lived there, though his offspring, including John Wilkes Booth, did. Ned Spangler, it will be recalled, was involved in the construction of the home.

John Wilkes Booth, the ninth of Junius and Mary Ann's ten offspring, was born on May 10, 1838. A well educated young man, he was regarded as an excellent horseman and marksman as well as a talented athlete. Like his father, he made his acting debut at seventeen, in an 1855 production of Richard III. By 1861, he was one of the most popular actors in America and there was considerable demand for his services.



*Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth at Lincoln's second inaugural address*

On December 2, 1859, John Wilkes Booth was among the soldiers standing guard on the scaffold when probable agent provocateur John Brown was hanged. Booth was not a soldier though – he purportedly either borrowed or stole a militia uniform and posed as a soldier to secure the position. On March 4, 1865, Booth found himself prominently placed among the onlookers at Lincoln’s second inaugural address. He was there as a guest of US Senator John P. Hale. Unknown at the time was that Booth was secretly engaged to Hale’s daughter, Lucy Hale. Senator Hale had worked closely with fellow Senator William Seward before Seward’s appointment as Secretary of State. Notably, Hale was a northern senator, representing New Hampshire, and he was known for his staunchly abolitionist views. It makes perfect sense then that his daughter would be engaged to an alleged Confederate operative.



*Senator John P. Hale*

During John Wilkes Booth’s lifetime, there was another member of the Booth/Wilkes clan who achieved a considerable amount of public notoriety. Charles Wilkes was a US naval officer who ultimately attained the rank of rear admiral, as well as a celebrated explorer who led the United



States Exploring Expedition from 1838 to 1842. He was also a great-nephew of John Wilkes, making him a blood relative of John Wilkes Booth and his numerous siblings.

Charles Wilkes was raised by his aunt, Elizabeth Ann Seton, who was a woman of considerable social prominence who later became the first American-born woman to be canonized by the Catholic Church. In the 1820s, Wilkes counted among his associates a genocidal Grand Master Mason by the name of Andrew Jackson – the same Andrew Jackson who was also, by some reports, a friend of Junius Brutus Booth, the guy who ‘jokingly’ threatened to assassinate him.



*Charles Wilkes*

Many years later, another member of the Booth clan, Theresa Cara Booth, was born on September 23, 1954. Theresa is a direct descendent of Algernon Booth, Junius Brutus Booth's brother and John Wilkes Booth's uncle. She became an attorney in 1976 and a member of the

Queen's Counsel in 1995. Two years later, Theresa Booth – better known as Cherie Blair, wife of Tony Blair – became the First Lady of Downing Street. Nothing unusual about that, I suppose. In the aftermath of the Lincoln assassination, actors were viewed with considerable suspicion across the country. The entire cast of *Our American Cousin* was arrested and numerous other productions closed for a time due to the lynch-mob mentality that was sweeping the nation. No one was above suspicion and, as previously noted, more than 2,000 people were arrested as possible co-conspirators. Those with only the loosest connections to the accused coup plotters were scooped up and held for varying lengths of time.

Two of John Wilkes Booth's brothers, Edwin and Junius Brutus, Jr., were fellow actors. Clearly then they had two big strikes against them, which should have put them at the very top of the government's round-up list. And yet not a single member of the Booth clan was arrested in the frenzy of arrests and accusations. Not one. It always helps to have friends in high places.

Brower's Hotel, Philadelphia.

July 4<sup>th</sup> 1835.



You damn'd old Scoundrel if you  
don't sign the pardon of your  
fellow men now under sentence  
of Death De Ruiz & De Soto. I  
will cut your throat whilst  
you are sleeping. I wrote to  
you repeated Cautions - so look  
out or damn you I'll have  
you burnt <sup>at the Stake</sup> in the  
City of Washington.

Your Master

Junius Brutus Booth

You know me! Look out!

\*\*\*\*\*

The Op-Ed page of the *Los Angeles Times* apparently now operates in part as a forum for unpaid advertisements for intelligence agency-approved works of fiction. I say that because just a few days ago that page featured what was essentially a half-page ad for Jeff Bauman's hopelessly fraudulent account of the Boston Marathon bombings. And yesterday that same page featured a barely disguised advertisement for a book written by a professional liar by the name of Mel Ayton.

Ayton has apparently penned a whole series of disinformational books on various presidential assassinations and attempted assassinations. His latest, *Hunting the President: Threats, Plots and Assassination Attempts – From FDR to Obama*, carries on in that fine tradition. The following paragraph is from his wildly inaccurate Op-Ed piece:

“Lincoln was the first American president to be assassinated. But the motivations that drove his assassin were unfortunately not unique. Understanding the nature of those who want to kill a president goes considerably further toward explaining assassinations than looking to fanciful conspiracy theories.”



*Cherie Blair, aka Theresa Cara Booth*

Let's now take a peek at what “fanciful” theory it is that Ayton is pitching: “Booth's desire for fame and recognition is a common theme among assassins. In researching a book on presidential killers and would-be killers, I found that they tended to share certain personality traits. While some had been treated for mental illness, an even more predominant characteristic is that many of them were disillusioned with and resentful of American society after a lifetime of failure. And most of them also had a burning desire for notoriety. Killing an American president, most would-be assassins believed, would win them a place in history, making a ‘somebody’ out of a ‘nobody.’”



Every single word of the preceding paragraph can only be described as complete and utter bullshit. Booth already had fame and recognition beyond his wildest dreams. He was far from being a “nobody.” To the contrary, he was making upwards of \$20,000 a year, a staggering amount in those days, and had the love, respect and admiration of men and women all across the country. He was wealthy, good looking, supremely talented, and had lived a very charmed life. And given that he was only twenty-six at the time of the assassination, it is hardly accurate to say that he had faced a “lifetime” of failure. In truth, he had never known failure at all in his short life.

Compulsive liar Ayton’s body of work is, unfortunately, typical of what has been written about Lincoln and his alleged assassin over the last 149 years. Listed below, in order of the date of release, are some of the more honest books that have been published (some decidedly better than others).

*Bates, Finis L. The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, J.L Nichols & Company, 1907*

*Wilson, Francis John Wilkes Booth: Fact and Fiction of Lincoln’s Assassination, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929*

*Eisenschiml, Otto Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, Little, Brown and Company, 1937*

*Eisenschiml, Otto In the Shadow of Lincoln’s Death, Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940*

*Roscoe, Theodore The Web of Conspiracy, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959*

*Shelton, Vaughan Mask for Treason: The Lincoln Murder Trial, Stackpole Books, 1965*

*Balsiger, David and Charles Sellier, Jr. The Lincoln Conspiracy, Schick Sunn Classic Books, 1977*

*Jameson, W.C. Return of Assassin: John Wilkes Booth, Republic of Texas Press, 1999*

“The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, only days after the end of the war, was a terrible tragedy. Much has been speculated about the events leading up to the murder and immediately afterward, but few people know what *really* happened.” So says Bill O’Reilly on page 1 of his tome on the Lincoln assassination. What he doesn’t tell readers is that after reading his novelized account, they will still have no clue what *really* happened.

One thing that O’Reilly opts to leave out of his book entirely is the mockery of a trial held for the alleged conspirators. After spending the first 276 pages of his book covering the period from April 1, 1865 to April 26, 1865 (the day Booth was allegedly gunned down at Garrett’s barn), O’Reilly then abruptly jumps ahead to July 7, 1865, the day four of the alleged conspirators were hanged. Apparently nothing of significance happened in May or June of 1865. Or maybe it is best not to shine too bright a light on one of the most sordid chapters of US history.

US Navy Secretary Gideon Welles is on record as stating that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton wanted the alleged conspirators to be “tried and executed before President Lincoln was buried.”

Convictions were obviously a given. Lincoln was laid to rest on May 4, 1865, nineteen days after he died and just before the trial of the conspirators began, thwarting Stanton's wishes, but 'justice' was dispensed very quickly nonetheless.

Stanton favored a military trial, a course of action opposed by various other members of the Lincoln cabinet, including both Welles and former Attorney General Edward Bates, who noted that "if the offenders are done to death by that tribunal, however truly guilty, they will pass for martyrs with half the world." Many believed that a military trial would be unconstitutional given that all of the defendants were civilians. Stanton nevertheless prevailed.

It would in fact be later determined that the proceedings had been unconstitutional, both because the suspects were subjected to military 'justice,' and because they were denied their right to individual trials. That ruling would not, however, resurrect the five alleged conspirators who paid with their lives.

While awaiting what passed for a trial, the prisoners were held in appalling conditions aboard two ironclad vessels, the *Montauk* and the *Saugus* (except for Mudd and Surratt, who were reportedly held elsewhere and spared the tortuous hoods). Very special attention appears to have been paid to Lewis Powell. Throughout his confinement, Powell was personally guarded by Thomas T. Eckert, which is undoubtedly the only time in the nation's history that a sitting Assistant Secretary of War served as a lowly prison guard. Even more curiously, despite the fact that Powell was kept shackled, hooded, isolated, and otherwise deprived, he was nevertheless allowed to keep a knife while imprisoned. And false reports were circulated indicating that he was suicidal.



*Thomas T. Eckert*

It is perfectly clear, in retrospect, that the government had contingency plans to have Powell 'suicided' if necessary.

On May 1, 1865, newly-installed President Andrew Johnson ordered that the eight alleged conspirators face a nine-man military tribunal. The members of that tribunal – seven generals and two colonels – were all handpicked by Stanton. All but a couple were unknown to the public and none of them knew anything about the so-called 'rule of law' or about evidentiary or procedural rules. That didn't prove to be a problem though – they just made up the tribunal rules as they went along.

As Vaughan Shelton wrote back in 1965, "All but one or two were nearly as unknown then as they are now. There was not a noteworthy war record in the whole group. In fact the two whose names might be recognized by the average reader – Major General David Hunter, presiding officer, and Major General Lew Wallace (later author of *Ben Hur*) – had attained rank by political connections, and their names had been associated with military defeats throughout the four-year contest. All appeared to be qualified largely by their prejudices, total ignorance of the law, and subservience to the will of the prosecutors. It was common talk in Washington that the military commission was assembled for the purpose of convicting the accused persons – not to weigh the merits of their cases."

Besides being completely unqualified to sit in judgment of the accused, the panel had something else in common, as various photographs reveal: many of them, maybe all of them, were Freemasons. As were the prosecutors. And at least some of the defense attorneys. And Edwin Stanton. And Lafayette Baker. And John Wilkes Booth. And seemingly just about everyone else who played a prominent role in the assassination conspiracy and cover-up. And many of the generals who directed the action on the battlefields of the Civil War. On both sides.



*Confederate General Albert Pike*

Seated on the panel were Major General David “Black Dave” Hunter, Brigadier General Albion Parris Howe, Lieutenant Colonel David Ramsey Clendenin, Brigadier General Thomas Maley Harris, Brevet Brigadier General James Adams Ekin, Major General Lew Wallace, Brevet Colonel Charles Henry Tompkins, Brigadier General Robert Sanford Foster, and Brevet Major General August Valentine Kautz. The lead prosecutor was Brigadier General Joseph Holt, then the Judge Advocate General of the United States Army and a former Secretary of War. Joining him as Special Judge Advocates were John Armor Bingham, a US Representative from Ohio and a future US Ambassador to Japan, and Brevet Brigadier General Henry Lawrence Burnett. Both Bingham and Burnett were appointed, of course, by Edwin Stanton.



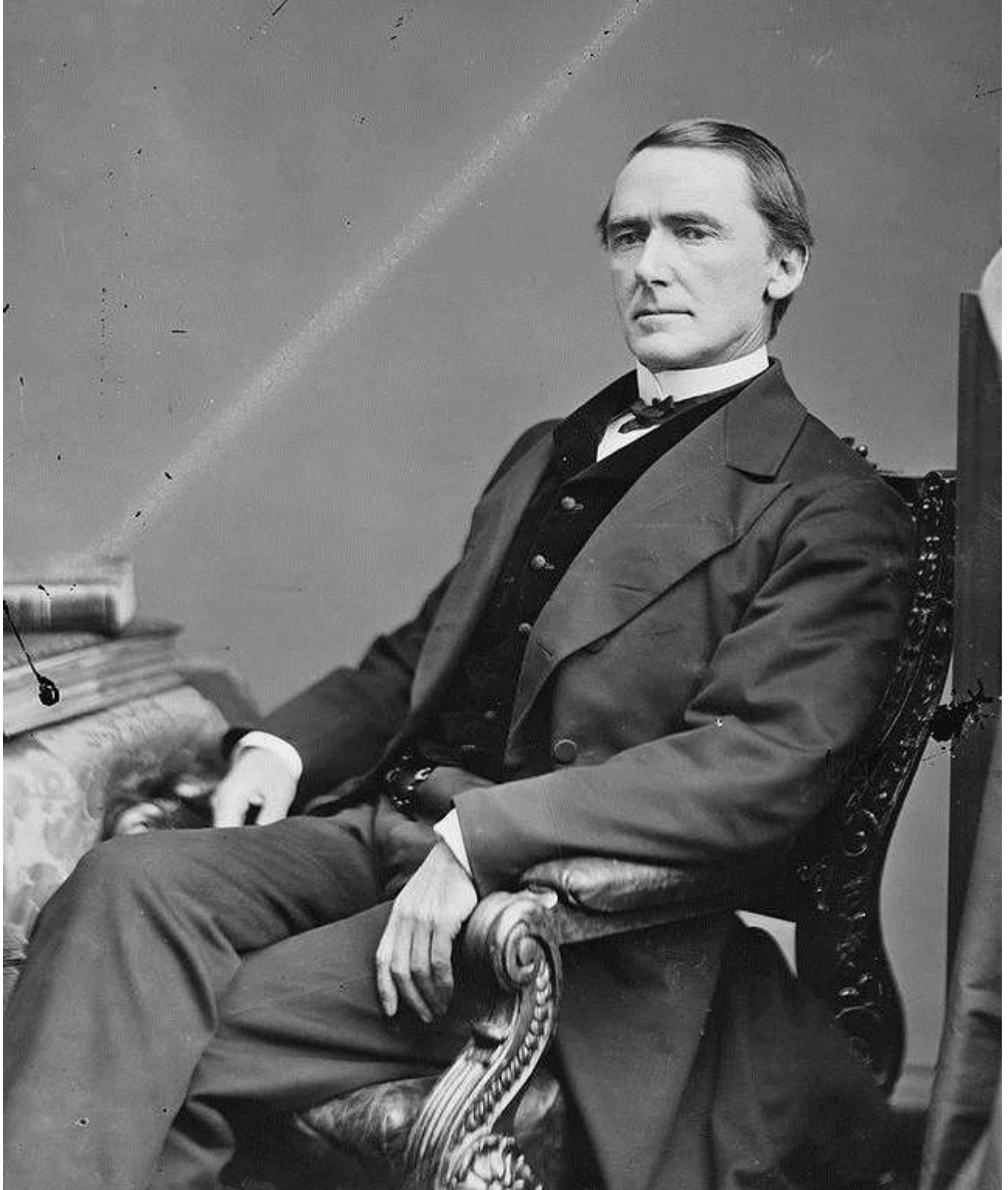
*Pretty Masons all in a row: the nine tribunal members and three prosecutors*

Shockingly enough, the assembled panel of ‘judges’ showed extreme bias throughout the seven-week proceedings. That bias was revealed, for example, by the jurists’ handling of objections. The defense attorneys, most of whom appear to have actually been working for the state, lodged only twelve objections, all of which were overruled. Prosecutors, on the other hand, voiced fifty-four objections, fifty-one of which were sustained.

The prisoners were arraigned on May 10, 1865, just one day after the charges against them had been read (Holt wanted those charges withheld from the press and public). Two days later, on May 12, testimony began. The defendants had been given just three days to obtain legal counsel, which they had to do while being quite literally muzzled. Ultimately assembled for the defense were Captain William Doster, Frederick Stone, Thomas Ewing, Jr., Walter Smith Cox, and Colonel Frederick Aiken.

Three members of that group appear to have been richly rewarded for their ‘service’ to country. Just two years after the ‘trial,’ Stone became a US Representative from Maryland. Ewing also joined the US Congress, representing a district in Ohio. Cox became a federal judge and, perhaps quite tellingly, presided at the trial of alleged presidential assassin Charles Guiteau just a couple years after being seated.





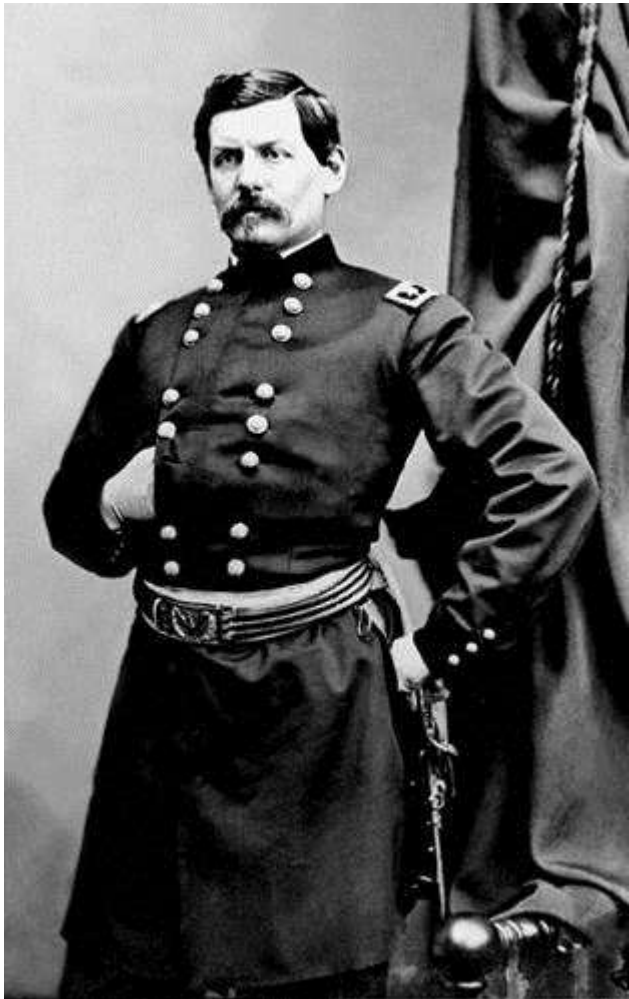
*Defense attorney Frederick Stone*

Aiken, who represented Mary Surratt after the curious withdrawal of her first attorney, Reverdy Johnson – who was a sitting US Senator, a former US Attorney General, and a future Minister to the UK – may have actually been legitimately working on behalf of his client. Notably, he faced a much different fate after the trial concluded than did Stone, Ewing and Cox. Within a year,

Aiken's law practice had imploded and he had been arrested for bouncing a check. He died in 1878 at the relatively young age of forty-six and was buried in an unmarked grave.

Very little else is known about the young defense attorney. As his *Wikipedia* page notes, "Information on Aiken's early life is largely unknown; his date of birth, city of birth, and even his full name varies depending on source." And "like his birth records, his war service also remains largely unknown." Even less appears to be known about the ethereal William Doster, who was tasked with defending both Atzerodt and Powell, and who also may not have been thoroughly co-opted.

The reality though is that no defense attorney, no matter how devoted or how skilled, could have saved any of the defendants from their fates. All that was required for conviction was a simple majority of five votes – five votes from a nine-man panel predisposed to convict before the trial even began. Only one additional vote was required to impose the death penalty. And the tribunal's pronouncements would be final; there would be no appeals allowed. All of that, of course, was brazenly unconstitutional.



Union General George McClellan

Stanton's War Department did not just put the eight defendants on trial; the entire Confederacy was put on trial in a shameless attempt to inflame public opinion and inspire bloodlust.

As Shelton noted, witnesses told tales of “Plots to burn northern cities, start epidemics, instigate riots” and other nefarious deeds, including poisoning public water supplies, destroying historical buildings, and starving Union POWs. Most of these alleged plots were never actually carried out. And even if they had been, none of that had any relevance at all as to the guilt or innocence of the defendants and would not have been allowed into evidence in any legitimate court proceedings.

Another problem with the introduction of such testimony is that most of the ‘witnesses’ who delivered it didn’t actually exist. One such witness who testified as “Sanford Conover,” for example, was actually Charles Dunham, who also used the alias “James Watson Wallace.” It was later revealed that Dunham had run what was dubbed a “school for perjured witnesses” at the National Hotel, where he had coached others on how to properly deliver their perjured testimony. Dunham soon found himself in prison after being convicted for both perjury and suborning perjury.

One of those receiving schooling was “Richard Montgomery,” who was actually James Thompson, a burglar from New York with a long criminal record. Appearing as “Henry Van Steinacker” was Hans Von Winklestein, a prison inmate who gained his release shortly after testifying. A Canadian presented to the court as “Dr.” James Merritt was denounced by his own government as a fraud and a quack. And so on.



*Left to right: Thomas Harris, David Hunter, August Kautz, Albion Howe, Lew Wallace, and John Bingham*

Defense attorney Doster, whose vehement objection to the introduction of the irrelevant, inflammatory testimony was overruled, would later claim that some of the other prosecution witnesses were actually NDP detectives paid by the government for their testimony. And it

would later be revealed that NDP chief Lafayette Baker's order to his underlings instructed them to "extort confessions and procure testimony to establish the conspiracy ... by promises, rewards, threats, deceit, force, or any other effectual means."

Many of the state's witnesses were in fact paid handsomely for their testimony. Merritt, for example, collected a \$6,000 paycheck, the equivalent of more than \$150,000 today. Not bad for a day's work.

There were numerous other irregularities in 1865's version of The Trial of the Century. Major Henry Rathbone, as we have already seen, delivered a bizarrely verbatim recital of his deposition testimony. For those who have forgotten, here's another little taste of Rathbone's version of events, first from his deposition on April 17, 1865, and then from his testimony before the tribunal one month later, on May 15, 1865.

"Deponent then turned to the President; his position was not changed; his head was slightly bent forward, and his eyes were closed. Deponent saw that he was unconscious, and supposing him mortally wounded, rushed to the door for the purpose of calling medical aid. On reaching the outer door of the passageway, as above described, deponent found it barred by a heavy piece of plank, one end of which was secured in the wall ... This wedge, or bar, was about four feet from the floor. Persons upon the outside were beating against the door for the purpose of entering. Deponent removed the bar, and the door was opened ..."

"I then turned to the President. His position was not changed: his head was slightly bent forward, and his eyes were closed. I saw that he was unconscious, and, supposing him mortally wounded, rushed to the door for the purpose of calling medical aid. On reaching the outer door of the passageway, I found it barred by a heavy piece of plank, one end of which was secured in the wall ... This wedge or bar, was about four feet from the floor. Persons upon the outside were beating against the door for the purpose of entering. I removed the bar, and the door was opened ..."



*Union General William Tecumseh Sherman*

Rathbone was clearly ‘reading’ his testimony from a memorized script, which raises the obvious question of: why? Why was Rathbone so thoroughly rehearsed that he was able to recite his deposition testimony virtually verbatim, without even minor variations in the wording?

Historians, needless to say, have never addressed that question. Another question that has never been addressed is why the photo of John Wilkes Booth that was used throughout the trial wasn’t actually of John Wilkes Booth; it was instead an image of his brother, Edwin Booth. What that means, of course, is that every witness who identified Booth as the man they had seen or heard discussing, carrying out, or fleeing from the assassination, was actually identifying Edwin Booth as the culprit. And again, the obvious question that is raised, but that has never been asked or answered, is: why?

In a bold move, defense counsel Doster subpoenaed sitting President Andrew Johnson to appear as a witness, but Johnson cavalierly ignored the summons, with no legal repercussions.

