



Often called “the most handsome man in America” at the time, John Wilkes Booth was the 26-year-old actor and Southern sympathizer who raised a .44 caliber derringer to the back of Abraham Lincoln’s head and pulled the trigger. About that fact there is no doubt. Booth was what is now known as a “superstar,” and was recognized by hundreds when he leaped to the stage from the president’s box at Ford’s Theater in Washington, D.C. and made his dramatic exit. But from that moment, much of the truth about the murder and high-level conspiracy was greatly suppressed and distorted until this day. The fact of the matter is, as the author of this article proves, Booth escaped, and another died in his place.

WANTED:

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF LINCOLN'S ASSASSIN

JOHN WILKES BOOTH

HIS GREAT ESCAPE & THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PLOT

By PAT SHANNAN

ONLY DAYS AFTER UNION SOLDIERS allegedly tracked down and shot dead the assassin of 16th President Abraham Lincoln in 1865, the rumors began to fly: It wasn't Booth that they shot; Booth escaped; he went back to Canada where the banksters had funded him in the first place; a Confederate soldier by the name of J.W. Boyd died in his place.

As with most government cover-ups, the official story did not mesh with the facts. But what was the truth? Most of the rumors were no more than inflated conjecture that grew with time, as all gossip always does. On the other hand, time sometimes also has a way of pushing the truth to the surface (as in "murder will out"), and this truth took over 70 years to appear in print for the first time and another 70 to be repeated here.

Nearly five years after being allegedly shot and killed and secretly buried, John Wilkes Booth (hereinafter "Booth" or "JWB") sired a son born February 27, 1870. This is confirmed in the 70-year-old treasure tome written by Booth's granddaughter, Izola Forrester, entitled *This One Mad Act*. Forrester was born in 1878 in Baltimore and spent much of her early life in New York, Chicago and Boston when she reached school age. There she lived with her grandmother while her mother, Booth's daughter, had carried on the family tradition of show business, appearing in theater productions all over the country.

In 1937, Izola wrote that because of her relationship to Booth which gave

The Cast of Characters:

Izola D'Arcy Booth—Wife of John Wilkes Booth and keeper of the Booth family secrets; "Izola I" herein.

Ogarita Rosalie Booth—Daughter of JWB and Izola I, born in 1859, blood sister of Harry Stevenson Jr., mother of author Izola born in 1878.

Harry Stevenson Jr.—Actual son of John Wilkes Booth and Izola, born in 1870, five years after JWB disappeared, and raised as half-brother to Izola II.

Harry Stevenson Sr.—Longtime friend of both JWB and Izola I who volunteered his name and posed as Izola I's new husband in order to conceal the truth.

Aunt Sarah—Negro house slave for Izola I and nurse for daughter Rita.

Henry—Aunt Sarah's son who was JWB's loyal aide before and after the escape. Born around 1845.

KGC—Knights of the Golden Circle, an offshoot group of the Masons, who believed that the South would rise again, and did not disband until 1916. The Confederate gold, never found after the fall of Richmond, was believed to have been captured and controlled by this faction.

Izola II—Daughter of Booth's daughter, Rita, born in 1878. She was the 1937 author of *This One Mad Act*—the story of her grandfather's escape and how the KGC's Booth doppelganger was shot by Boston Corbett in the Garrett's barn.

her access to the family records and because of the stories told to her by her mother (Booth's daughter), grandmother (Booth's wife) and her "Uncle Harry" (whom we will introduce shortly), and also because of long-secreted information given to her voluntarily by many responsible persons after learning that she was Booth's granddaughter—not to mention the 40 years of ceaseless research she did to find new material and verify reports and rumors—she was able to conclude, without any doubt, that:

1) Booth, contrary to "common knowledge," was married before the war and had his home in the Shenandoah Valley;

2) Lincoln's assassination was instigated by men high in the order of the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC), said to have been a branch of Freemasonry, flourishing in the North as well as in the South. They believed that the South could rise again, and did not disband until 1916. The Confederate gold, never found after the fall of Richmond, was believed to have been captured and controlled by this faction.;

3) Booth escaped from the Garrett Farm through the aid of this order and lived in exile (California, England and India) until his actual death in 1879 or later.