Numerous other witnesses who should have been called were strangely absent from the proceedings, like Mary Todd Lincoln and Clara Harris, both of whom were eyewitnesses to the assassination of Lincoln. And William Seward, Frederick Seward, Fanny Seward, Frances Seward, and Emerick Hansell, all of whom were allegedly eyewitnesses to the supposed bloodbath at the Seward home.



The three witnesses who did testify about the alleged attack at the Seward residence – William Bell, George Robinson and Augustus Seward – presented wildly contradictory and problematic accounts, made all the more problematic by the fact that, according to all the early reports, Augustus Seward wasn't actually at the home at the time of the alleged attack.



*Confederate General Robert E. Lee with various other Confederate generals in 1869*

It will probably come as a shock to no one that in 1865 America, the testimony of a black man carried considerably less weight than the testimony of a white man, especially when the white men in question were the Secretary of State, an Assistant Secretary of State, and a US State Department courier. Why then did the state leave William Seward, Frederick Seward and Emerick Hansell (along with three of the Seward women) on the sidelines while calling to the stand two black servants – two men who were, if we're being honest here, just a step above slaves in the social hierarchy of the time?

According to reports, there were as many as eight eyewitnesses to the carnage at the Seward mansion – six of them white and five of them members of the Seward family. But the only two of the eight called were a black 'houseboy' who was unable to give his age when asked in court, and a black nurse. The only member of the Seward family who was called was the one who wasn't actually home and therefore didn't witness anything.



*Defense attorney Thomas Ewing, Jr.*

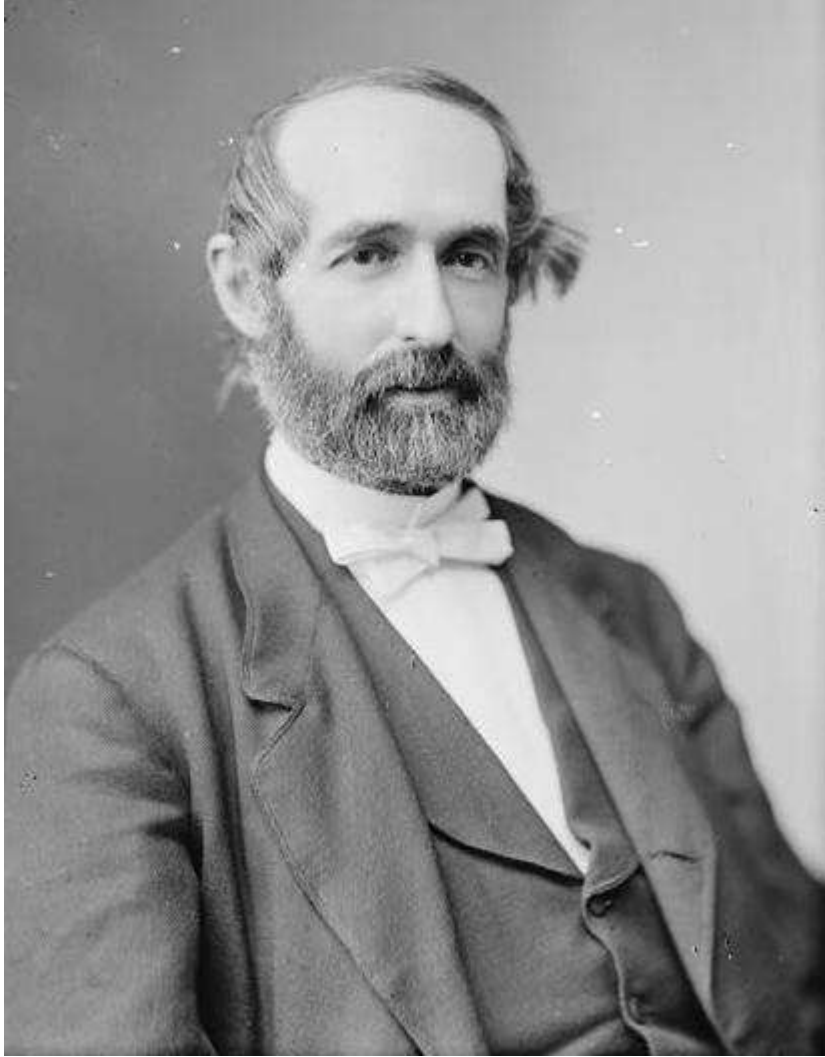
As previously stated, the first arrivals to the house after the alleged attack were Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, and Surgeon General Joseph Barnes. Arriving shortly after them was Assistant Secretary of War Thomas Eckert, who would soon be serving as Lewis Powell's prison guard. Unanswered, of course, is the question of why these four prominent individuals converged on the Seward house before anyone else arrived. And why they didn't instead head immediately to Ford's Theater, where the president lay near death. No mention was made by any of them of encountering Major Augustus Seward that evening. And testimony at the tribunal also indicated that Augustus was not at home the evening of April 14. And yet, nevertheless, he was presented to the courtroom and to the public as the principal eyewitness to the alleged carnage.

According to the official story, Powell came calling at the Seward home the night of April 14 under the guise of delivering medicine for the ailing William Seward. He was greeted by houseboy Bell, whom he allegedly brushed past while insisting that he was to hand-deliver the medications. Powell was then confronted at the top of the stairs by Frederick Seward, who insisted that Powell leave the package with him and not bother the sleeping Secretary of State. Powell then turned to leave, took a few steps down the stairs, and then pulled a gun and attempted to shoot Frederick. When the gun failed to fire, he supposedly bum-rushed Frederick and brutally beat him nearly to death.

According to Bill O'Reilly's overwrought version of events, "The two men grapple as Powell leaps up onto the landing and then uses the butt of his gun to pistol-whip Frederick. Finally, Frederick Seward is knocked unconscious. His body makes a horrible thud as he collapses to the floor, his skull shattered in two places, gray matter trickling out through the gashes, blood streaming down his face."

During that encounter, Fanny Seward supposedly looked out from her father's room and in doing so conveniently gave away William Seward's location. So after incapacitating Frederick, Powell next burst into William Seward's room and encountered George Robinson, whom he grappled with before beginning to brutally slash away at Seward. At that time, Augustus Seward, who had been awakened by all the commotion, allegedly entered the room and began grappling with Powell. Powell though got the best of him as well and then bolted out of the room and down the stairs. In most versions of the story, there is no further mention of Fanny Seward, who was supposedly in her father's room throughout the ordeal.

On his way out of the house, Powell allegedly encountered Hansell, who had just arrived at the home. Hansell was supposedly brutally attacked and left for dead just inside the entrance to the home. Powell then exited the residence and rode off into the night. And that, in a nutshell, is the official story of how one man was allegedly able to leave at least five people mortally wounded while walking away without a scratch.



*Frederick Seward, showing the severe scarring from his alleged beating*

The witnesses who appeared before the military tribunal, however, had a very hard time keeping the details of that story straight. Here is a portion of Robinson's testimony, delivered on May 19, 1865: "The first I saw of [Powell] I heard a scuffling in the hall; I opened the door to see what the trouble was; as I opened the door he stood close up to it; as soon as it was opened wide enough he struck me and knocked me partially down and then rushed up to the bed of Mr. Seward, struck him and maimed him; as soon as I could get on my feet I endeavored to haul him off the bed and he turned on me; in the scuffle there was a man come into the room who clutched him; between the two of us we got him to the door, or by the door, when he clinched his hand around my neck, knocked me down, broke away from the other man and rushed down stairs." Amazingly enough, neither the prosecutors nor the defense attorneys bothered to ask him who this other mystery man was. Clearly though it wasn't Augustus Seward, who Robinson, a household servant, would certainly have recognized. When asked specifically whether he saw Powell's alleged "encounter with Major Seward," Robinson replied that he "did not see that." When asked about Frederick Seward, he responded as follows: "I did not see Mr. Frederick Seward around at all." So George Robinson did not see the guy who was supposedly lying in a bloody heap just outside the door to William Seward's room. He also didn't see the guy who

supposedly assisted him with trying to subdue Powell. And he didn't see, or at least didn't mention, Fanny Seward. But he did see some mysterious, unidentified stranger. When later asked, "Where was [Frederick] when [Powell] came out [of Seward's room]?", his unexpected response was: "The first I saw of Mr. Frederick was in the room standing up; he had come inside the door." So it appears that the guy who was lying near death somehow magically got up and strolled into the room, hopefully after pushing the gray matter back into his shattered skull.



JOSEPH HOLT



COLONEL HENRY L. BURNETT



JOHN A. BINGHAM

*The prosecution team: one of Burnett's duties was to oversee the rewriting of the trial transcript to remove various contradictions and inconsistencies*

Robinson also told the court that he never heard Powell utter a sound throughout the ordeal. Judge Advocate Holt, sounding a bit incredulous and clearly not getting the answers he wanted, asked the witness this question: "You say that this man, during the whole of this bloody work, made no remark at all; that he said nothing?" Robinson responded with: "I did not hear him make any remark."

Let's now listen in to some of Augustus Seward's testimony, because this is where it really gets interesting: "I retired to bed about 7 o'clock on the night of the 14th, with the understanding that I would be called at 11 o'clock, to sit up with my father; I very shortly fell asleep, and so remained until wakened by the screams of my sister; I jumped out of bed and ran into my father's room in my shirt and drawers; the gas in the room had been shut down rather low, and I saw what appeared to be two men, one trying to hold the other; my first impression was that my father had become delirious, and that the nurse was trying to hold him. I went up and took hold of him, but saw at once from his size and the struggle that it was not my father; it then struck me that the nurse had become delirious and was striking about the room at random; knowing the delicate state of my father's health, I endeavored to shove the person I had hold of to the door, with the intention of putting him out of his room; while I was pushing him he struck me five or six times over the head with whatever he had in his left hand; I supposed it at the time to be a bottle or decanter he had seized from the table; during this time he repeated with an intensely



strong voice-‘I am mad, I am mad;’ on reaching the hall he gave a sudden turn and breaking away from me, disappeared down stairs.”

You got all that straight? Augustus first mistook Powell – a strapping, physically fit, 20-year-old man – for his frail, 63-year-old, bedridden father. Following that, he next mistook Powell, a decidedly fair-skinned Caucasian lad, for his father’s black nurse. He also completely failed to notice that Robinson was right alongside him grappling with Powell. And he failed to notice that his sister was in the room. And he distinctly heard Powell loudly proclaiming himself to be mad, even though Robinson, also in the room, didn’t hear Powell utter a word.

Augustus was also asked about his brother Frederick, to which he responded: “I never saw anything of my brother the whole time.” In other words, he didn’t notice that he had to practically step over his brother’s prone, bloody body to get to his father’s room. And he apparently wasn’t paying attention when Frederick stood up and walked into that room.



*It's Booth's photograph – just not the right Booth*

Coupled with the conflicting testimony of Seward and Robinson, there is the enduring mystery surrounding Emerick Hansell. According to the official version of events, Hansell was left lying nearly lifeless just inside the front door of the home. But Dr. T.S. Verdi, the Seward family physician, testified that he “found Mr. Hansell, a messenger of the State Department, lying on a bed, wounded by a cut in the side some two and a half inches deep.” He went on to say that that bed was in a third-floor bedroom! Needless to say, no explanation was offered as to how and why Hansell could have ended up there. On that particular night, apparently, it was not uncommon for mortally wounded guys to get up all by themselves and wander around the Seward manor.

It seems pretty obvious that of all the witnesses to testify before the tribunal, none were more important to securing convictions than those who claimed to have witnessed the crimes actually being committed. It seems more than a bit odd then that the state bypassed both the First Lady and a senator’s daughter in favor of an otherwise obscure future murderer named Henry Rathbone, who was clearly reading from a script written by unseen others. And it also seems more than a little odd that the state also left no fewer than five members of the Seward household *and* a State Department courier sitting on the sidelines in favor of two lowly household servants and a member of the Seward family who, by all accounts other than his own, wasn’t even in the home that night.

It is on the shoulders of those four men – Augustus Seward, William Bell, George Robinson, and Henry Rathbone, all of whom are all but forgotten and all of whom presented obviously perjured testimony – that the official story of what happened on the evening of April 14, 1865 in the presidential box at Ford’s Theater and at the Seward home has now rested for 149 years.



*Defense attorney William Doster*

As for Bell, his testimony was problematic as well: “When [Powell] came he rang the bell and I went to the door, and this man came in; he had a little package in his hand, and said it was medicine from Dr. Verdi; he said he was sent by Dr. Verdi with particular directions how he was to take the medicine, and he said he must go up; I told him he could not go up ... he said that would not do, and I started to go up, and finding he would go up I started past him and went up the stairs before him ... I noticed that his step was very heavy, and I asked him not to walk so heavy, he would disturb Mr. Seward; he met Mr. Frederick Seward on the steps outside the door, and had some conversation with him in the hall.”

After describing a lengthy argument between Powell and Frederick Seward, Bell testified that Powell “started toward the steps as if to go down, and I started to go down before him; I had gone about three steps, and turned around, saying ‘don’t walk so heavy;’ by the time I had turned round he jumped back and struck Mr. Frederick Seward, and by the time I had turned clear around, Mr. Frederick Seward had fallen, and thrown up his hands, then I ran downstairs and called ‘murder;’ I went to the front door and cried murder; then I ran down to General Auger’s headquarters at the corner.”

Finding no one there, Bell ran back to the house in time to see Powell run out and get on his horse. Asked if he saw “with what [Powell] struck Mr. Fred. Seward,” Bell responded that “it appeared to be round and wound with velvet; I took it to be a knife afterwards.” For the record, it was actually supposed to be a gun.

Probably seeking to avoid perjuring himself too brazenly, Bell adopted the “I didn’t see nothing” approach. Powell, acting with superhuman strength and speed, managed to get to and subdue

Frederick Seward before Bell could even turn around – after which Bell left the house, missing the rest of the carnage and returning just in time to witness Powell’s escape. One wonders though how Emerick Hansell, the Steven Parent of this story (look it up), somehow managed to not see or hear Bell’s frantic flight and shouts of “murder” as he approached the Seward house that night. And why no patrols were near enough to respond to his cries. And exactly how long it took William Bell to turn “clear around.” In any event, we know that we can rule Bell out as being the mystery man who assisted George Robinson.



*Union General Ambrose Burnside*

Amazingly enough, after nearly a century-and-a-half, no one has ever seriously questioned the official narrative of what exactly happened that night. There have been just a relative handful of books written that question various aspects of the assassination, such as whether there were other, unseen conspirators, and whether John Wilkes Booth really was gunned down at Garrett’s barn, but even the authors of those books have unquestioningly accepted that what the state says went down in that presidential box and in the Seward home really did happen.

But why? On what basis should we blindly accept those aspects of the official story? Why should we believe a guy who when called upon three times to tell his story under oath, told that story in the exact same words all three times? And why should we believe two guys who supposedly stood side-by-side to fight off an intruder without either noticing the other’s presence? And who both somehow failed to notice the allegedly mortally wounded Frederick Seward lying right

outside the door? And why should we believe a guy who absurdly claimed that he confused a young, physically fit Lewis Powell for his own invalid, aging father, and then claimed to have confused the very same Lewis Powell with the shorter, older, and much darker George Robinson?

How is it possible that no one has questioned any of that? Do I have to fucking do everything around here?

There were, needless to say, other irregularities in what passed for a trial, including the wholesale suppression of exculpatory evidence. And the introduction of brazenly manufactured evidence, like a supposed cipher letter, also introduced into evidence at John Surratt's trial, that had allegedly been retrieved from a river but that clearly had never been in the water.



*Confederate General Robert E. Lee, with son*

To briefly recap then, all of the following were distinguishing characteristics of the 'trial' of the conspirators:

1. The defendants were informed of the charges against them just 72 hours before the trial began, depriving them of the ability to put together an effective defense.
2. The defendants, all civilians, were subjected to military justice.

3. The defendants were denied their right to individual trials.
4. The defendants were not allowed to speak in their own defense.
5. The state willfully withheld the list of prosecution witnesses, denying the defendants their right to know the nature of the testimony they would be defending themselves against.
6. The state freely introduced inflammatory, prejudicial testimony.
7. The state made extensive use of witnesses testifying under assumed identities.
8. The state made extensive use of paid witnesses.
9. The defendants were prohibited from privately consulting with their attorneys.
10. The state was not shy about suppressing exculpatory evidence.
11. The state was also not shy about introducing manufactured evidence.
12. The state allowed subpoenaed defense witnesses to ignore those subpoenas.
13. Only a simple majority was required to convict, and only a 2/3 majority was required to impose the death penalty.

And yet, through seven weeks of the most extreme prosecutorial misconduct imaginable, the entire defense team raised only twelve objections. They should have raised that many just during the first hour of the first day of the proceedings. If not sooner.



*Union General John Pope*

On June 29, 1965, the tribunal members met in a secret session to begin reviewing the evidence. It didn't take them long to find all the defendants guilty. On July 5, President Johnson approved



all the sentences handed down by the commissioners, including the death sentence for Mary Surratt. The very next day, four of the prisoners were informed that they would hang in less than 24 hours.

Mary Surratt's spiritual advisers were denied access to her until they gave their assurances that they would not proclaim their belief in her innocence. Even then, they were allowed access only for a few hours. All of the prisoners were guarded very closely during their final hours by Thomas Eckert, Lafayette Baker, and a number of his thuggish detectives. Some of the gathered witnesses described the condemned prisoners as looking drugged as they were led to the gallows by Baker's men.

More than a thousand soldiers ringed the prison walls to keep protestors at bay. Just after 1:30 PM on the afternoon of July 7, 1865, four soldiers kicked away the posts that were temporarily supporting the floor of the gallows and Mary Surratt, Lewis Thornton Powell, David Herold, and George Adzerodt fell to their deaths.

Meanwhile, military personnel escorted Dr. Samuel Mudd, Michael O'Laughlin, Ed Spangler, and Samuel Arnold to a remote, isolated, desolate facility known as Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Florida. Photos reveal that what was once undoubtedly a gorgeous tropical atoll had been converted by the US military into a veritable hell on Earth. The facility reportedly featured underground torture cells and dungeons. All four prisoners were held in solitary confinement in conditions so appalling that one of them, Michael O'Laughlin, was dead within two years.



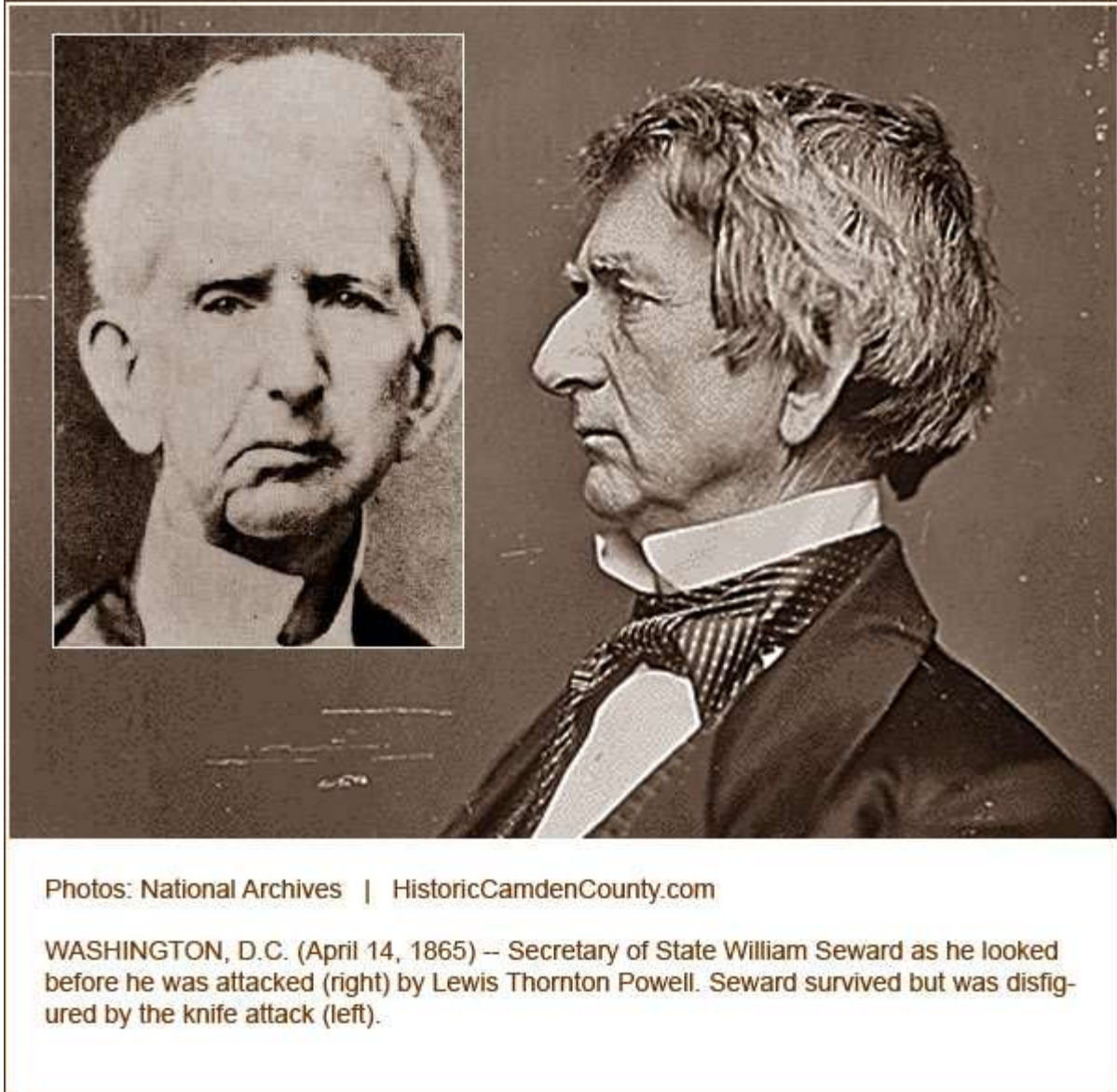
*Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas*

And that, dear readers, is how 'justice' was meted out to the eight alleged accomplices of John Wilkes Booth.

In my continuing quest to gain some kind of understanding of exactly what happened on the night of April 14, 1865, I have worked my way through several more rather tedious treatments of the Lincoln assassination, including a relatively new tome by Leonard Guttridge and Ray Neff (*Dark Union*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003) that adds several new layers of complexity to the fabled attack on Secretary of State William Seward. And by “new layers of complexity,” I really mean new layers of absurdity.

One thing we learn from the authors is that the “house where the Swards lived was a thirty-room mansion overlooking Lafayette Square.” A three-story, thirty-room mansion. But like virtually everyone else who has written about the alleged attack at the Seward home, the authors offer little commentary on how Lewis Powell, who by all accounts had never been in the home, could have so easily navigated his way through it.

The authors also inform us that, “This was no assassin’s work. Seward’s body was otherwise unscathed. The knife struck nowhere near the heart or any other vital organ. It was not aimed at the windpipe. It targeted Seward’s face – in particular, his ligatured jaw.” In other words, none of the wounds that Seward allegedly sustained that night were inconsistent with the injuries he was known to have suffered as a result of the carriage accident. It is, I have to say, a rather remarkable ‘coincidence’ that Powell’s knife struck only where Seward was previously injured.



Photos: National Archives | [HistoricCamdenCounty.com](http://HistoricCamdenCounty.com)

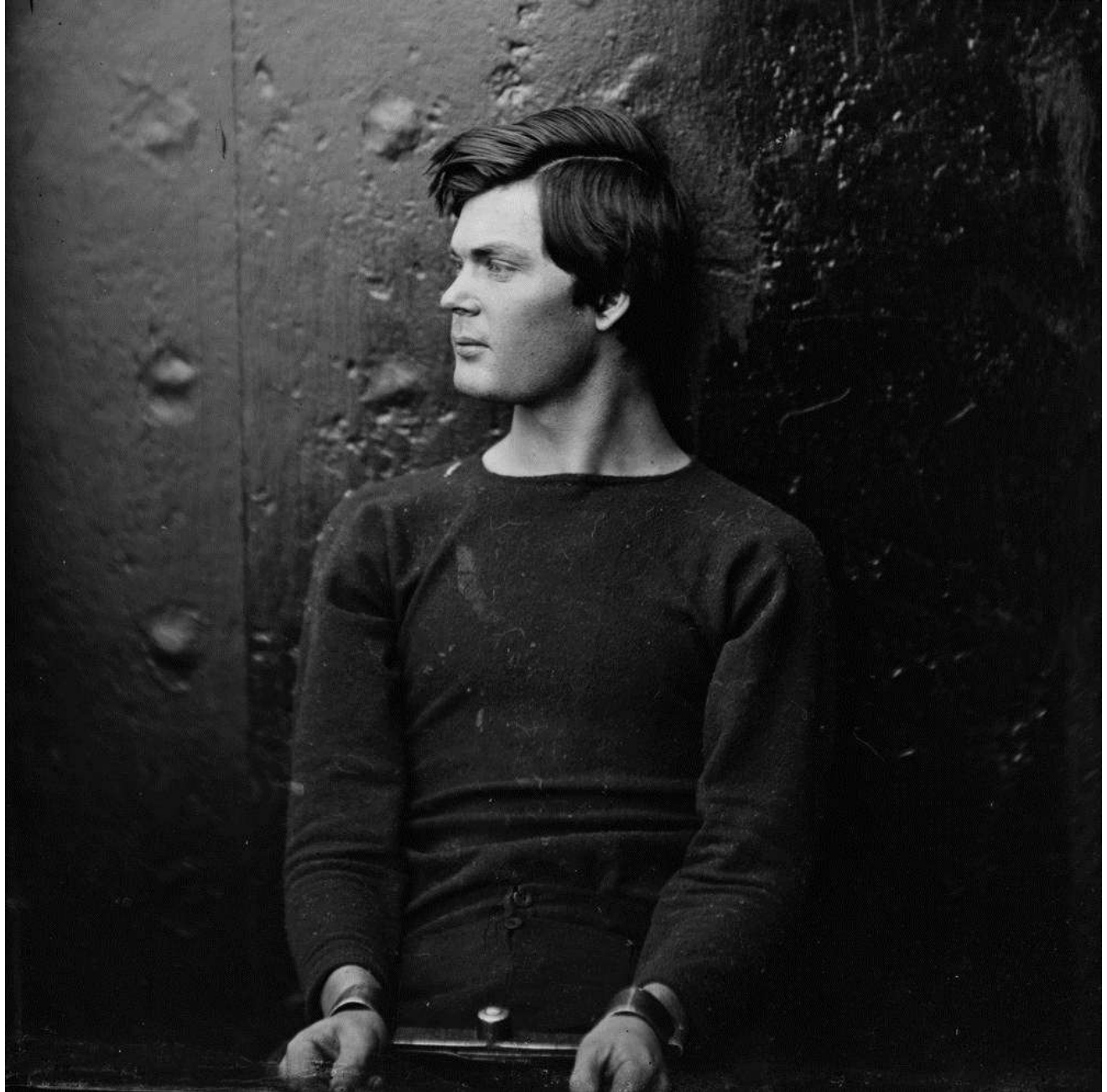
WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 14, 1865) -- Secretary of State William Seward as he looked before he was attacked (right) by Lewis Thornton Powell. Seward survived but was disfigured by the knife attack (left).

Contradicting virtually everything else that has been written about the alleged attempted assassination of Seward, Guttridge and Neff also claim that “Two male nurses had been assigned to the secretary, and two State Department messengers, each armed with a Colt revolver, were working shifts as Seward’s bodyguard. That Good Friday evening one of the messengers, Emerick Hansell, reached Seward’s home shortly after nine in the evening ... After a meal in the kitchen, he settled himself in an alcove on the third floor, where most of the family bedrooms were located.”

So now we find that, in addition to two active-duty military personnel (George Robinson and Augustus Seward) and two other able-bodied men (William Bell and Frederick Seward) being present in the home, William Seward actually had an armed guard stationed right down the hall from his room – and yet Powell was still able to locate, get to, and brutally attack his target. Well done, Mr. Powell!



According to Guttridge and Neff, Hansell didn't enter into the melee until after William Seward had been attacked and Powell was grappling with Robinson: "Then another figure plunged into the room. It wasn't Fred. He had already staggered to his bedroom, beaten nearly senseless. The new arrival was Emerick Hansell ... He heard Robinson cry, 'Hansey, help me.'"



*The always photogenic Lewis Powell*

In case anyone missed any of that, let's run through the scenario presented by Neff and Guttridge: William Seward had an armed guard stationed just down the hall from his room. We have no idea why he had an armed guard since the President didn't even have one, but we'll just play along and say that he had one. That guard though didn't respond when Powell came calling at the door, forcing his way in. He didn't respond when Powell argued with Bell and pushed past him. He didn't respond when Powell "walked heavy" up two flights of stairs. He didn't respond

when Frederick Powell stood on the landing loudly arguing with Powell. He didn't respond when Powell then physically attacked Frederick, leaving him for dead (or to wander off to his bedroom, or to get up and wander into his father's room). He didn't respond when William Bell ran from the house screaming "murder!" He didn't respond when Powell forced his way into William Seward's room. He didn't respond when Powell attacked first Robinson and then Seward. No, it wasn't until Powell was fighting his way out of the bedroom that Hansell decided to respond. And even then, despite the fact that Powell had nearly killed three people, including the guy that Hansell was assigned to protect, he opted not to use his weapon, choosing instead to become another casualty.

Does all of that make perfect sense to everyone?

If so, then this infinitely fascinating bit of assassination trivia should make perfect sense as well: "The Seward episode was further complicated by a coincidence. Within twenty-four hours of the Good Friday attack, newspapers reported that Emerick Hansell, the State Department messenger on protective duty and knifed on the third floor, had died of his wounds. The obituaries were all but correct. There were two men named Emerick Hansell. One had indeed succumbed in Washington, but he was a farrier at the Union cavalry depot at Giesboro at the edge of the city. His widow was informed that he was kicked in the head while shoeing a horse. He lingered a week, to die just eight hours after the stabbing of his namesake."

Call me a skeptic if you will, but I am finding it very difficult to believe that that was a 'coincidence.' Truth be told, I'm finding it almost impossible to believe that there were two guys named Emerick Hansell living in Washington, DC in 1865, let alone that one of them died within hours of the other being brutally attacked. If such reports did indeed circulate, then they had to be deliberately false reports. And those false reports led to a very predictable outcome:

"The farrier's death had the effect of stilling questions that only the other Hansell might have answered. Many years would pass before the State Department's messenger, then in pensioned retirement following a resumed career on the federal payroll, would give his story under strict guarantees of confidentiality. His recollection then was that he had been the third man on the landing, rushing to Private Robinson's aid, convinced that the man he and the soldier grappled with was Major Augustus Seward, the secretary's troubled son."

It is obvious from this passage that Guttridge and Neff based their account of the alleged attack at the Seward residence on Hansell's belated, off-the-record recollections. The authors appear to be unaware that Hansell's story is wildly at odds with the accounts of other supposed witnesses, or perhaps they just don't care.





*The Seward family home in Washington, DC*

We now have testimony from three guys claiming to have been in William Seward's bedroom and to have acted in his defense. One of them, Augustus Seward, had no one assisting him and he thought he was fighting against either his father or his father's nurse. Another of them, Emerick Hansell, was assisted only by Robinson and thought he was grappling with Augustus Seward. The third, George Robinson, thought that he was fighting with a guy he described to a newspaper reporter as having "light sandy hair, whiskers and moustache." And he, of course, thought that he was assisted by someone who was never identified.

None of the three saw Frederick Seward lying unconscious outside William Seward's room, but Robinson did see him enter the room. None of them made any mention of the presence of Fanny Seward, though her belatedly released statement would hold that she was in the room as well. None of them saw Frances or Anna Seward either, though you would think they would have come to see what all the commotion was about at some point. Though Powell and Hansell were both supposedly packing heat, and Augustus Seward's testimony at trial indicated that he retrieved a gun as well, not a single shot was fired that night at the Seward mansion. After being awakened by the commotion, which necessarily would have included Bell's shouts of murder, Major Seward nevertheless opted to initially respond without a weapon. Hansell apparently responded without his weapon as well. And Bell, ignoring the fact that Seward already had an armed guard and a militarily trained and armed son, felt the need to run down the street seeking outside help.

It's hard to imagine a more ridiculously contradictory set of stories. Two of the 'witnesses' essentially identified each other as the assailant, and the third offered up a description that did not in any way fit the always clean-shaven Lewis Powell. To say that there was reasonable doubt in this case would be a serious understatement, but the tribunal had no problem convicting Powell and sentencing him to death (there were even, as previously stated, contingency plans to have him executed before the trial even concluded).

But then again, Doster did wrap up his ‘defense’ of Powell by delivering a closing argument that began as follows: “May it please the court: There are three things in the case of the prisoner, Powell, which are admitted beyond civil or dispute: (1) That he is the person who attempted to take the life of the Secretary of State. (2) That he is not within the medical definition of insanity. (3) That he believed what he did was right and justifiable. The question of his identity and the question of his sanity are, therefore, settled, and among the things of the past.” With a defense like that, how could he lose?



*Lewis Powell's empty gravesite*

Perhaps James Swanson, who appears to fancy himself to be the reigning expert on the Lincoln assassination, can clear up the confusion surrounding what exactly happened at the Seward manor. In his bestselling *Manhunt: The Twelve-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer* (William Morrow, 2006) Swanson spins a uniquely preposterous account of the alleged attack. Like other self-styled historians, he handpicks facts from the accounts of various alleged participants while conveniently leaving out all the contradictory elements of those accounts.

One thing that Swanson does get right in his overly wordy account is an acknowledgement that Powell's alleged assignment would have been a very difficult one: “This was a difficult mission even for a man like Powell, a battle-hardened and extremely strong ex-Confederate soldier. Powell had three problems. First, how could he get inside Seward's house? ... Once inside, it was Powell's job to track down Secretary Seward in the sprawling, three-story mansion ... Powell faced a third challenge: he did not know how many occupants ... were on the premises.” In Swanson's telling of the tale, on the night of April 14, 1865, “Fanny [Seward] watched over her father and listened to the sights and sounds of the never-ending celebrations in the streets.” Of primary interest here is the mention of the “never-ending celebrations.” General Lee had just surrendered to General Grant, the Civil War was all but over, and the nation's capitol was in a celebratory mood. Just the night before, public buildings and private homes across the city were lit up with candles and gaslights while fireworks exploded overhead, providing, by all accounts, a uniquely awe-inspiring view of the city.

The next day, April 14, was a Friday and those celebrations continued well into the night, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets to join in the revelry. The Seward mansion sat, as previously noted, right across the street from Lafayette Square, which surely would have been filled that night with a sizable portion of that mass of humanity. Keep that in mind as we work our way through Swanson's highly dubious account.

“Around 10:00 P.M.,” according to Swanson, Fanny Seward “put down her book, *Legends of Charlemagne*, turned down the gaslights, and, along with Sergeant George Robinson, a wounded veteran now serving as an army nurse, kept watch over her recovering father.” For the record, Robinson was not yet a sergeant, which is one of many factual inaccuracies that can be found throughout Swanson's supposedly authoritative books.

Shortly after Fanny had lowered the lights, Lewis Powell approached the front door of the home and “rang the bell ... [and] William Bell, a nineteen-year-old black servant, hurried to answer the

door.” Amazingly, Swanson knows what William’s age was at the time even though Bell himself was unable to provide that information when asked at trial! In any event, an argument ensued between Powell and Bell and, “For five minutes, the assassin and the servant bickered about whether Powell would leave the medicine with Bell.”

Powell next pushed past Bell and proceeded up the stairs, where, as we know, he encountered Fred Seward and argued with him as well. After appearing to lose the argument, Powell began to retreat down the stairs but then quickly pivoted and attempted to shoot Fred Seward. When the gun failed to fire, “Powell raised the pistol high in the air and brought down a crushing blow to Seward’s head. He hit him so hard that he broke the pistol’s steel ramrod, jamming the cylinder and making it impossible to fire again.”

*Broke the steel ramrod?! No shit? I could see possibly bending it, but how do you “break” a steel ramrod? Had Powell or anyone else hit Seward with that kind of force, and then delivered a few more equally devastating blows, he would certainly have killed him. But according to Swanson, Powell didn’t even knock him down (directly contradicting, of course, Bell’s sworn testimony at trial): “Powell moved lightning fast. He shoved Fred aside and struck Robinson in the forehead hard with the knife.” Swanson later informs us that Fred remained conscious and on his feet throughout the ordeal, though he mostly just “wandered around the house like a zombie, babbling the same phrase, ‘It is ... it is,’ over and over unable to complete the thought.”*

Meanwhile, “The assassin pushed past the reeling sergeant and the waiflike girl blocking his path and sprinted to the bed” where the ailing William Seward lay helpless. According to Swanson, the only thing that saved Seward’s life was Powell’s poor aim, which resulted in him completely missing the motionless secretary of state with his first two knife thrusts. By the time he connected, Robinson had rejoined the fight and was attempting to pull Powell away from Seward. At about that time, “Fanny ... screamed, not once, but in a ceaseless, howling, and terrifying wail that woke her brother Augustus, or ‘Gus,’ who was asleep in a room nearby. Fanny then opened a window and screamed to the street below.”

So now, in addition to Bell running down the street screaming “murder,” we have Fanny Seward screaming out an open window. And yet still, with celebrants swarming around the capitol, no one was able to respond in time to even see Powell, let alone try to stop him! Sounds perfectly reasonable to me. As does the fact that “Gus” was able to sleep through the knock on the door, the argument between Bell and Powell, Powell’s noisy ascent of the stairs, Powell’s argument with Frederick, Powell’s attack on Frederick, Powell forcing his way into William Seward’s room, Powell’s attack on Robinson, Powell’s attack on William Seward, and all the screaming that all the victims would undoubtedly have been doing as they were being viciously attacked. Old Gus was a pretty sound sleeper, I guess.

According to Swanson, Augustus Seward and George Robinson then jointly battled Powell, which we already know directly contradicts the sworn testimony of both of them. That fight supposedly spilled over into the hallway outside Seward’s room. At that time, “Secretary Seward’s wife, alarmed by Fanny’s screams, emerged from her third-floor, back bedroom in time to witness the climax of the hallway struggle between Powell and her son Gus.

Uncomprehending, she assumed that her husband had become delirious and was running amok. Fred’s wife, Anna, rushed to the scene ...”

Apparently Frances and Anna Seward slept even more soundly than Augustus. With their arrival though, Powell was outnumbered six to one, and that didn’t even include Hansell, who, according to Swanson, decided that his best bet was to get the hell out of Dodge: “On [Powell’s] way out, he caught up with Emerick Hansell, who was running down the staircase, trying to stay

ahead of the assassin. The State Department messenger, on duty at Seward's home, was fleeing rather than joining the battle."

Of course he was. That's probably why we all remember him being lynched, which is undoubtedly what would have happened if Swanson's tall tale was true. I guess Hansell slept through most of the ordeal as well, foolishly choosing to flee at the same time as Powell. You'd think he would have just stayed wherever it was that he was hiding. Or run sooner. Those would have been safer options. But then again, since he had a gun and was backed up by at least six people, and the assailant was unarmed, maybe he should have just done his job. That way, he wouldn't have had to haul his gravely wounded body up two flights of stairs to get into bed before the doctor got there.

It is more than a little odd, I must say, that both Augustus Seward and Frances Seward claimed to initially believe that the 'intruder' was actually William Seward "running amok." Was that a common thing for the secretary of state to do? Even when everyone knew that he was confined to bed and completely immobile?

Mr. Robinson, by the way, had a change of heart after telling a reporter about the intruder with "light sandy hair, whiskers and moustache." By the time the trial rolled around just a few weeks later, Robinson was sure that Powell was the assailant. That may have been due to the fact that he had received a gold medal, \$5,000 in cash, and a promotion. And he later was awarded the knife allegedly used by Powell in the attack.



*This is said to be the only known remains of Lewis Powell*

It is impossible for me to believe that the alleged events at the Seward home ever took place. All the available evidence overwhelmingly suggests that it was an entirely manufactured affair. Fanny and Frances Seward, as previously discussed, did not live long after the alleged attack. Neither, of course, did Lewis Powell. William and Frederick Seward chose to never speak publicly about the alleged incident. Augustus Seward, George Robinson, William Bell, and (belatedly) Emerick Hansell gave wildly conflicting accounts. And as mainstream historians continue to work diligently to bend the conflicting accounts into some kind of believable storyline, the story just gets more and more ridiculous.

The more deeply immersed in this I become, the more I am convinced that the key to understanding the Lincoln assassination may be in understanding what *didn't* happen at the Seward residence. For if the alleged parallel attack on the Swards never took place, then clearly there was much more to the events of April 14, 1865 than the activities of John Wilkes Booth and a ragtag band of conspirators.

Before wrapping up, let's take a look at one final curiosity surrounding the alleged attack on the Seward family: in all the accounts that I have read – and I have now worked my way through fourteen books chronicling the Lincoln assassination – it is either stated or implied that Powell (and Bell) ascended just one flight of stairs to get to William Seward's bedroom, and descended just one flight to exit the house. But Seward's bedroom was on the third floor of the home, which meant that reaching him (and Frederick and the rest of the cast) would have required first ascending one flight of stairs, then crossing a second-floor landing, and then ascending a second flight of stairs.

That curious fact seems to have remained deliberately obscured for many, many years now. And it's not hard to figure out why, for if that fact is pointed out, it raises the very obvious question of exactly how Powell would have known to bypass the home's second floor and proceed directly to the third.

If there is anything we can be certain about in regards to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, it is that we will never know what really happened in the presidential box at Ford's Theatre at approximately 10:15 PM on the night of April 14, 1865.

In addition to the guy who made a hasty exit across the stage and out the back door, and the guy who caught a bullet to the head and never regained consciousness, there were, depending upon which version of events one chooses to believe, either three or four eyewitnesses present in that box that fateful evening. Mary Todd Lincoln was certainly there, as were Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancé/stepsister Clara Harris. By some accounts (including Forbes' own account) presidential aide Charles Forbes was there as well.

The Lincoln party arrived at the theater around 8:30 PM, about a half-hour after the play, *Our American Cousin*, had begun. The show was briefly halted while the band played "Hail to the Chief," accompanied by a rousing ovation from the crowd, after which the Lincolns and their guests quietly took their seats and the play resumed. Some two hours later, the president lay mortally wounded with a lead ball lodged in his brain.



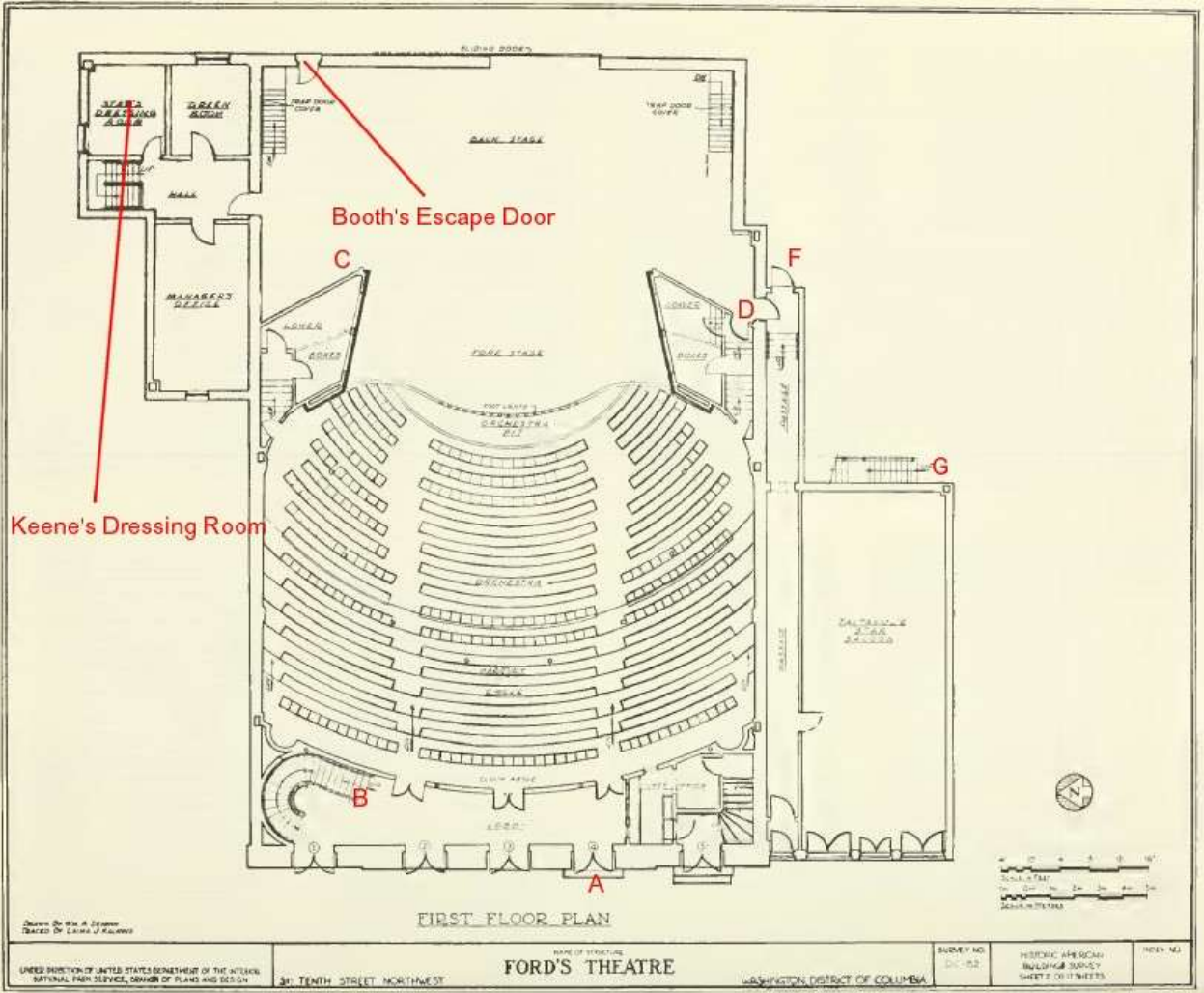


this earth, sons, the most idolising, the noblest, purest, most talented – that were ever given to parents – Their presence grand & beautiful – too good for this world, so full of sorrow – Yet the time will come, when the severance, will be over, together husband, wife and children – never more to be separated – I grieve for those who have been called upon to give up their precious ones, and until the sunlight of a happier clime dawns upon us, we will never know until then, why, we have been visited, by such sorrow.”