Booth's granddaughter claims about her book:

In this book I present my reasons for believing as I do. I realize that there are gaps in my story [for instance, at exactly what particular time Booth was in the various locations], due to the fact that many who knew it have died, but particularly because nearly all written evidence has been deliberately destroyed [mostly by government agents]. I hope that what has been left me, and what I have discovered through the help of many friends and strangers, will help piece the facts together and solve once and for all the mystery around John Wilkes Booth.

THE OFFICIAL STORY

As most people learned in school or read in books and magazine articles, 26-year-old John Wilkes Booth, nationally renowned actor and known Southern sympathizer, silently slipped into the private box of Abraham Lincoln, where the president and his wife and another couple sat enjoying the presentation of *Our American Cousin* on Good Friday evening, April 14, 1865.

Booth had several known confederates whose pre-planned assignments were to simultaneously carry out the murders of other high-ranking administration officials—namely Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. These men and others were involved in a foiled kidnap plot of

Lincoln exactly a month earlier, when the president was not riding in the carriage he was believed to be in late on the night of March 14.

The plot elevated to a plan of murder of the president, vice president and secretary of state because the war had ended with Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Confederate army the previous Sunday, and Booth not only wanted revenge against the hated Lincoln but believed that Lee might reconsider and reorganize the troops if the Union administration was in disarray and without any leadership.

Those active with Booth in the murder plans included Lewis Thornton Powell, a large, handsome ex-Confederate soldier who had adopted the alias of Lewis Payne. He had been wounded and captured at Gettysburg, escaped from a hospital in Baltimore and joined John Singleton Mosby's Confederate guerrilla rangers. In January of 1865, he deserted Mosby and went back to Baltimore, where he was arrested for assault on March 12. He was released after signing an oath of allegiance and a statement that he would not engage in activities against the North. While he had used his own name of L.T. Powell

when signing a receipt for clothing issued to him as a member of Mosby's Rangers, he signed the oath of allegiance as "L. Payne." (Because of identification problems, he would be referred to as Payne throughout the 1865 conspiracy trial, which was likely fine with the Powell family members back home.)

Powell (Payne) was the son of a Baptist minister in Florida. He was a clean-cut, well-coordinated and fearless young man who made an excellent impression

upon all who saw him. Even the hangman who knew him in the prison and on the gallows later would comment that this young fellow conducted himself with dignity and admirable composure. Powell had the intelligence and *savoir-faire* to carry out the convincing deception necessary to penetrate to the very bedside of Secretary of State William H. Seward in an attempt to beat and stab him to death.

Booth also recruited George Atzerodt, a rather brutish carriage painter and blockade-runner, who provided another pair of willing hands, at least for the attempt to kidnap Lincoln. When Booth changed his plan from kidnapping to murder, a protesting Atzerodt was the man he assigned to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson. Atzerodt's value lay in his familiarity with the countryside and the river crossings in the Port Tobacco area, but as it soon turned out, he lacked the stomach for murder.

Also part of Booth's group was a young drugstore clerk named David Herold, who guided Powell to Seward's house and then followed John Wilkes Booth out of town (southeast) across the Navy Yard Bridge, accompanying him on the escape

"I hope that . . . what I have discovered through the help of many friends and strangers, will help piece the facts together and solve once and for all the mystery around John Wilkes Booth."

ride and acting as a guide and personal servant.