Clara Harris was similarly tight-lipped about what she witnessed at Ford’s Theatre. Her account also comes from personal correspondence, this one written on April 29, 1865, just two weeks after the tragedy: “That terrible Friday night is to me yet almost like some dreadful vision ... We four composed the party that evening. They drove to our door in the gayest spirits; chatting on our way – and the President was received with the greatest enthusiasm. They say we were watched by the assassins; ay, as we alighted from the carriage. Oh, how could anyone be so cruel as to strike that kind, dear, honest face! And when I think of that fiend barring himself in alone with us, my blood runs cold. My dress is saturated with blood; my hands and face were covered. You may imagine what a scene! And so, all through that dreadful night, when we stood by that dying bed. Poor Mrs. Lincoln was and is almost crazy. Henry narrowly escaped with his life. The knife struck at his heart with all the force of a practiced and powerful arm; he fortunately parried the blow, and received a wound in his arm, extending along the bone, from the elbow nearly to the shoulder. He concealed it for some time, but was finally carried home in swoon; the loss of blood had been so great from an artery and veins severed. He is now getting quite well, but cannot as yet use his arm ...”

It wasn’t until almost thirty years after the assassination that Charles Forbes swore out an affidavit; unfortunately, that affidavit also fails to shed any light at all on the events of that evening: “I was the personal attendant of the late President Lincoln from shortly after his first inauguration up to the time he fell by the assassin’s bullet ... I accompanied him in the carriage, was with him from the carriage to the box in the theatre, and was in the box when the assassin fired his fatal shot.” Curious that nearly three decades after John Wilkes Booth was identified as the assassin, Forbes referred to him merely as “the assassin.”

And that, dear readers, is the sum total of what we have from three of the four eyewitnesses. Considering once again that this was, as I may have mentioned, the Crime of the Century, that is a rather remarkable set of circumstances.



That leaves us with only the tale told by Major Henry Rathbone, which we already know was a hopelessly scripted, rehearsed affair that he told under oath in almost exactly the same words on no less than three occasions. And yet it is the only account we have – the only account we will ever have – so we must look at it in its entirety, as originally told at his April 17, 1865 deposition. It is a strange tale, to be sure, and it would seem to indicate that Rathbone spent more time studying the physical characteristics of the room than he did watching the play:

“The box assigned to the President is in the second tier, on the right hand side of the audience and was occupied by the President and Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris and this deponent and by no other person. The box is entered by passing from the front of the building in the rear of the dress circle to a small entry or passageway about eight feet in length and four feet in width. This passageway is entered by a door which opens on the inner side. This door is placed as to make an acute angle between it and the wall behind it on the inner side. At the inner end of this passageway is another door standing squarely across and opening into the box. On the left hand side of the passageway and very near the inner end is a third door which also opens into the box. This latter door was closed. The party entered the box through the door at the end of the passageway. The box is so constructed that it may be divided into two by a movable partition, one of the doors described opening into each. The front of the box is about ten or twelve feet in

length and in the center of the railing is a small pillar overhung with a curtain. The depth of the box from front to rear is about nine feet. The elevation of the box above the stage including the railing is about ten or twelve feet.

“When the party entered the box a cushioned armchair was standing at the end of the box furthest from the stage and nearest the audience. This was also the nearest point to the door from which the box is entered. The President seated himself in this chair and, except that he once left the chair for the purpose of putting on his overcoat, remained so seated until he was shot. Mrs. Lincoln was seated in a chair between the President and the pillar in the centre, above described. At the opposite end of the box – that nearest the stage – were two chairs. In one of these, standing in the corner, Miss Harris was seated. At her left hand and along the wall running from that end of the box to the rear stood a small sofa. At the end of this sofa next to Miss Harris this deponent was seated, and the President, as they were sitting, was about seven or eight feet and the distance between this deponent and the door was about the same. The distance between the President as he sat and the door was about four or five feet. The door, according to the recollections of this deponent, was not closed during the evening.

“When the second scene of the third act was being performed and while this deponent was intently viewing the proceedings upon the stage with his back toward the door he heard the discharge of a pistol behind him and looking round saw through the smoke, a man between the door and the President. At the same time deponent heard him shout some word which deponent thinks was ‘Freedom.’ This deponent instantly sprang towards him and seized him. He wrested himself from the grasp and made a violent thrust at the breast of this deponent with a large knife. Deponent parried the blow by striking it up and received a wound several inches deep in his left arm between the elbow and the shoulder. The orifice of the wound is about an inch and a half in length and extends upwards towards the shoulder several inches. The man rushed to the front of the box and deponent endeavored to seize him again but only caught his clothes as he was leaping over the railing of the box. The clothes, as this deponent believes, were torn in this attempt to seize him. As he went over upon the stage, deponent cried out with a loud voice ‘Stop that man.’ Deponent then turned to the President. His position was not changed. His head was slightly bent forward and his eyes were closed. Deponent saw that he was unconscious and, supposing him mortally wounded, rushed to the door for the purpose of calling medical aid. On reaching the outer door of the passageway as above described, deponent found it barred by a heavy piece of plank, one end of which secured in the wall and the other resting against the door. It had been so securely fastened that it required considerable force to remove it. This wedge or bar was about four feet from the floor. Persons upon the outside were beating against the door for the purpose of entering. Deponent removed the bar and the door was opened. Several persons who represented themselves to be surgeons were allowed to enter. Deponent saw there Colonel Crawford and requested him to prevent other persons from entering the box. Deponent then returned to the box and found the surgeon examining the Presidents person. They had not yet discovered the wound. As soon as it was discovered, it was determined to remove him from the Theatre. He was carried out this deponent then proceeded to assist Mrs. Lincoln, who was intensely excited, to leave the Theatre. On reaching the head of the stairs, deponent requested Major Potter to aid him in assisting Mrs. Lincoln across the street to the house which the President was being conveyed. The wound which the deponent had received had been bleeding very profusely and on reaching the house, feeling very faint from the loss of blood, he seated himself in the hall and soon after fainted away and was laid upon the floor. Upon the return of consciousness deponent was taken in the carriage to his residence.

“In review of this transaction it is the confident belief of this deponent that the time which elapsed between the discharge of the pistol and the time when the assassin leaped from the box did not exceed thirty seconds. Neither Mrs. Lincoln nor Miss Harris had left their seats.”



Rathbone’s deposition and subsequent testimony were given at a time when attorneys did not have the luxury of submitting photographic evidence to set the scene for jurors. It appears then that prosecutors used his detailed physical description to paint a mental image for those in the courtroom. And it is very hard to believe that Rathbone would have spontaneously offered up such testimony. Those details were undoubtedly provided to him as part of the script he appears to have been following.

Let us now look at all the other reasons why Rathbone’s account is seriously lacking in credibility. First of all, he claims that the alleged assailant was in the box for up to thirty seconds after shooting Lincoln, long enough to grapple with and seriously wound Rathbone. But the accounts of other witnesses in the theater that evening directly contradict that notion. A witness identified only as “Basset,” for instance, claimed that “A second after the shot was fired a man vaulted over the ballister of the box.” Witness Frederick Sawyer wrote that, “The whole occurrence, the shot, the leap, the escape – was done while you could count to eight.” Actor Harry Hawk, after describing the sequence of events, claimed that “The above all occurred in the space of a few seconds, and at the time I did not know the president was shot.”

How then was there time for the alleged struggle with Rathbone? And if Rathbone had been grappling with an assailant as said assailant was leaping over the front railing, as Rathbone claimed, those actions would have been visible to many of the witnesses in the theater. And yet

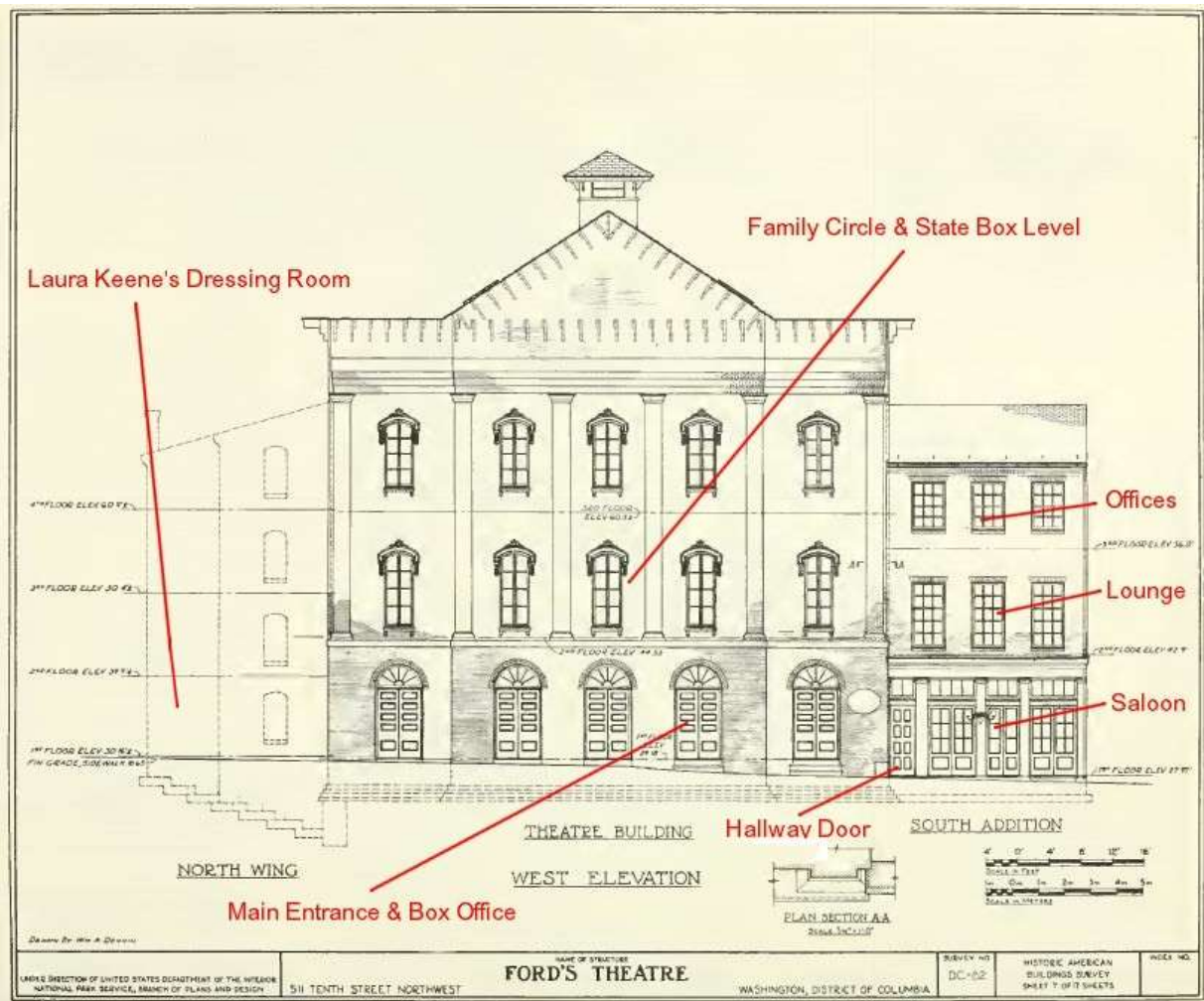


none of the witnesses who claimed to see the man leap from the box mentioned seeing him struggling with Rathbone either before or while doing so.



Another problem is that Rathbone claims to have suffered a substantial wound that bled profusely, so much so that his fiancé allegedly found herself drenched in blood, and yet of all the witnesses who said they saw the fleeing man prominently brandish a large knife as he made his exit across the stage, not one of them mentioned seeing any blood on that knife. Or on the man's hands. Or on his clothing. How is it possible that he could have cut Rathbone so severely, and then continued grappling with him, and yet walked away with no visible blood on him? Yet another minor problem is that neither Rathbone nor his fiancé made any mention of his very serious wound ever being treated. He claimed that the wound was so severe that he passed out from blood loss, but that he then was merely taken home and dropped off. According to the official story, there were at least three skilled surgeons on hand, none of whom could really do much for the mortally wounded Lincoln. Why then didn't anyone bother to attend to such a grave wound inflicted on a guest of the President? From what I hear, those severed arteries can be a real killer if left unattended.

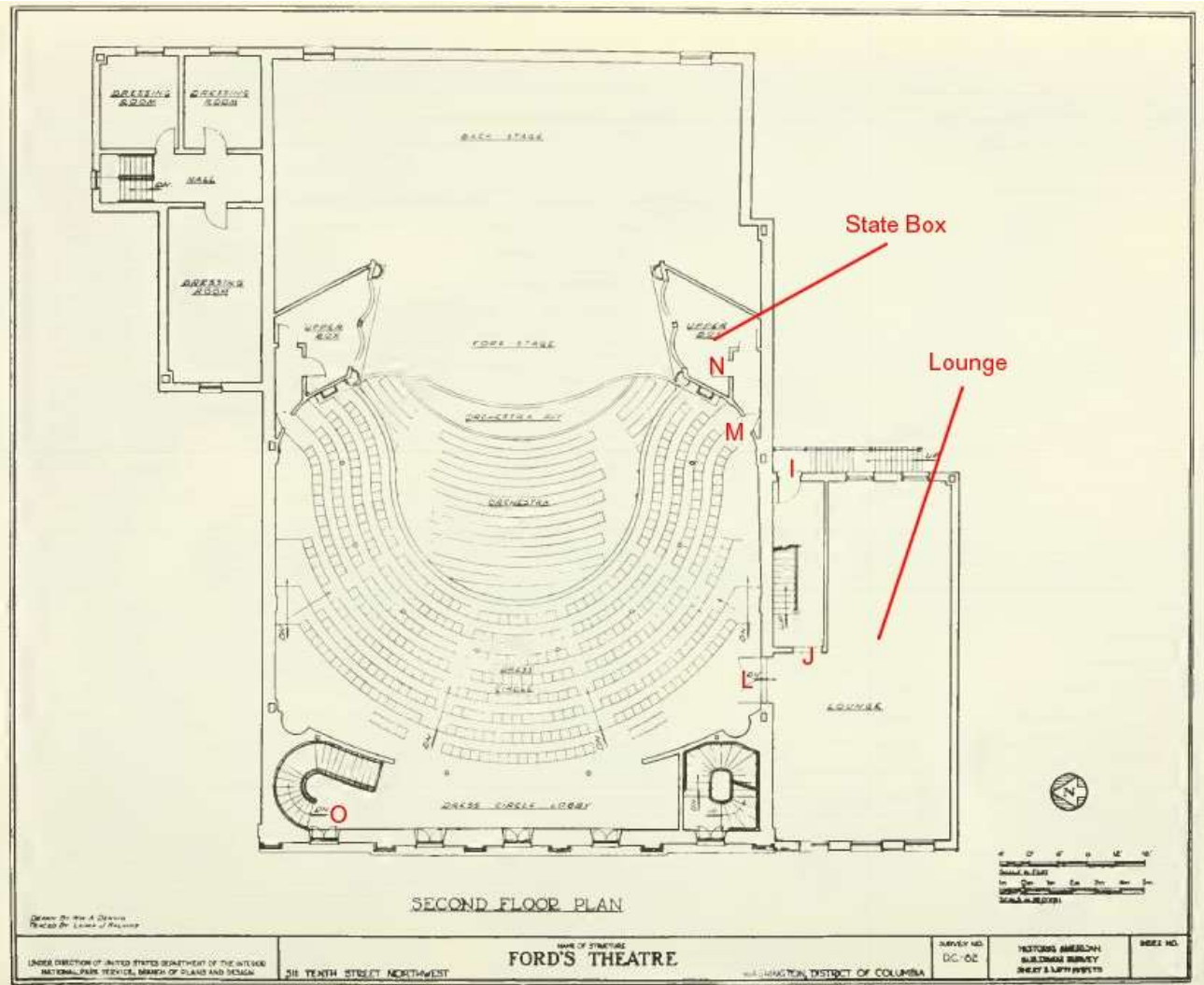
What we seem to have here is a situation in which: (a) witness accounts don't allow for enough time for Rathbone to have been seriously wounded; (b) Rathbone never received treatment for a serious wound; (c) the knife that allegedly inflicted the wound was bloodless just seconds later, as was the guy carrying it; and (d) none of the self-proclaimed witnesses in the theater that night saw Rathbone grappling with his alleged assailant.



Moving on to other peculiarities in Rathbone's account, one obvious question that is raised is: why would John Wilkes Booth, or anyone else entering the box for the purpose of killing Lincoln in the manner in which it occurred, take the time to wedge the outer door shut? Any pursuers weren't going to come from that direction. And if the alleged plan went awry, the assailant might need to flee in that direction. So why cut off a possible means of escape? And how is it that a sturdy wood plank of the precise length needed to do the job just happened to be on hand? Those are questions that historians have never really provided satisfactory answers to. According to Rathbone's account, the inner door to the box was open all night. How then would the party not have heard an intruder enter the outer door and then close it and forcibly wedge it shut ... before sneaking up behind the President? It doesn't seem possible for an uninvited intruder to have done that. And there was no reason to do it. Booth, it will be recalled, was ludicrously armed with a single-shot derringer. The plan, therefore, was heavily dependent upon the element of surprise. Why then risk discovery by pointlessly wedging the door shut? Who then really wedged that door shut and why? Did it benefit the alleged assailant, or did it provide a window of opportunity to stage the scene before any responders could get to the president?

Several other questions are raised by Rathbone's account, including why the president was seated furthest from the stage and closest to the door? Wouldn't the guest of honor customarily

get the best seat in the house? Why had the furniture in the box that day been arranged to place him furthest from the stage? And being that he was the fourth member of the party, why didn't Rathbone sit in the fourth chair along the front of the box? Why did he choose instead to sit alone on a sofa slightly behind the others?



Beyond the problems with Rathbone's account, there are other problems with the official story of what went down in Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865. According to witness accounts, the man fleeing across the stage brandished his knife in his right hand, indicating that he was right-handed. But the bullet that killed Lincoln, purportedly fired by an assailant standing behind him, entered behind his left ear and traveled diagonally through the brain cavity, ending up behind his right eye. That would be a rather tricky shot to pull off for a right-hander. To the extent that historians have addressed this anomaly, it is generally claimed that Lincoln turned his head just as the shot was fired. But that is purely speculation aimed at bringing the known facts of the case in line with the official story.

According to all the early witness accounts, events played out very quickly and the suspect was across the stage and out of the building before anyone realized what had happened. It was only then, when it was too late to apprehend the suspect, that Mary Lincoln's anguished cries from the



box could be heard, along with Rathbone's futile exhortations to stop the fleeing suspect. But why did it take so long for Mary Todd and the others to cry out?

Mary Lincoln had had her husband gunned down as he sat right beside her, hand in hand. She had then witnessed a violent struggle between her husband's killer and Major Rathbone, during which Rathbone was grievously wounded, bathing the box in blood. Had Rathbone succumbed to his alleged wound, Mary and Clara would have been left alone in that box with a knife-wielding madman. You would think then that they would have been screaming bloody murder throughout the ordeal, and quite likely trying to exit that box. Help, after all, was just steps away. But instead the two ladies remained stoic, and seated, throughout the performance. It wasn't until the assailant had leaped from the box to the stage, regained his footing, run across the stage and then exited the building that Mary verbally responded to the attack. And Clara Harris never responded at all.

Why the curiously delayed reactions from everyone in the presidential box? And why, as previously asked in this series, would the assailant have chosen such a fundamentally preposterous weapon as a single-shot derringer for this mission? And who would plan an escape route that included an exceedingly risky leap onto a very hard stage floor below, especially while wearing riding boots with spurs? Was that really a planned escape route, or was it an improvised one?

Such are the questions that historians have avoided asking for 150 years now.



One thing that we cannot definitively conclude from the early witness accounts, contrary to popular opinion, is that the guy who hastily exited Ford's Theatre that evening was John Wilkes Booth. In witness accounts recorded years after the official story had cast a long shadow over that day's events, Booth's name pops up fairly often. But it isn't so easy to find in the early accounts.

One guy closest to the scene was Army Captain Theodore McGowan, who was seated in Ford's Theatre not far from the entrance to the president's box. I like to think that this guy was an upright sort of guy, primarily because he had a very honorable name. When called upon to testify at the military tribunal, McGowan had this to say: "I was present at Ford's Theatre on the night of the assassination. I was sitting in the aisle leading by the wall toward the door of the President's box, when a man came and disturbed me in my seat, causing me to push my chair forward to permit him to pass; he stopped about three feet from where I was sitting, and leisurely took a survey of the house. I looked at him because he happened to be in my line of sight ... I know J. Wilkes Booth, but, not seeing the face of the assassin fully, I did not at the time recognize him as Booth."

So here we have a guy who knew Booth, and yet from just three feet away, with the guy directly in his line of sight, he did not recognize the man in the theater as Booth. It is a fairly safe bet that the government exerted considerable pressure on Captain McGowan to positively identify Booth, and yet he proved unable, or unwilling, to do so. Curious also that McGowan referred to him in the present tense when Booth was supposed to be dead.

So what are we to make of all of this? Was Rathbone really gravely injured? Or was his wound a substantially less severe one that was self-inflicted while responders were held at bay by the barricaded door? Was it really John Wilkes Booth who entered the presidential box that evening? And whoever it was, did he enter for the purpose of assassinating the president? Would a small derringer have been the weapon of choice for an assassin, or was it a weapon that would have been easy for someone else in that box to have brought along?

One thing we do know – Henry Rathbone's actions in the years after the assassination clearly demonstrated that he was fully capable of two things: murder, and self-inflicted knife wounds.

It should be noted here that it has never made any sense at all why John Wilkes Booth would have chosen Ford's Theatre as the ideal site to assassinate the president. As eyewitness Edwin Bates noted the day after the shooting, "the probability was that the man when found would be discovered to be some insane person, that the lowest depths of human depravity even in a rebel of the worst type would not permit to commit such a horrible deed in so bold a manner before thousands of people & where there could be so little chance of escape." (Timothy S. Good *We Saw Lincoln Shot*, University Press of Mississippi, 1995)

As H. Donald Winkler has written, there were numerous opportunities to kill Lincoln that would not have put the assassin at such high risk of capture: "the president had made himself an easy target. He stole away for solitary walks, especially at night. He held public receptions where security was almost nonexistent. He conferred with generals in the field. He stood atop a parapet at Fort Stevens on the outskirts of Washington for a clear view of Jubal Early's approaching Confederate forces as soldiers around him were shot dead. He attended the theater frequently. He had walked virtually unguarded through the streets of the fallen Confederate capital. When he and his family stayed at his summer retreat at the Soldiers Home on the outskirts of Washington, he often rode back and forth to the White House in an unguarded carriage. Nearly every night, before going to bed, he strolled without protection down a densely shaded path through the White House grounds to the War Department's telegraph office to learn the latest news from the war front." (H. Donald Winkler *Lincoln and Booth*, Cumberland House, 2003)



The only conceivable reason to carry out the mission at Ford's was to make the assassination as much of a public spectacle as possible. Which was also true, of course, of the events that played out in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963, and the events that played out in New York on September 11, 2001. If there had been television in 1865, you can bet that the cameras would have been rolling in Ford's Theatre on the night of April 14.

Beginning at about 10:30 PM or shortly thereafter on that particular evening, a curious series of events played out in Washington, DC. At about that time, according to the official narrative, a man riding hell-bent-for-leather to get out of town approached the Navy Yard Bridge. The bridge though was closed due to a curfew imposed by the War Department, and armed guards were under standing orders not to let anyone cross without official authorization.

The rider on the swift horse allegedly identified himself as John Wilkes Booth. He did not, of course, need to do that. It wasn't as if the guard, Silas Cobb, was going to ask him for an ID to verify his identity. In those days, a man had to be taken at his word as to who he really was. Those engaged in activities that could earn you jail time, or worse, generally used an array of aliases. But the guy who had allegedly committed the 'Crime of the Century' just minutes earlier purportedly used his real name.

In that regard, Booth was a very accommodating kind of guy. Earlier in the day, when he had supposedly stopped by the Kirkwood House to visit Vice President Johnson – a guy supposedly slated to be assassinated just hours later – Booth had thoughtfully left a calling card. According to Capt. Theodore McGowan, he left another one at the entrance to the presidential box at Ford's Theatre: "He took a small pack of visiting-cards from his pocket, selecting one and replacing the others, stood a second, perhaps, with it in his hand, and then showed it to the President's messenger, who was sitting just below him." Booth was a big believer, it seems, in dropping breadcrumbs along the evidence trail.

Silas Cobb, for reasons that historians have never been able to explain, and often have never attempted to explain, allowed the rider to pass over the closed bridge and into Maryland. Cobb was never reprimanded or punished in any way for allowing the president's assassin to escape the city – which is okay, I suppose, since the same is true of everyone else who blatantly 'dropped the ball' that night.

Just minutes later, another rider looking to cross into Maryland approached the bridge. This rider, who would later be identified in the official narrative as David Herold, failed to properly identify himself. He was, nevertheless, also allowed to cross the officially closed bridge. Minutes after that, a third rider supposedly approached the bridge. This one, local stableman John Fletcher, was supposedly in hot pursuit of David Herold.

Fletcher would later claim that he had seen Herold riding through town on a horse that was supposed to have been returned, and, fearing that the horse was being stolen, he had run back to his stables, saddled and mounted another horse, and took off in pursuit of Herold. Cobb supposedly told Fletcher that he would let him pass, once again in violation of standing orders, but that he wouldn't be able to return, so Fletcher abandoned his alleged pursuit and returned to his stables.

This alleged sequence of events raises any number of deeply troubling questions that historians have done their very best to avoid answering, or even addressing. First and most obviously, why were both Booth and Herold allegedly allowed to pass over a closed bridge despite standing orders to the contrary? Another obvious question is how would John Fletcher have possibly known, after going to fetch his own horse, which way David Herold was headed on the dark streets of Washington?

Yet another painfully obvious question is why would John Wilkes Booth have given his real name? True enough, this was 1865 and travel was by horseback and the world was not a connected sort of place, so Booth would have been confident that Cobb would have had no clue yet about the shooting of Lincoln. But pursuers would surely be on the way very soon, with Ford's Theatre just three miles away, and tipping them off as to your flight path probably isn't such a good idea.

The next obvious question is why *didn't* pursuers arrive there shortly after this sequence of events? Indeed, why didn't anyone arrive there throughout the entire night? Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who quickly assumed control of the manhunt, had an impressive array of manpower at his disposal: federal troops, metro police, cavalry troops, provost marshals, and Lafayette Baker's NDP detectives. Yet none of them ever made their way over to the Navy Yard Bridge, though it was well known as an underground Confederate route.

Manpower was deployed first to the north and northwest, the least likely escape routes. The only hole in the dragnet throughout the entire night was the underground route to the South across the Navy Yard Bridge, which was never mentioned that night in any War Department dispatches. Had anyone involved in the manhunt – anyone at all – bothered to stop by the Navy Yard Bridge, it would have been quickly discovered that Booth and a likely accomplice had crossed over into Maryland. But that didn't happen and pursuers were instead sent on wild goose chases throughout the night.

Another less obvious question is why was Booth so woefully unprepared for his escape? He had to assume that he was going to have to hide out for a time and/or survive on the trail. Why then did he bring no provisions with him? No change of clothes, no bedroll or blanket, no weapons other than his dagger, no toiletries or razor, no food. Nothing that would be required for survival on the road. And the same was true of Herold.

Why would Booth, or any reasonably sane person, plot an assassination at a venue from which escape was highly unlikely? Why would the very first phase of that escape involve an incredibly risky leap onto a hard stage floor while wearing riding boots with spurs? Why would his escape route necessitate crossing a bridge that he had no reasonable expectation of being allowed to cross? And why would he have failed to bring along any provisions to survive during his time on the lam?

There is also the question of why there was a two to three-hour interruption in telegraph service in and out of Washington following the assassination. Stanton had been installed as Secretary of War in January 1862 on the recommendation of Secretary of State William Seward. On February 14, Lincoln had signed Executive Order #1, giving Stanton the power of arbitrary arrest. That too had been at Seward's urging. By early March, Stanton had assumed control of all the nation's telegraph lines and had the machinery comprising the hub of the system moved to the War Department offices. He would soon seize control of the country's transportation system as well. In addition to the civilian telegraph system, the War Department had its own system as well, to transmit secure news and updates on the war effort. Both systems were housed next to Stanton's office at the War Department. On the night of April 14, the civilian telegraph service was out for up to three hours following the assassination, disrupting communications in and out of Washington. That curious fact was never publicly acknowledged. There was also an unexplained delay in getting the news out on the War Department's telegraph service. The first dispatch concerning the shooting of Lincoln was not written until 1:30 AM, more than three hours after the events at Ford's Theatre; it wasn't sent until 2:15 AM, some four hours after the curtain fell at Ford's.

Then there were the curious actions of LA Gobright, the Associated Press agent in the nation's capitol. At around 11:00 PM, he sent out his first dispatch, which was oddly vague and lacking in details. Even odder, he quickly followed it with a second dispatch instructing recipients that the first message was "stopped." Gobright, it should be noted, was very close to the scene and knew what had gone down. He supposedly rushed over to Ford's immediately after the shooting and is credited with being the guy who allegedly found the derringer on the floor of the box, where it had conveniently been left behind but had apparently not been noticed by anyone else. I guess securing the crime scene wasn't a big priority in those days, even when it was the scene of the Crime of the Century, so it was up to reporters to gather the physical evidence.

And some of you probably thought that having controlled assets in the media was some kind of mid-20th century innovation that began with Operation Mockingbird. Guess again.

Yet another problem with the official story is that this was supposed to be a very well planned, coordinated attack on multiple targets. The attacks on President Lincoln in Ford's Theatre, Secretary of State William Seward in his family home, Vice President Andrew Johnson in his hotel room, and possibly Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in his family home, were supposed to occur simultaneously, which would have been an extremely difficult operation to pull off given the limitations in communications in those days.

A considerable amount of research and planning would have had to go into such an ambitious project. But the reality is that it wasn't known that the Lincolns were going to be attending Ford's Theatre until the very day that Lincoln was shot, which didn't leave a lot of time to plan such an intricate series of attacks. Yet we are to believe the plan was thwarted only by such things as Lewis Powell's ineptitude with a knife and George Adzerodt's cowardice.

And if there was an extensive amount of planning done, then why was no thought apparently given to the aftermath and escape? Lewis Powell never made it out of the city and supposedly ended up hiding out in a tree for a few days. Booth chose an escape route that included a dangerous jump onto a stage floor in front of hundreds of potential pursuers, followed by heading directly to a closed bridge under armed guard. And then he was off into the wilderness for an extended stay, with a broken leg and no provisions.

One aspect of the events of that day that is frequently downplayed is the late cancellation by General Ulysses Grant and his wife, which was highly unusual. Declining a presidential invitation was all but unthinkable in those days; canceling at the eleventh hour was obviously an even worse affront. Especially when this was to be a major historical event – the first joint public appearance of the victorious president and his heroic general. And especially when the reason given for the cancellation – that the Grants had to catch an evening train to go see their kids in New Jersey – didn't hold much water.

As Winkler has written, "the Grants could have taken a Saturday morning train with better connections than the six o'clock Friday evening train, which was much slower and necessitated a long wait in Philadelphia. The morning train would have reunited the Grants with their children just two hours later than the earlier train." So the Grants could have spent the evening at the theater basking in the adulation of the crowd, then enjoyed a good night's sleep in Washington, and still got to their children almost as quickly. Why then would they choose to both inconvenience themselves and snub the president?

And they were not the only ones to snub the president. After the cancellation by the Grants, Lincoln asked a few other notable figures in Washington, who all declined. One of them was Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax, Jr., who would, four years later, take over the vice-president's office. And so it was that the guys who would take over as president and vice-

president when Lincoln's term expired both opted to snub Lincoln on the evening of his assassination. Lucky break for them, I guess. And the guy who immediately took over at the White House, just as soon as he sobered up, caught a really lucky break when George Adzerodt supposedly opted not to assassinate him.

Schuyler Colfax, by the way, was a member of the extended van Cortland/Schuyler/Rensselaer clan that also includes Laurel Canyon's own David van Cortland Crosby.

By various accounts, Lincoln walked over to the War Department on the afternoon/evening of April 14 to ask Stanton if Major Thomas Eckert might serve as his guest/bodyguard that evening. Eckert had run the War Department's telegraph service since 1862. He was a large, powerfully built, physically imposing man who historians agree would have provided Lincoln with considerable protection. But Stanton refused, claiming that Eckert had important work to do that night. In truth, Eckert would be at home that evening, doing nothing of any importance.

Though Eckert was ostensibly recruited by the War Department based on his expertise with telegraph systems, he was a close confidant of Stanton who was known to receive assignments far removed from organizing and running communications systems. One of those assignments, as previously noted, was as Lewis Powell's personal guard during his confinement and 'trial.' Not long after completing that assignment, Eckert was rewarded with a promotion to Assistant Secretary of War.

Yet another longstanding problem with the official story is the unexplained assignment of ne'er-do-well police officer John Parker as Lincoln's personal bodyguard, an assignment he had landed just over a week earlier. That assignment had come, though no one really likes to talk much about it, at the instigation of Mary Todd Lincoln. Mary wrote a letter on April 3, 1865, handwritten on White House stationery, that read as follows: "This is to certify that John F. Parker, a member of the Metropolitan Police, has been detailed for duty at the Executive Mansion. By order of Mrs. Lincoln." The next day, she wrote another requesting that Parker be exempted from the draft.

Due directly to Mary Lincoln's actions, it was Parker who was assigned to guard the president at Ford's Theatre. True to his nature, he arrived at least two hours late for that assignment. And then promptly abandoned his post, leaving the president unguarded. So that he could wander next door and get good and drunk, by some accounts. He next surfaced at 6:00 AM the next morning at the police precinct, in the company of a drunken hooker. Parker attempted to book her, but records indicate that he was unable to make a case against her and she was released. Parker had a habit of arresting prostitutes who refused to provide him with free services. In any event, the important point here is that Parker obviously had more important business to attend to than preventing the assassination of the president.

Metro police superintendent A.C. Richards – the same guy who the industrious AP agent supposedly turned the derringer over to – filed charges against Parker in May 1865. But those charges were dropped the next month without explanation and Parker continued on in his position. Numerous questions still surround this particular aspect of the assassination, as summarized by H. Donald Winkler:

"Inquiring minds should have raised the following questions regarding Mary Lincoln, Edwin M. Stanton, and John Parker: On what basis and on whose authority did the first lady authorize Parker's assignment to the White House? On whose recommendation was Parker's name submitted to her? Was she aware of Parker's record? If she was, why did she want such a person to guard her husband? If she was not familiar with Parker, what prompted her to approve him without knowing more about him? Did she know him at all? Was she related to him, or did she

think she was related to him? (Her mother's family name was Parker.) Did she authorize Parker to leave his post to watch the play? Was Stanton aware of Parker's assignment to the White House? If he was not, should he have been? If he was, why didn't he object to it? Considering the secretary's concern for the president's safety, shouldn't his department have investigated anyone proposed for assignment to protect the president? Considering the innocent people arrested after the assassination, why didn't Stanton order Parker's arrest or at least investigate his apparent misconduct? Was it not possible that Parker was part of Booth's conspiracy? Didn't that possibility deserve investigation? Regarding Parker's superiors, did Stanton consider that one of them might have issued orders allowing Parker to leave his post? Was he aware of Mary Lincoln's endorsement of Parker? Was that a factor in his decision not to arrest Parker? Did the secretary in any way try to influence any pending charges against Parker? If so, why? Was he trying to protect Mary Lincoln? Did Stanton know Parker or have any contact with him before April 14? Did any of his staff know Parker? Did Parker have any communication with Mary Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, Stanton, or anyone from the War Department on or before April 14, 1865? Did he know Booth? Did Booth bribe him to leave his post? Who dictated Parker's duties for that night? What specifically were his instructions? Why did he leave his post? Did it not occur to Parker that by doing so he was jeopardizing the president's life?"

As Winkler added, "Such questions apparently were never asked, and the participants never commented on them. No one seemed to want to set the record straight."

Keep in mind that that lengthy list of questions only covers one small aspect of the events of that day. There are literally hundreds of unanswered, and frequently unasked, questions still surrounding the Lincoln assassination. As one further example, there is the question of how it was that in at least a half-dozen isolated pockets of the country, news of Lincoln's assassination was reported four to twelve hours before the Lincolns had arrived at Ford's Theatre?

Folks in St. Joseph, Minnesota, which was 40 miles from the nearest railroad and 80 miles from the nearest telegraph service, learned of Lincoln's death while he was still very much alive. So did the good people of Manchester, New Hampshire. And the people living in Middleton, New York. And in Newburgh, New York as well. Ace reporters at the Whig Press got the scoop before the shot was fired.

Shit happens, I guess. Maybe they had caught wind of the fact that, a couple weeks before the assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln, who was known to go on extravagant shopping sprees, had purchased some \$25,000 (in today's dollars) worth of mourning clothes. It's always good to be prepared. Even when your husband isn't even ill, let alone dying.

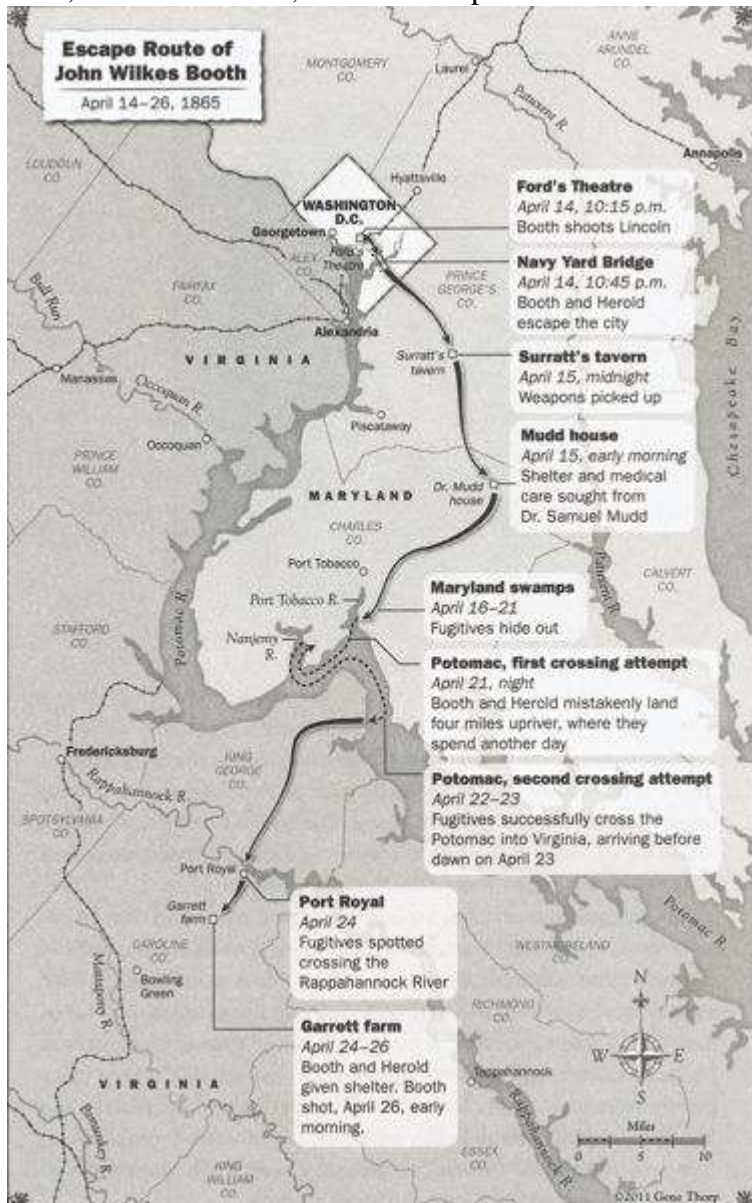
When we left off on the last outing, two men officially identified as John Wilkes Booth and David Herold had just crossed the Navy Yard Bridge from Washington, DC into Maryland. They were the only two people to cross the bridge after curfew that fateful night, so being allowed to do so was quite the lucky break for the pair. Just as it had been a lucky break for Booth that Lincoln's bodyguard for the evening, John Parker, had abandoned his post (as had coachman Francis Burns and presidential aide Charles Forbes, all three of whom went next door to drink in the same bar as John Wilkes Booth), and that General Grant and his military entourage had not accompanied the Lincoln party to the theater.

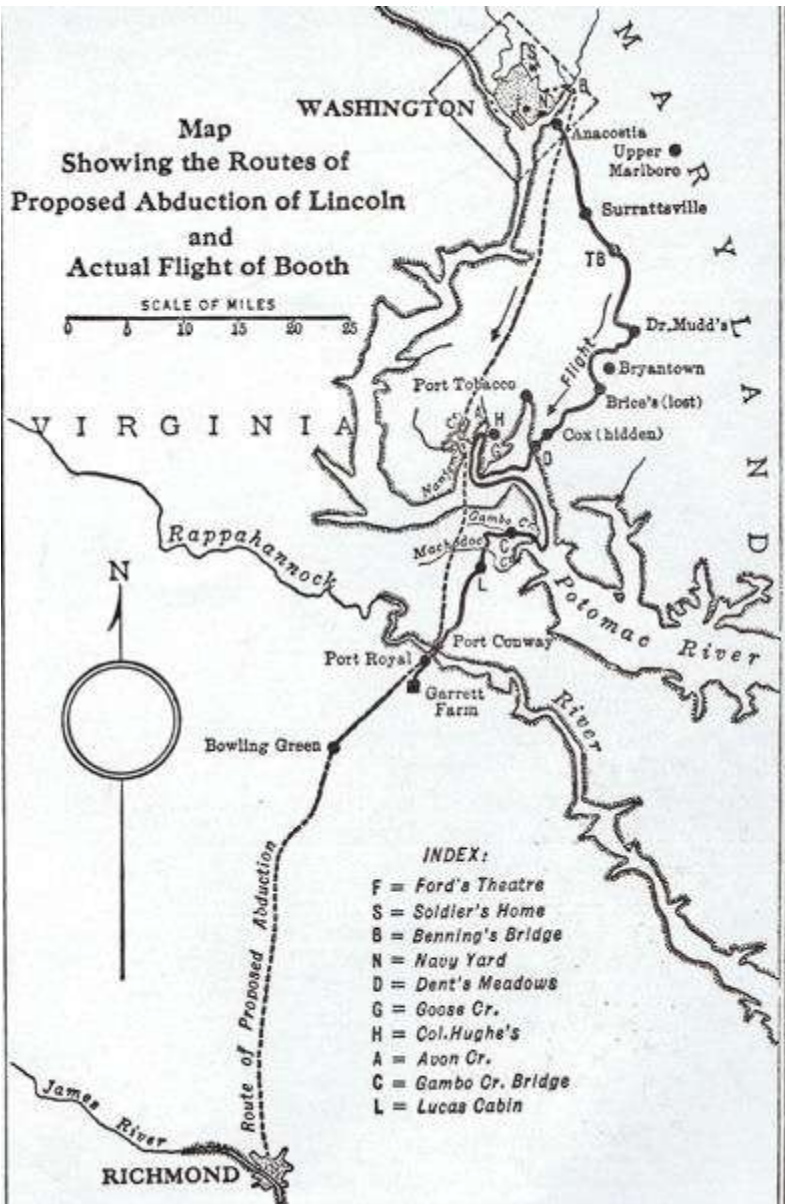
Booth caught numerous 'lucky breaks' that night, like having the telegraph service go down right after the assassination. But as Thomas Eckert later explained to a congressional committee, that

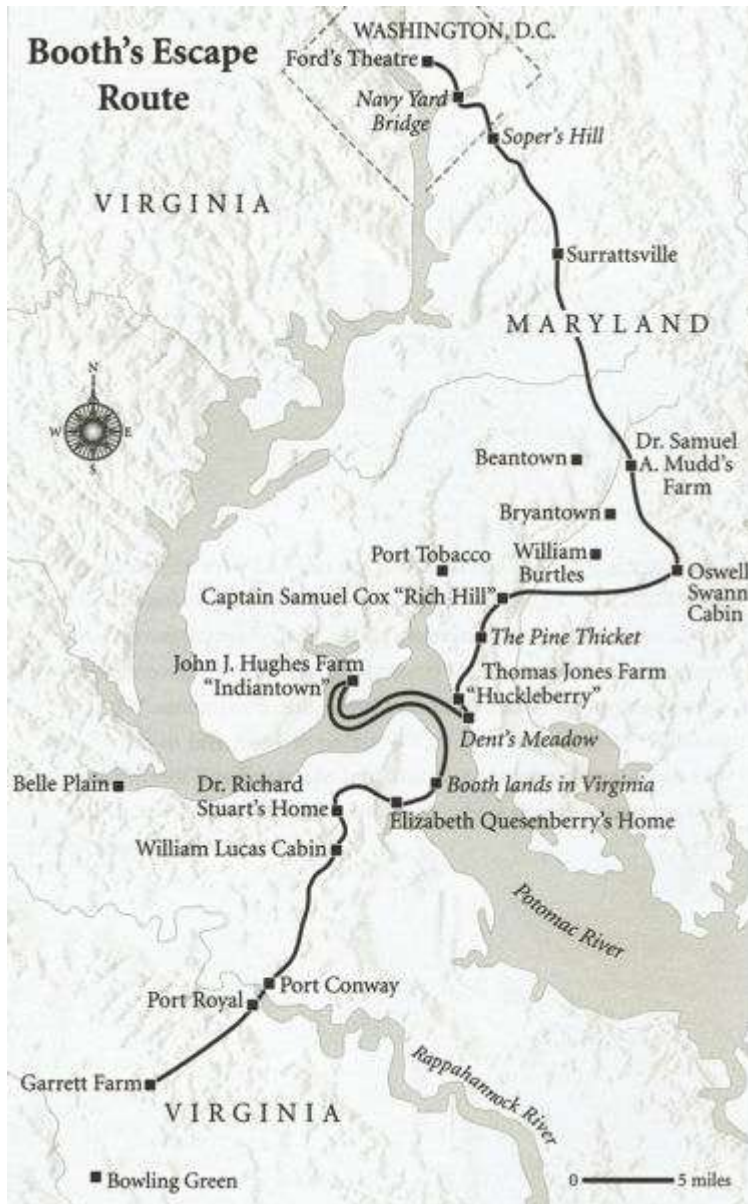


apparently was a trivial matter: “It did not at the time seem sufficiently important, as the interruption only continued about two hours. I was so full of business of almost every character that I could not give it my personal attention . . . I could not ascertain with certainty what the facts were without making a personal investigation, and I had not time to do that.”

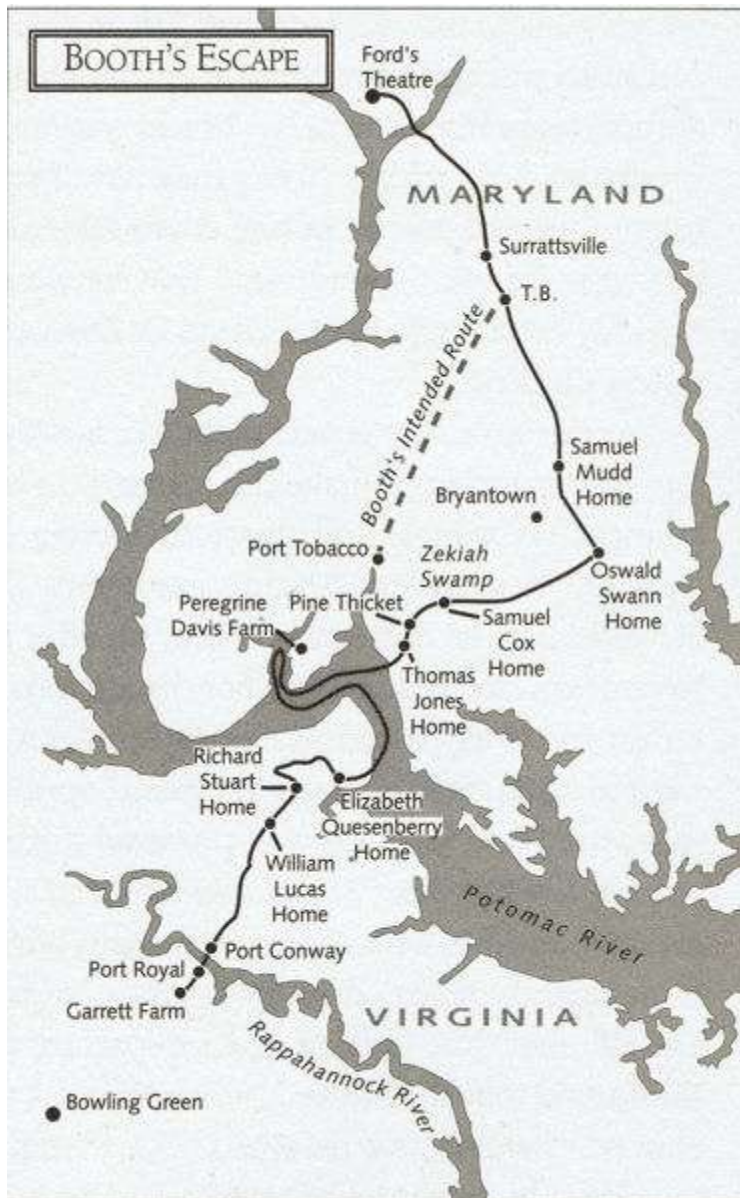
For those who may have forgotten, Eckert was hired specifically to set up and maintain the telegraph system, which naturally raises the question of what other, more important “business of every character” he had to attend to on a night when keeping the system running should have been, one would think, of utmost importance.











*Four versions of Booth's alleged escape route*

Leonard Guttridge and Ray Neff have written in *Dark Union* that Booth caught another lucky break when, at the same time that the telegraph system mysteriously went down, “someone at the gasworks on Maryland Avenue shut off the gas that fed the lights around the Capitol and westward along Pennsylvania Avenue,” plunging the assassin’s escape route into darkness at a most opportune time. (Leonard Guttridge and Ray Neff *Dark Union: The Secret Web of Profiteers, Politicians, and Booth Conspirators That Led to Lincoln’s Death*, Wiley, 2003) Booth also caught a lucky break when his questionable choice of a firearm turned out to be surprisingly adequate for the job. He took a huge risk, it will be recalled, in bringing a Derringer as his only firearm – a risk that was, as James Swanson noted in *Manhunt*, completely unnecessary: “Booth couldn’t have chosen the Deringer [sic] because he could not obtain a revolver. He had already purchased at least four, and if he did not have any in his hotel room within easy reach, he could have gone out and bought another one. In the war capital of the Union, thousands of guns, including small, lightweight pocket-sized revolvers, were for sale in

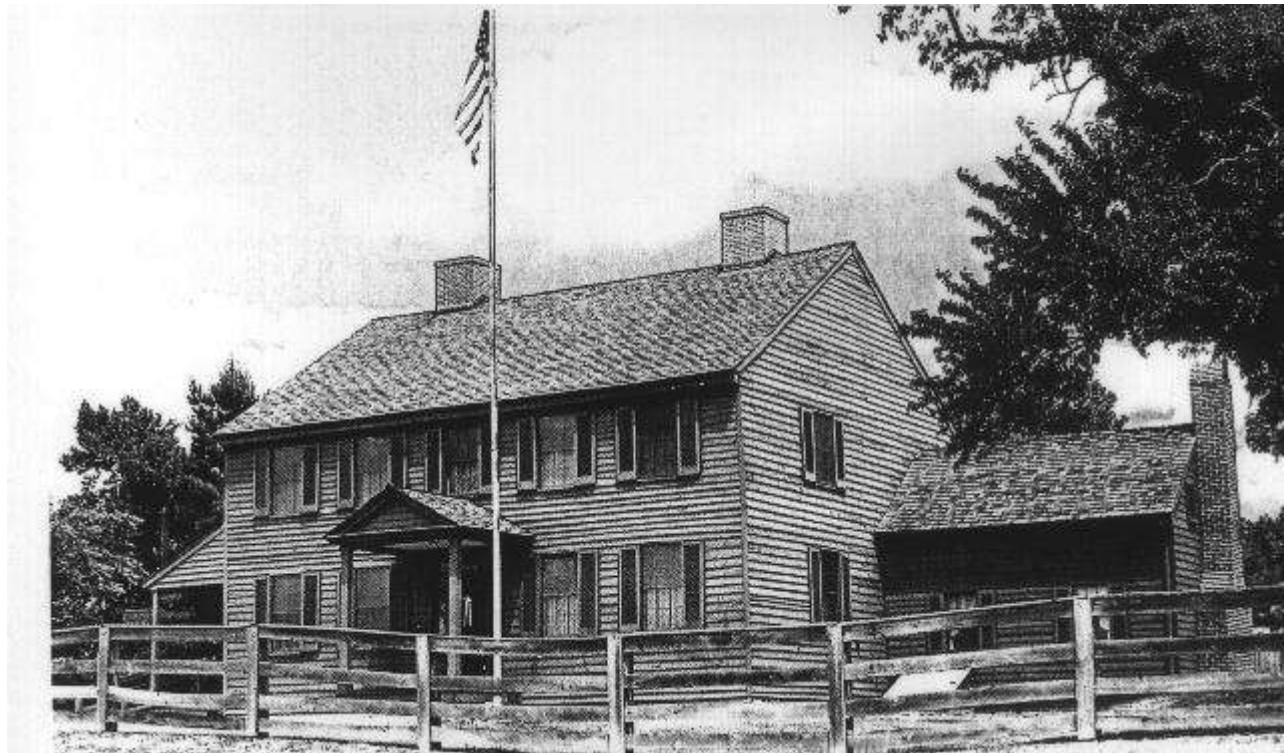
the shops of Washington.” (James Swanson *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln’s Killer*, William Morrow, 2006)

Another lucky break for Booth was that the locks on both of the doors leading into the presidential box at Ford’s Theatre were conveniently broken, rendering them useless. And a spy hole had been drilled into one of them at eye level, so that someone approaching could survey the scene inside the booth before entering. Both of those anomalies were apparently unnoticed by Lincoln and his not-very-security-oriented entourage. And, as previously discussed, a heavy piece of lumber precisely long enough to wedge the door shut happened to be on hand. Many historians have claimed that Booth himself had come by earlier in the day and broken the locks, drilled the hole, and fashioned and hidden the wedge for the door, but no evidence to support such claims has ever been presented.

Booth also caught a lucky break in that he was able to successfully execute an unlikely and extremely risky escape from a crowded theater. As no less a scholar than Bill O’Reilly has had written for him, “A less informed man might worry about being trapped in a building with a limited number of exits, no windows, and a crowd of witnesses—many of them able-bodied men just back from the war.” Donald Winkler was a bit more blunt in his assessment: “It sounded like a foolhardy plan with no chance of success. How could one man with a single-shot derringer, a bullet, and a knife walk nonchalantly through a crowded theater, pass unobstructed through two doors into the State Box, stand behind the president without being seen by the two occupants in the box, kill the president with no one hearing the sound of the shot, leap eleven feet to the stage, take time to yell a message to the audience, and escape through a rear exit? Fulfilling this mission required far more than blind luck.” (Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard *Killing Lincoln: The Shocking Assassination That Changed America Forever*, Henry Holt, 2011; and H. Donald Winkler *Lincoln and Booth: More Light on the Conspiracy*, Cumberland House, 2003)

Actually, there were obviously more than two occupants in the box and plenty of people heard the shot, but such glaring errors are commonplace in the existing literature on the assassination. So having caught numerous ‘lucky breaks,’ Booth and Herold rode off separately into the Maryland night, with Booth having a lead on Herold. No mention is ever made of why Powell, who had supposedly attacked the Seward family, and Adzerodt, who was supposed to have killed second-in-command Andrew Johnson, were not included in the escape plan. In any event, Booth and Herold supposedly met up eight miles from the city limits. How they did so in the dark and with no communication devices is anyone’s guess. No mention is made in the literature of Booth asking Herold anything about how the alleged attack at the Seward mansion had gone down, or about the attack on Johnson that had supposedly been planned, or about what had become of Powell and Adzerodt.





*The Surrat Tavern in Surrattsville*

The pair's first stop, so the story goes, was at Mary Surratt's tavern in Surrattsville, run by John Lloyd. They allegedly arrived there around midnight. Lloyd, known as a raging drunkard, allegedly supplied the pair with two carbines, field glasses, and booze. By many accounts, his confession to such high crimes was obtained through torture. And it is never explained why the pair wouldn't have already had those items, and various other provisions, from the outset. Lloyd became a witness for the prosecution at the pseudo-trial of the conspirators. Of course, his other option was certain conviction and probable execution, so he was highly motivated to tell the story the government wanted him to tell.

The pair's next stop – at about 4:30 in the morning on April 15, 1865, with Lincoln still clinging to life – was at the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd, who gained the dubious distinction of being the only person along Booth's alleged escape route to be prosecuted and convicted. "Wanted" posters issued by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton warned that "All persons harboring or secreting the conspirators or aiding their concealment or escape, will be treated as accomplices in the murder of the President and shall be subject to trial before a military commission, and the punishment of death." As we shall see though, various historians have identified at least two dozen people who supposedly provided aid and comfort to the fugitives, and none of them, other than Mudd, were ever prosecuted for their alleged crimes and all of their names are now long forgotten.

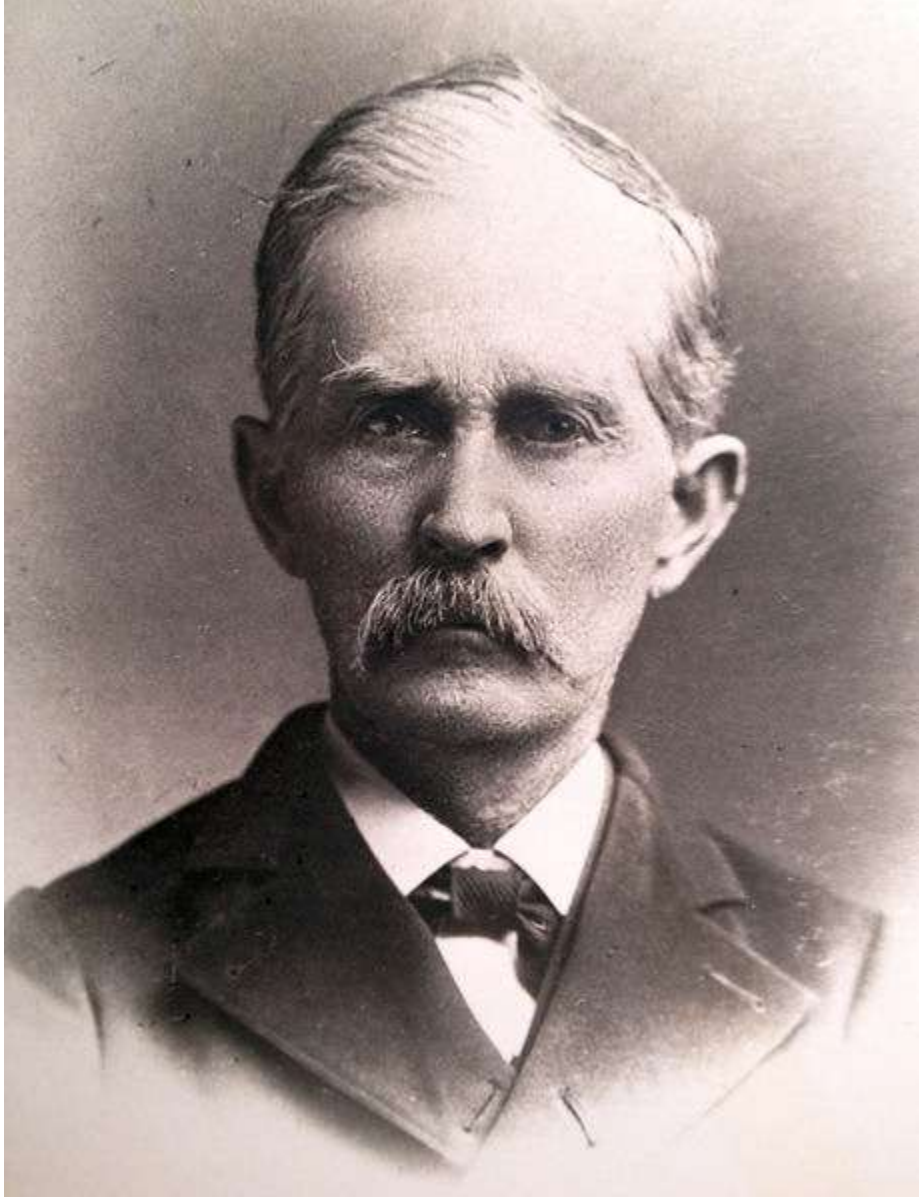


*The home of Dr. Mudd and family*

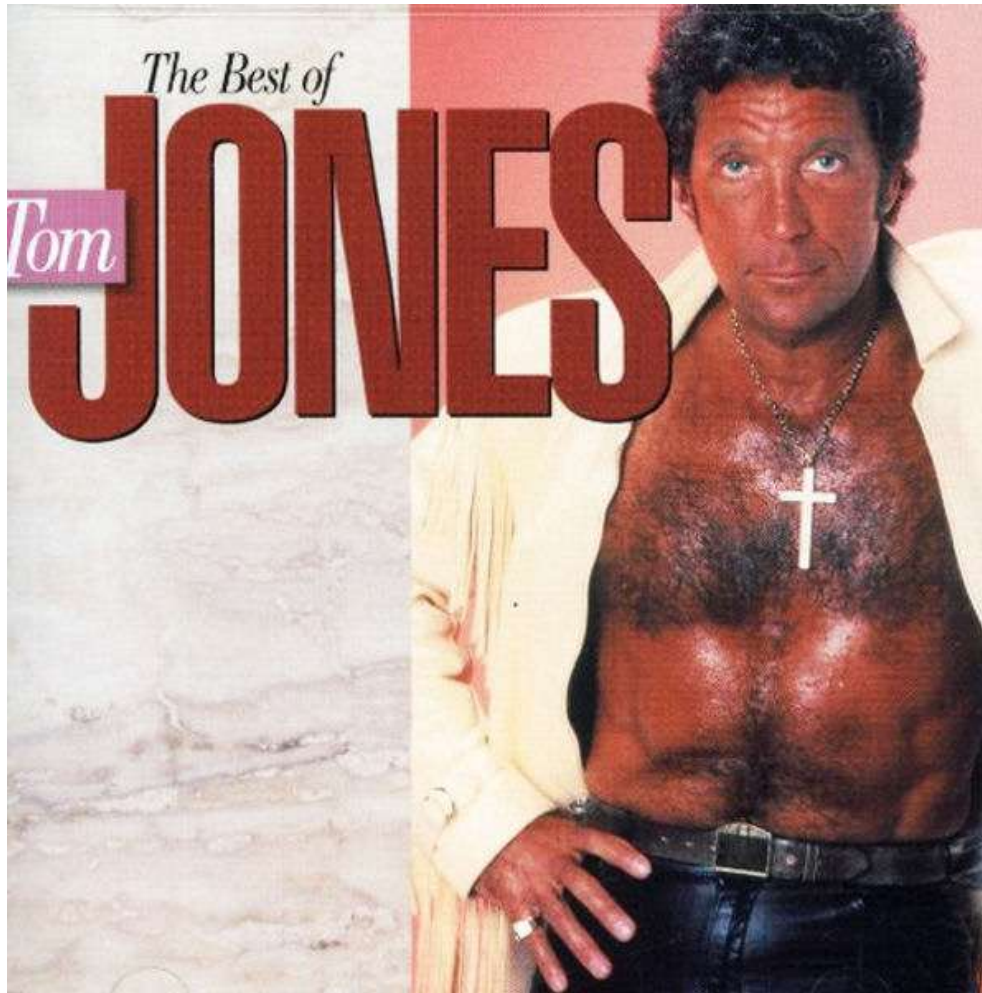
Booth and Herold supposedly introduced themselves to Mudd using the aliases of Tyson and Henson, and by some accounts, Booth wore a fake beard – which of course makes perfect sense since Booth had chosen not to don a disguise before committing the crime, and had left his real name scattered about the crime scene and the escape route. And by virtually all accounts, Mudd knew Booth and had had prior dealings with him, so the good doctor would surely have seen through a cheap disguise. For the record, Mudd claimed that he did not recognize the man he treated as John Wilkes Booth, and he could not identify David Herold from a photograph. Herold, meanwhile, maintained that he had crossed the bridge out of Washington on the afternoon of April 14 and was long gone from the city when Lincoln was shot. He also claimed that he had not gone to the Mudd house with Booth or anyone else. And evidence does indeed suggest that Herold spent the afternoon of April 14 on a horseback ride in the Maryland countryside. And he did so with – and I couldn't possibly make this stuff up – a sixteen-year-old kid by the name of Johnny Booth, who was apparently not related to the far more famous John Booth. Herold and the young Booth got drunk and passed out and were found the next morning by Johnny's father. Johnny and his father, of course, were not called upon to testify at the mock trial.

Meanwhile, Mudd repaired the damage to his visitor's leg, which he later described in a statement as a not very serious or painful wound, and fashioned a splint for him. He then offered the exhausted travelers sleeping accommodations. After catching some sleep and paying the good doctor for his services, the pair left later that day. At the infamous trial of the conspirators,

the story did not pick up again until nine days later, on April 24, when the pair allegedly took a ferry across the Rappahannock River. Various historical narratives have filled in those missing nine days, though not necessarily with a story that has much credibility.







*Thomas Jones and namesake*

According to Lincoln folklore, a guy by the name of Oswell Swann (sometimes identified as Oswald Swann), described as being half black and half Indian, guided the pair to the home of a Samuel Cox at about 1:00 AM on April 16, 1865. Cox allegedly advised Booth and Herold to hide out in a nearby pine thicket, and had his overseer, Franklin Robey, guide them there. He then summoned Thomas Jones to supply them with food, blankets, and newspapers. Needless to say, none of these men were ever prosecuted for their alleged capital offenses.



*Samuel Cox*

Booth and Herold supposedly spent five long days cooling their heels in that pine thicket. During that time, they had to keep quiet at all times for fear of alerting any nearby patrols to their whereabouts. They couldn't light a fire to keep warm. And Booth is generally described as being immobilized and in considerable pain from his injury (the one that Dr. Mudd described as not particularly painful). According to the best-selling *Manhunt*, for example, "Booth never rose from the ground during the time in the thicket." So the wealthy, accomplished, well-bred actor spent five agonizing days lying hungry and motionless on the cold, unforgiving ground of a Maryland pine thicket. Sounds perfectly reasonable.

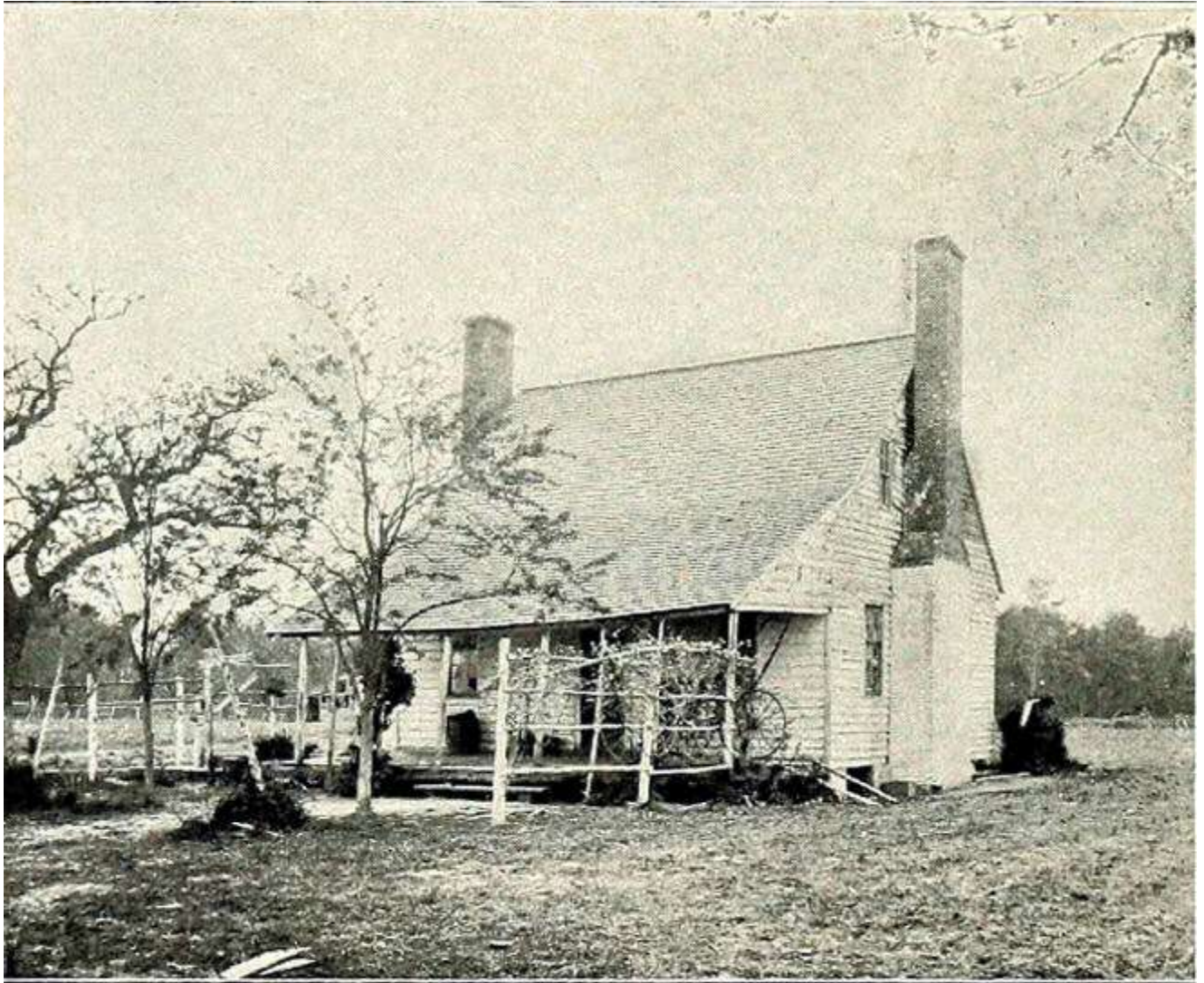
One problem with that tall tale though concerns the fate of Booth's and Herold's horses. It is agreed that they surely had horses when they arrived at the pine thicket, and they would have had to get rid of them to avoid giving away their position to any passing patrols. So what happened to them? In *Manhunt*, James Swanson tells the following tale: "Davey [Herold] untied both horses and led them by the reins to a quicksand morass about a mile from the pine thicket. Quickly, he shot each one in the head with a pistol or the carbine, and then sank their bodies, still accoutered



with saddles, bits, bridles, stirrups, and all. There they rest in an unmarked grave, their skeletons undiscovered to this day.”

Here Swanson has acknowledged something that historians agree on: despite one of the world’s most exhaustive manhunts, no trace of the two horses was ever found. According to the guy who actually writes the books that Bill O’Reilly puts his name on, “A combined force of seven hundred Illinois cavalry, six hundred members of the Twenty-second Colored Troops, and one hundred men from the Sixteenth New York Cavalry Regiment now enter the wilderness of Maryland’s vast swamps [on April 18, 1865] ... Incredibly, eighty-seven of these brave men will drown in their painstaking weeklong search for the killers.” No large animal carcasses were found on that search, or on any other searches. O’Reilly doesn’t mention, by the way, how many of those eighty-seven alleged drowning deaths involved members of the Twenty-Second Colored Troops (sorry – I couldn’t resist).

Historians also agree that Booth was far too seriously injured to be of any help to Herold, leaving Herold solely responsible for disposing of the horses. There are, generally speaking, two versions of the ‘story of the disappearing horses,’ both of which are laughably absurd. One commonly told fable holds that Herold led the two horses into quicksand; the other posits that he shot and buried them. Swanson has essentially weaved a new version of the tall tale by combining the two.



HUCKLEBERRY, THE HOME OF THOMAS A. JONES.

Some historians just avoid any mention of the disappearing horses trick, probably out of a desire to not sound like buffoons. But others have no problem with repeating tales that have stood unchallenged for well over a century despite being easily discredited. Because the reality, dear readers, is that there is no rational explanation for how two horses and all the gear accompanying them could have just vanished into thin air. Only in some fantasy world would it be possible for one man, working alone in fairly primitive conditions and with no tools at his disposal, to dig graves deep enough to completely conceal two very large animal carcasses without even leaving mounds for searchers to find. And even if he could somehow dig the holes, how would one man get those very heavy carcasses into those miraculously excavated graves? And wouldn't shooting them be a very risky maneuver, since gunshots tend to attract attention? It seems rather unlikely then that Herold shot the horses and then buried them both with his bare hands.

Equally preposterous is the claim that Herold led the horses into quicksand and let them sink to their deaths. Horses can be rather obedient creatures, to be sure, but they certainly aren't stupid and they won't willingly walk into what they would surely perceive as a deathtrap. And how

exactly would someone go about *leading* them into quicksand? Wouldn't that require that the person doing the leading would have to walk out into the quicksand ahead of the horses? Those are rather moot points though given that *Wikipedia* describes quicksand as "harmless," and notes that "People falling into (and, unrealistically, being submerged in) quicksand or a similar substance is a trope of adventure fiction, notably in movies."

It doesn't actually happen, you see, in real life. But that hasn't stopped mainstream historians and academics from promoting such nonsense for decades.

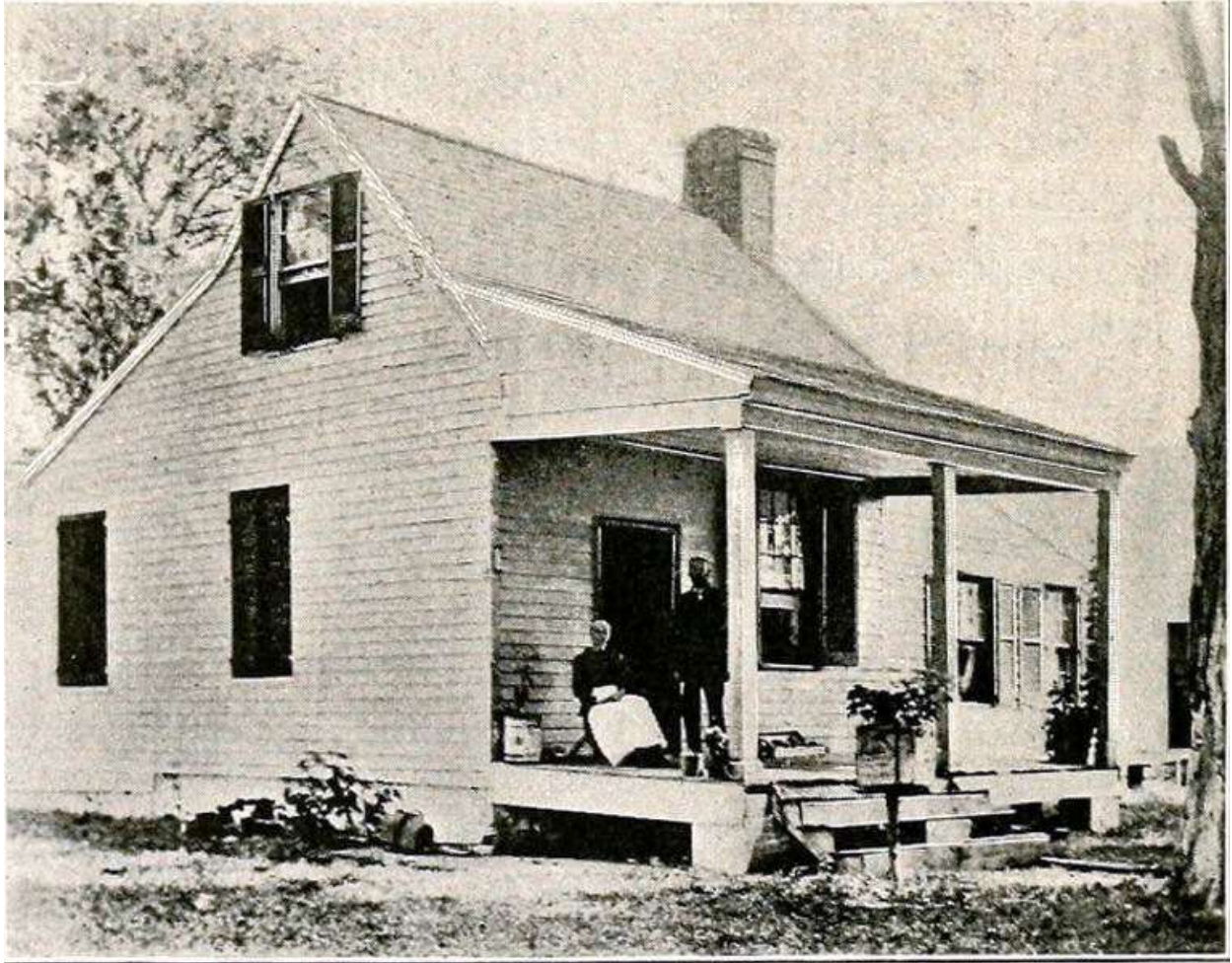
As previously noted, Swanson has combined the two versions of the 'disappearing horses' fable. No graves needed to be dug because the bodies were disposed of in quicksand, though horse-swallowing quicksand pits only exist in movies and TV shows from the 1960s – and in bestsellers that begin with the words, "This story is true." And in this particular version of the fable, Herold didn't have to lead the horses *into* the mythical quicksand, he just led them *to* it. But what Swanson leaves out is an explanation of how Herold single-handedly drug or pushed those half-ton horse carcasses into a fictional quicksand pit. The only way that could actually happen is in a cartoon.

In any event, after allegedly spending five long days lounging in a Maryland pine thicket, our antiheroes supposedly emerged to attempt a crossing of the Potomac River in a boat supplied by local fisherman Henry Rowland. Their first attempt though failed when the 'pair that couldn't row straight' supposedly paddled the wrong direction and ended up in Nanjemoy Creek, still on the Maryland side of the Potomac. Not to worry though – they went to a farm owned by Peregrine Davis and operated by his son-in-law, John Hughes, who happily put his life on the line by feeding and sheltering the fugitives.

The next night, April 21, Booth and Herold chose not to attempt a second crossing of the Potomac, for reasons never explained by historians. It had been a full week since the assassination and the most wanted men in America had failed to put much distance at all between themselves and Washington, but they apparently weren't in any hurry.



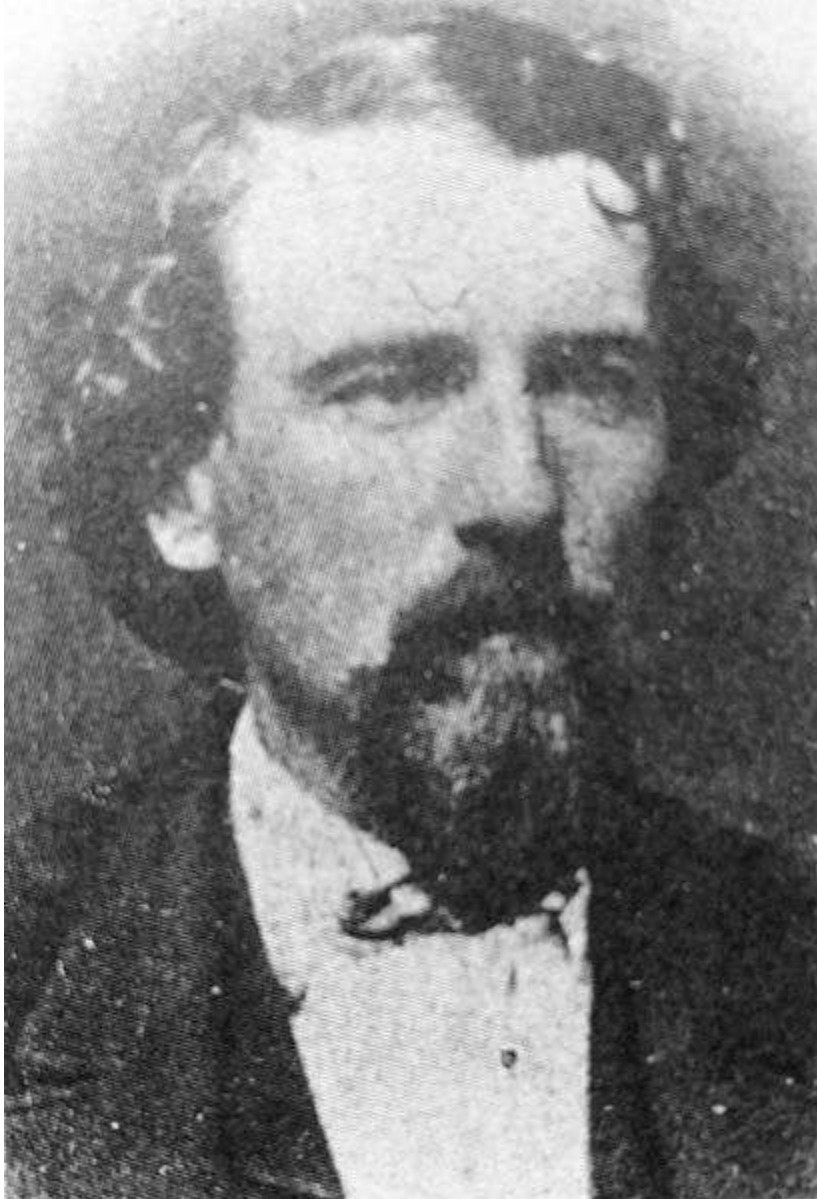




*Elizabeth Quesenberry and her home*

The dynamic duo allegedly made a second attempt the next night and successfully navigated into Machodoc Creek, near the home of Elizabeth Quesenberry. They arrived at Quesenberry's home at around 1:00 PM on April 23. The lady of the house promptly sent for Thomas Harbin, who was reportedly Thomas Jones' brother-in-law. Harbin arrived at about 3:00 PM with horses and two associates, William Bryant and Joseph Baden. The five men then rode to the home of Dr. Richard Stuart, who was apparently related in some way to General Robert E. Lee.





*Thomas Harbin*



*Dr. Richard Stuart*

Stuart directed the party, which arrived at around 8:00 PM, to the cabin of a freed slave by the name of William Lucas – because, you know, freed slaves were highly motivated to assist Lincoln’s alleged assassin. From there, Booth and Herold were supposedly transported by son Charley Lucas to Port Conway hidden under a load of straw in a wagon. In Port Conway, the fugitive pair hooked up with three Confederate soldiers by the names of Mortimer Ruggles, Absalom Bainbridge and William Jett, who by some accounts had been under the command of notorious Confederate intelligence operative John S. Mosby (Mosby, by the way, would soon enthusiastically campaign for and serve in the cabinet of Ulysses S. Grant, the man who had defeated his supposedly beloved Confederacy).

Booth, Herold, Ruggles, Jett and Bainbridge, along with a few horses, purportedly took a ferry across the Rappahannock River. At approximately 3:00 PM on April 24, 1865, they arrived at the Garrett home. The gravely injured, or not so gravely injured, John Wilkes Booth stayed at the home while Herold rode on to Bowling Green with his new friends. Booth spent the night with

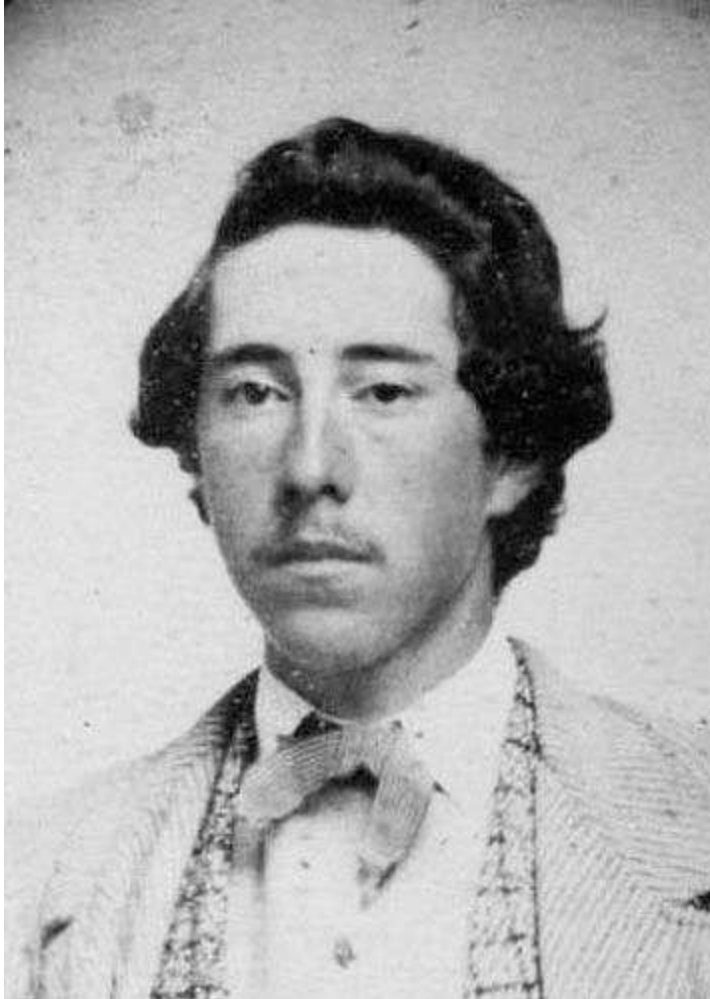
one of the Garrett sons while Herold and Bainbridge slept at the home of Joseph and Elizabeth Clarke. Herold returned the next day with Ruggles and Bainbridge, though Jett stayed behind in Bowling Green, from where he would soon lead a posse to the Garrett farm.



*Ruggles*



*Bainbridge (both circa 1890)*

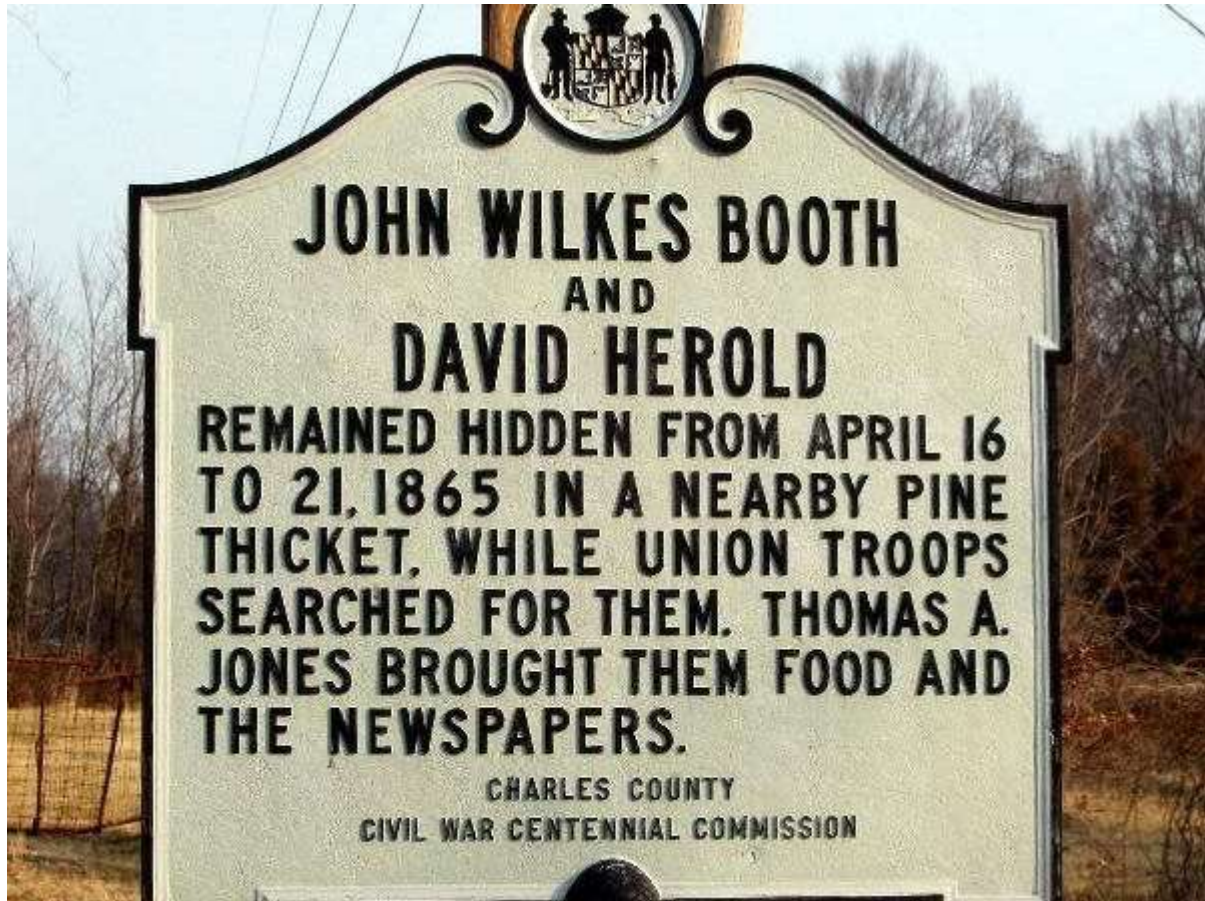


*Jett*

Booth and Herold spent the next night, April 25, supposedly locked in the Garretts' tobacco barn, making them easy prey for the posse that would soon arrive. The Reverend Richard Garrett, however, who was just eleven at the time of the assassination, would later note that the barn actually had double doors on all four sides and large windows in the upper story. William H. Garrett would add that some of those doors and windows fastened on the inside. There was, therefore, no way to actually lock the fugitives inside, another unfortunate fact that has been swept aside by historians.

The posse that would allegedly end the life of John Wilkes Booth arrived at the Garrett home at around 2:00 AM on April 26, 1865. A few hours later, Booth, or someone playing the part of Booth, had been shot. In due time, Dr. Richard Stuart, William Bryant, Elizabeth Quesenberry, Samuel Cox, Thomas Jones, the Garrett sons, and various others were arrested and taken to the Old Capital Prison. Curiously though, they were all freed without being charged. All but Dr. Mudd.





*Sign commemorating fictional historical events*

Meanwhile, as Booth and Herold were following their convoluted path to the Garrett farm, a massive manhunt spearheaded by Edwin Stanton was underway. We shall pick up there on the next outing.

Before resuming where we left off, I need to tack on some info here that should have been included in earlier installments. First off, there were, as it turns out, at least three additional suspicious deaths that followed closely on the heels of the Lincoln assassination, so let's take a quick look at those. And as I'm sure it will be recalled, these deaths are in addition to all the other curious deaths and confinements that have previously been discussed.

First up for review is Colonel Levi C. Turner, who was appointed Assistant Judge Advocate for the Army on August 5, 1862, which positioned him to be second-in-command to Judge Advocate Holt during the farcical 'trial of the conspirators.' The colonel also worked closely with notorious NDP chief Lafayette Baker during and after the Civil War to investigate suspected subversive activities. Turner died of unstated causes on March 13, 1867, less than two years after Lincoln was slain and about sixteen months before Baker himself turned up dead.

Also up for review is our old friend Silas Cobb, the guy who was in charge of guarding the Navy Yard Bridge and enforcing the curfew on the night of the assassination. Cobb was the accommodating gent who allegedly allowed both Booth and Herold to escape from Washington and then failed to offer any reasonable explanation for his actions, and of course suffered no

repercussions for those actions. Cobb turned up dead in November 1867, two-and-a-half years after Lincoln was shot. According to reports, he was the victim of a drowning accident. Finally we have Henri Beaumont de Sainte-Marie, the chap who was credited with tipping off authorities to the whereabouts of John Surratt, ultimately leading to Surratt's arrest, extradition, and failed prosecution. De Sainte-Marie died at the relatively young age of forty-one while still awaiting a claims court decision on the hefty reward promised for information leading to Surratt's capture.

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I also discussed in a previous post the fact that former British First Lady Cherie Blair is a descendant of the Booth clan, thereby demonstrating that the Booth family has continued to wield political power into the modern era. What I didn't know at the time was that another member of the Booth dynasty wielded considerable power on *this* side of the Atlantic right up until her death at the infamous Watergate Apartments on October 9, 1987. She was hiding right in plain sight, disguised only by the "e" that her branch of the family had added to the Booth name to mask the association. That wielder of power was none other than Clare Boothe Luce, who, along with her husband Henry Luce – a Skull and Bonesman who became a publishing magnate, launching such influential magazines as *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated* – was a longtime asset of the Central Intelligence Agency. Boothe was born on March 10, 1903 to unmarried parents who lived a shadowy life and moved around a lot. Her mother was known to use at least three aliases and her father used at least two. Clare briefly flirted with being an actress before embarking on a career as a journalist, war correspondent, politician and diplomat. Curiously, another woman born in 1903 and also known as Claire Luce also became an actress, creating a good deal of confusion after Clare Boothe became Clare Luce.



*Clare Boothe Luce*

Clare Boothe Luce had the distinction of being the first American woman named to a key diplomatic post, serving as the US Ambassador to Italy from 1953 to 1956. In 1959, she very briefly served as the US Ambassador to Brazil before resigning. From 1943 to 1947, she had served in the House of Representatives, representing Connecticut. During that time, she served on the House Military Affairs Committee, because she naturally knew a lot about military affairs. During the 1960s, her and her husband busied themselves with sponsoring anti-Castro groups seeking to return Cuba to its former status as a US puppet-state. In 1973, she was appointed to the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, because she obviously also knew a lot about foreign intelligence. In 1983, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Boothe Luce was also a Dame of Malta.

It is a strange world indeed when well over a century after the first acknowledged assassination of a sitting US president (historians don't generally have much to say about the untimely deaths of William Harrison, who served for just one month, or Zachary Taylor, who served for some sixteen months), members of the alleged assassin's family were still wielding considerable political power on both sides of the Atlantic. Last time I checked, there weren't any members of the Guiteau, Czolgosz, Oswald or Sirhan families occupying such positions of power. And now, we return to our regularly scheduled programming ....

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While Booth and Herold were supposedly taking their time getting from Washington to Garrett's farm (traveling a distance of less than 100 miles in a week-and-a-half), the largest manhunt in the young nation's history was underway, coordinated by our old friend, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. From the outset, Stanton's goal seemed to be to avoid actually apprehending John Wilkes Booth and some of the other alleged conspirators.

Stanton had considerable manpower at his disposal, including idle US military forces in Washington, the Metropolitan Police, Lafayette Baker's detective force, US Cavalry forces, and provost marshals. Working closely with Stanton were Metro Police Superintendent A.C. Richards, Washington Provost Marshall Major James O'Beirne, and General Christopher Columbus Augur, commander of US military forces in Washington. To say that Stanton misappropriated the available manpower would be a rather charitable assessment.



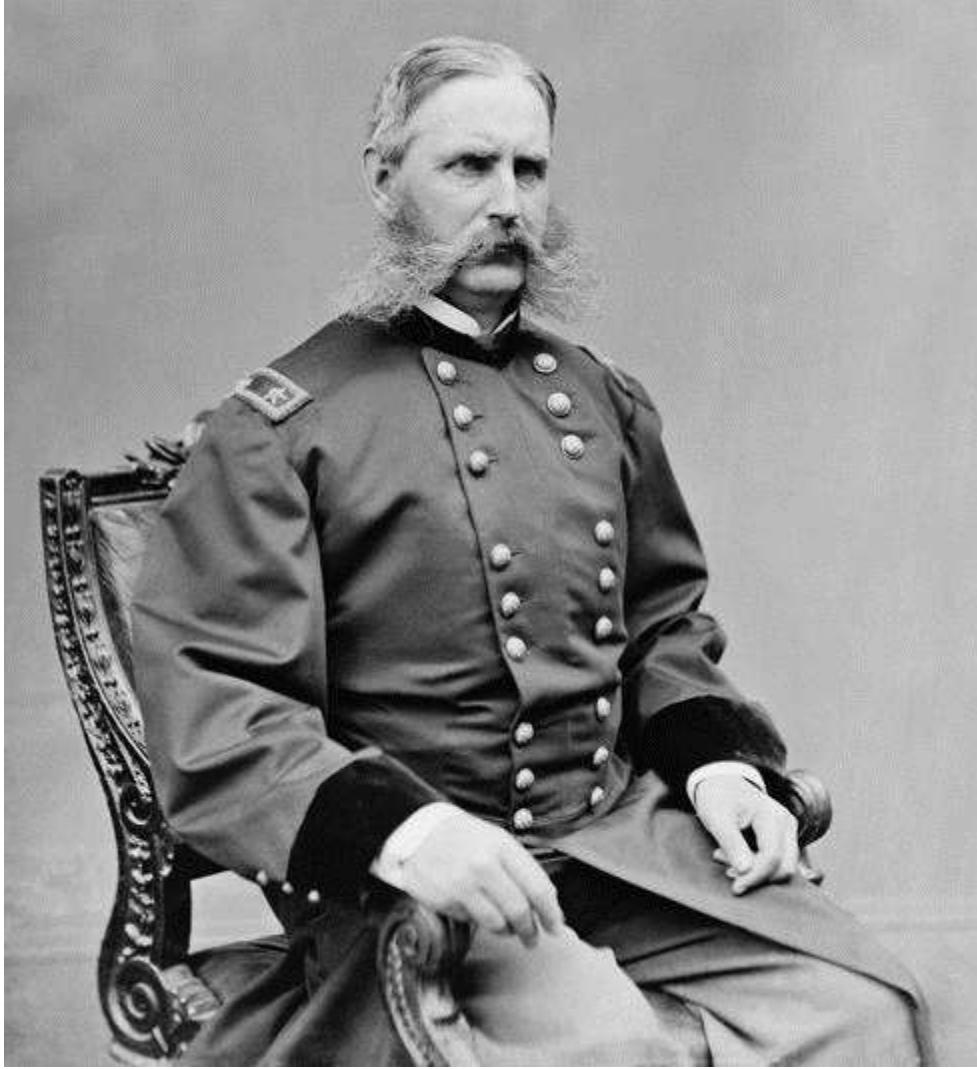
*A.C. Richards*

According to Bill O'Reilly's error-filled bestseller, *Killing Lincoln*, there were three routes leading out of Washington into Virginia – the Georgetown Aqueduct, Long Bridge, and Benning's Bridge – and just one, the Navy Yard Bridge, leading into Maryland. The

Confederacy-friendly path into Maryland was by far the most likely route for an assassin to take, so it naturally was completely ignored.

The first troops to find themselves accidentally on the correct route were led by a David Dana. Dana just happened to be the brother of Assistant Secretary of War Charles Dana, who served directly under Stanton and who decided that the patrol's presence on the trail of the alleged assassins was pointless and instead sent his brother's troops on a wild goose chase. Major O'Beirne also found himself accidentally on the right trail, so he of course was recalled to Washington.

As previously mentioned, Stanton's first dispatch after the shooting of Lincoln was not written until 1:30 AM and was not sent until 2:15 AM, about four hours after the shot was fired. That dispatch made no mention of John Wilkes Booth, despite the fact that numerous witnesses supposedly (but not actually) immediately identified Booth as the assailant. Booth's name didn't appear in a telegram until 4:15 AM, conveniently too late to make the morning papers. A telegram sent to the police chiefs of northern cities contained no mention of the name Booth. Initial press reports, based on information leaked by Stanton himself, identified John Surratt as the perpetrator of the fictional attack on the Seward family. When it later became known that Surratt was nowhere near Washington at the time of the attack, Lewis Powell/Paine, who bore no physical resemblance whatsoever to John Surratt, was substituted in as the perpetrator of the alleged assassination attempt.



*Christopher Columbus Augur*





*James O'Beirne*

The first telegram dispatched by the War Department was a curiously worded message to General Grant, which read: "The President was assassinated tonight at Ford's Theatre at 10:30 tonight & cannot live. The wound is a pistol shot through the head. Secretary Seward & his son Frederick, were also assassinated at their residence & are in a dangerous condition." One would think that it would go without saying that someone who had been "assassinated" would be in "a dangerous condition." Luckily though, neither of the Swards were actually assassinated, although news of their 'deaths' quickly circulated around Washington.

One of the earliest actions taken by investigators was raiding the room at the Kirkwood Hotel allegedly rented by George Atzerodt for the purpose of assassinating Andrew Johnson.

According to Guttridge and Neff, writing in *Dark Union*, "The room was registered as Atzerodt's but had not been slept in. The Kirkwood's day clerk, who had entered Room 126 earlier that morning, found nothing and said so. His testimony was ignored." When detectives entered that very same empty and unused room, they allegedly uncovered a wealth of evidence.

Supposedly recovered from the room were a bankbook issued to John Wilkes Booth, a loaded revolver, three boxes of pistol cartridges, a map of the southern states, a Bowie knife, and a handkerchief with Booth's mother's name embroidered on it. Booth's room at the National

Hotel, Room 228, was similarly raided with additional evidence supposedly recovered, including a business card containing John Surratt's name and a letter from Samuel Arnold conveniently implicating both he and McLaughlin, despite the fact that Arnold and McLaughlin, like Surratt, were nowhere near Washington at the time of the assassination.

"Wanted" posters issued by the War Department were wildly, and probably deliberately, inaccurate. John Surratt's and David Herold's names were both spelled incorrectly, the photo of Herold was of him as a schoolboy, which clearly wasn't an accurate representation of how he looked circa 1865, and the photo of Surratt wasn't John Surratt at all. In a blatant act of historical revisionism, corrected posters were issued much later. One widely circulated poster that was issued *after* Lewis Paine was already in custody inexplicably offered a reward for Paine and contained a richly detailed 160-word description of the already incarcerated suspect, along with a mere 42-word description of the guy who was still at large, John Wilkes Booth.

The poster features three small portraits at the top, each in a separate frame. From left to right, they are labeled 'SURREAT', 'BOOTH', and 'HAROLD'. Below the portraits, the text reads: 'War Department, Washington, April 20, 1865,' followed by a hand icon pointing to the right and '\$100,000 REWARD!'. The main title is 'THE MURDERER' in large, bold, black letters. Below this, it says 'Of our late beloved President, Abraham Lincoln, IS STILL AT LARGE.' There are three reward amounts listed: '\$50,000 REWARD' with a small note below it: 'Will be paid by this Department for his apprehension, in addition to any reward offered by Municipal Authorities or State Executives.'; '\$25,000 REWARD' with a note: 'Will be paid for the apprehension of JOHN H. SURREATT, one of Booth's Accomplices.'; and '\$25,000 REWARD' with a note: 'Will be paid for the apprehension of David C. Harold, another of Booth's accomplices.'

*Original "Wanted" poster*



*Revised "Wanted" posters*

The first alleged conspirator to be arrested was the hapless Ned Spangler, who was taken into custody at Ford's Theatre on the night of the assassination. Samuel Arnold and Michael McLaughlin, implicated through what appears to have been planted evidence, were arrested on April 17, 1865, the former at Fort Monroe and the latter in Baltimore. Later that night, Mary Surratt and Lewis Powell were both arrested at Surratt's boardinghouse. George Adzerodt was taken into custody in the early morning hours of April 20 in Maryland, following – by one account – a tip from his police detective brother. Dr. Mudd was arrested on April 24, four days after Captain William Wood, a close associate of Stanton and the warden of the Old Capitol Prison, had begun watching his home.

Why authorities drug their feet for several days before arresting Mudd even while rounding up some 2,000 other suspects who ultimately were not charged is another of the many unanswered questions surrounding the Lincoln assassination and its aftermath. In any event, that left just two of the alleged conspirators at large, David Herold and John Wilkes Booth. Finding them was going to require a specially assembled team – a team that would uncannily know just where to go.

The elite posse was assembled by NDP chief Lafayette Baker on April 24. The group thereafter all but made a beeline to the area around Garrett's farm. How they knew to go there is a question not often addressed by historians. For the record, Baker claimed that he was tipped off by "an old

Negro,” but said person was never identified and he or she never stepped forward to collect the substantial reward offered. A House Committee noted that, “upon what information Colonel Baker proceeded in sending out the expedition ... is in no manner disclosed or intimated in his official report.”

An 1867 Minority Report of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives offered what were, by today’s standards, shockingly frank assessments of Baker’s character, such as, “Although examined on oath, time and again, and on various occasions, it is doubtful whether he [Baker] has in any one thing told the truth even by accident,” and “there can be no doubt that of his many previous outrages, entitling him to unenviable immortality, he has added that of willful and deliberate perjury; and we are glad to know that no one member of the committee deems any statement made by him as worthy of the slightest credit. What a blush of shame will tinge the cheek of the American student in future ages, when he reads that this miserable wretch for years held, as it were, in the hollow of his hand, the liberties of the American people.”

The posse assembled by Baker was led by his cousin, Lt. Luther Baker, and Lt. Col. Everton Conger, who had served as an aide to Lafayette Baker. Both had returned to civilian life and were recruited specifically to lead the mission. They were joined by Lt. Edward Doherty and a detachment of twenty-five soldiers. After completing the mission, all involved signed quitclaims and collected a substantial amount of reward money. One of the troopers, as fate would have it, had met Booth previously; some 33 years later, on April 20, 1898, he issued the following published statement: “It was not Booth nor did it resemble him ...” Many Americans had reached that conclusion years earlier.



*Edward Doherty*





*Everton Conger*

At the Garrett home, the guy later identified as John Wilkes Booth introduced himself as John W. Boyd. Herold was introduced as his cousin, David Boyd. During the standoff in the barn with the pair's would-be captors, the name "Booth" was never spoken. When Herold surrendered and exited the barn, leaving his companion behind, he insisted that he did not know the other man, who he claimed was named Boyd. Boyd/Booth was wearing a Rebel uniform and did not have on a ring that Booth reportedly always wore.

It was not until he had been shot and lay dying that the suspected assassin was addressed by Luther Baker as "Booth." According to Baker's account, the mortally wounded man "seemed surprised, opened his eyes wide, and looked about," as if he too was looking for the elusive John Wilkes Booth. At 7:15 AM on the morning of April 26, 1865, Booth/Boyd drew his last breath, some two-and-a-half hours after being shot, allegedly by Boston Corbett.

Mainstream authors and historians have labored long and hard to convince readers that Booth's body was positively identified, leaving no doubt in the public mind that justice had been served. James Swanson, for example, has written in *Manhunt* that, "On the *Montauk*, several men who knew Booth in life, including his doctor and dentist, were summoned aboard the ironclad to witness him in death. It was all very official. The War Department even issued an elaborate

receipt to the notary who witnessed the testimony. During a careful autopsy ...” The same James Swanson has also written, in *Lincoln’s Assassins*, that, “When the assassin’s body was brought back to Washington, the government took rigorous steps to confirm the identity of the man killed at Garrett’s farm ... Witnesses who knew Booth in life were summoned to identify him in death.” William Hanchett, in *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (his contemptible attempt to ‘debunk’ so-called ‘conspiracy theories’), has claimed that “Booth’s body was identified beyond any possibility of a mix-up at a coroner’s inquest on April 27, 1865.”

All such proclamations are rather brazen and unconscionable acts of historical revisionism. The reality is that the body was not autopsied and it was processed in-and-out of Washington in record time. A mere forty hours passed between the death of the man at Garrett’s farm and the secret, late night disposal of his body, and that included the time needed to transport the corpse back to Washington. To this day, that initial burial site remains a mystery and several different versions of the disposal of the body have been published.

For reasons never explained in the historical record, the body was not transported back to Washington by the military detachment, but was instead escorted by only three men: Luther Baker, prisoner Willie Jett, and one unnamed soldier. Before reaching Washington, Jett somehow managed to, uhmm, ‘escape.’ The body was carried by steamer up the Potomac River, then transported by tugboat to the Washington Navy Yard and placed aboard the ironclad *Montauk* in the dead of night, at 1:45 AM on April 27, 1865, bypassing normal procedures. Before the day was done, the body would be covertly disposed of. The captain of the *Montauk* would later say that he “was not present at either time (arrival or disposal) or I should have put a stop to it.” The commandant of the Navy Yard would add that, “The removal of the body was entirely without my knowledge, an unusual transaction.”

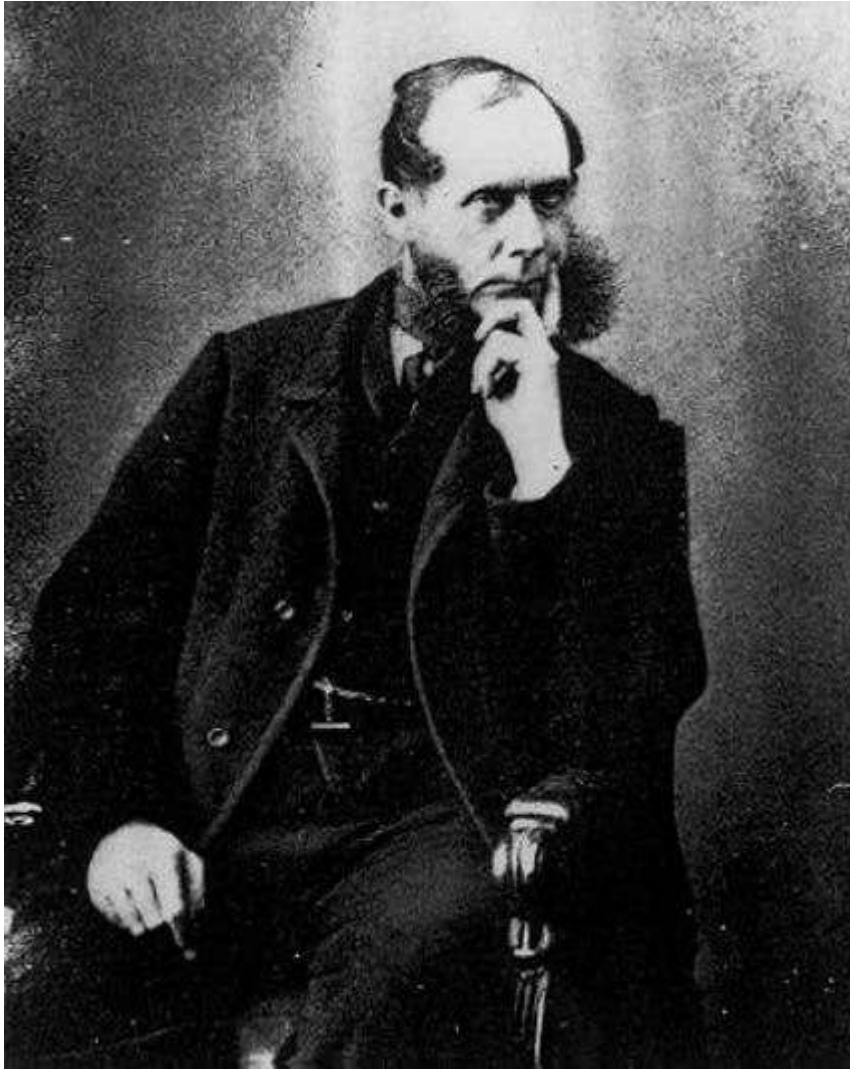


*Prosecutor John Bingham (left) and Judge Advocate Joseph Holt (center)*

Dispatched to the *Montauk* to oversee the identification of the body were such disreputable characters as Surgeon General Barnes, Judge Advocate Joseph Holt, prosecutor/persecutor John Bingham, Stanton underlings Thomas Eckert and Lafayette Baker, and two of Baker's most trusted men, Luther Baker and Everton Conger. Edwin Stanton had ordered Lafayette Baker and Thomas Eckert to personally intercept the boat carrying the body and clandestinely get it aboard the *Montauk*.

During the alleged inquest, none of Booth's peers in the theater community, many of whom were present in Washington at the time, were brought onboard to ID the body. No members of the Booth family were enlisted to view the body. None of Booth's alleged co-conspirators, many of whom were being held *on the very same ship*, were allowed to ID the body. According to *Dark Union*, "thirteen people were permitted to view the body. All but the war photographer Alexander Gardner, his assistant, and a hotel clerk were connected with the War Department." If we're being honest here, that should read, "all but possibly the hotel clerk were connected with the War Department."

Even within the government's handpicked and limited cast of witnesses, there was disagreement as to whether the body was that of Booth. Dr. John Frederick May, who had previously seen Booth as a patient, noted that "there is no resemblance in that corpse to Booth, nor can I believe it to be him." May added that the corpse "looks to me much older, and in appearance much more freckled than he was. I do not recollect that he was at all freckled." Dr. May would later write that the corpse's "right limb was greatly contused, and perfectly black from a fracture of one of the long bones." Surgeon General Barnes' report to Stanton, however, held that it was "the left leg and foot" that were injured and "encased in an appliance of splints and bandages," thus clouding the waters even on such straightforward issues as which of the corpse's legs was injured.



*Dr. John Frederick May*

After the hasty identification charade, and without anyone who was actually close to Booth in life having seen the body, and without any public display of the body, and without any photographs of the body that would ever see the light of day, the corpse was quickly disposed of by either Lafayette Baker and Thomas Eckert, or Lafayette and Luther Baker, depending upon who is telling the tale. Following the announcement that the body had been disappeared, shouts of “hoax!” rocked Washington, with many convinced that Booth hadn’t been captured or killed and was still free.

On July 28, 1866, Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky voiced his doubts about the identification of Booth: “I have never seen any satisfactory evidence that Booth was killed.” Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, who had played a role in the mock trial, came back with: “I submit to my friend from Kentucky that there are some things that we must take judicial notice of, just as well as that Julius Caesar is dead.”

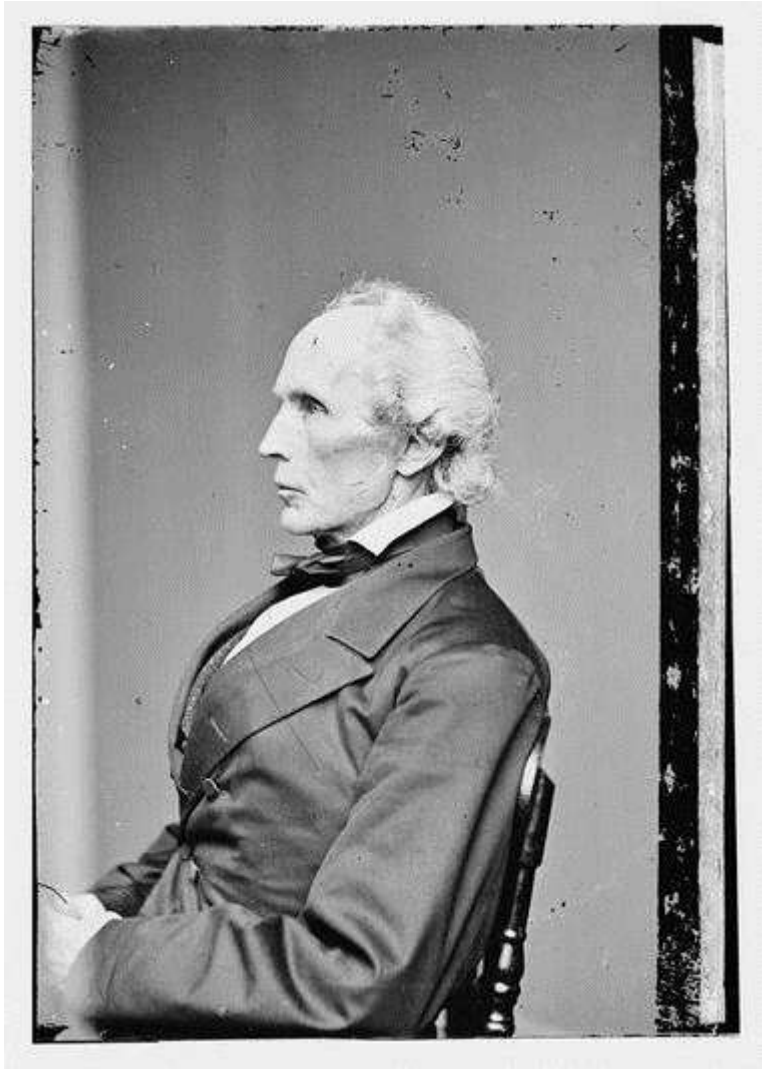
Davis though remained decidedly unconvinced: “I would rather have better testimony of the fact. I want it proved that Booth was in that barn. I cannot conceive, if he was in the barn, why he was not taken alive. I have never seen anybody, or the evidence of anybody, that identified Booth after he is said to have been killed. Why so much secrecy about it? ... There is a mystery and a

most inexplicable mystery to my mind about the whole affair ... [Booth] could have been captured just as well alive as dead. It would have been much more satisfactory to have brought him up here alive and to have inquired of him to reveal the whole transaction ... [or] bring his body up here ... let all who had seen him playing, all who associated with him on the stage or in the green room or at the taverns and other public places, have had access to his body to have identified it.”



*Senator Reverdy Johnson*





*Senator Garrett Davis*

There was no way the powers-that-be were going to allow that to happen, of course, since the body clearly wasn't that of John Wilkes Booth. Had it been, the government surely would have taken the actions necessary to convince a skeptical public. But such actions weren't really necessary in 1865, just as they aren't today. The omnipotent ones can tell us, for example, that Osama bin Laden was killed and his body promptly disposed of – and the majority of us will accept it as the gospel truth.

And those malcontents who choose not to accept a proclamation that lacks any objective proof? Well, they don't really matter. Just as the voices of reason didn't really matter 150 years ago.