Booth and others of his group frequented the Washington rooming house of Mary Surratt at 541 H Street NW. (Today, it is a Chinese restaurant.) She had moved there six months earlier, following her husband's death, and rented out the family farm and tavern 10 miles south in Surrattsville (now Clinton, Maryland) to a man named John Lloyd, a retired D.C. policeman. Mary's son John was deeply involved in the conspiracy to kidnap Lincoln, but luckily for him, was out of town when Booth changed the plan to murder. It was always questionable whether his mother was actually involved in any plot but the prosecutor's persuaded a witness to point the finger at her and she was convicted. She is the only woman in the history of the republic to hang in an official execution.

At the height of the hysteria in the days immediately following the assassination, over 200 people were under suspicion and arrested. Ironically, Mary's 23-year-old son, John, who was certainly guiltier than most of the earlier conspiracy, managed to evade punishment when he was captured and prosecuted two years later, because of a lack of evidence against him.

Booth was familiar with the popular play *Our American Cousin*, and knew that one of the uproarious comedic lines would come at approximately 10:15 p.m. when actor Harry Hawk barked at the female character, "Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you sockdologizing old man-trap!"

The follow-up lines might have been even funnier: "Well now when I think what I've thrown away in hard cash today, I'm apt to call myself some awful hard names. \$400,000 is an awful big pile for a man to light a cigar with. If that gal had only given herself to me in exchange, it wouldn't have been a bad bargain. But I dare no more ask that gal to be my wife than I dare ask Queen Victoria to dance a Cape Cod reel."

The audience never heard it. The screams from Mrs. Lincoln disrupted the play's proceedings, quickly followed by the recognizable actor John Wilkes Booth leaping to the stage from the president's box, landing on and breaking the fibula (the smaller of the two main bones of the lower leg) in his left leg because he was thrown off balance when the spur on his right boot caught in the colorful bunting decorating the outside of the box as he descended.

Booth (or Herold, following Booth's instructions) had drilled a small peephole that afternoon through the inside



Left: John Wilkes Booth

(far left of photo), a well-known stage actor, is here shown with his brothers Edwin and Junius in a production of *Julius Caesar*, in 1864, just a year before John assassinated President Lincoln. John and his



elder brother, Edwin, were both members of a Masonic lodge, but because of John's notoriety, the lodge quietly removed his name from its rolls. To this day the Scottish Rite's membership office maintains that only Edwin was a member. Above right, Booth strikes a hand-in-vest pose which some say in the secret language of Masonry indicates Booth can be trusted to keep important secrets.

door to the Presidential box. Then that night, shortly after 10 o'clock, he had entered via an outside door to a small standing area, jammed the outside door with a crowbar, and silently lay in wait for the comedic punch line by Hawk before entering and shooting Lincoln in the back of the head. Most in the audience below never heard the shot and were actually first alerted to it by the wild screams of the first lady.

A young Brooklyn newspaper reporter, who would later attain immortality as a poet, was in the audience that night, and his pen provided the most interesting and vivid description of all. Walt Whitman said, in part:

Through the general hum following the stage pause, with the change of positions etc, came the muffled sound of a pistol shot, which not one-hundredth part of the audience heard at the time—and yet—a moment's hush—somehow, surely a vague, startled thrill, and then—through the ornamented, draperied, and stripped space way of the president's box, a sudden figure, a man, raises himself with hands and feet, stands a moment on the railing, leaps below to the stage (a distance of 14 or 15 feet), falls out of position, catching his boot heel in the copious drapery (the American flag), falls on one knee, quickly recovers himself, rises as if nothing had happened (he really sprains his ankle but unfelt then)—and the figure—Booth, the murderer, dressed in plain black broadcloth, bare headed, with a full head of glossy raven hair, and his eyes like some mad animal's, flashing with light and resolution; yet with a certain strange calmness, holds aloft a large knife—walks along not much back of the footlights—turns fully toward the audience, his face of statuesque beauty, lit by

those basilisk eyes, flashing with desperation, perhaps insanity—launches out in a firm and steady voice—the words “Sic semper tyrannis”—and then walks with neither slow nor very rapid pace diagonally across to the back of the stage and disappears. (Had not all this terrible scene—making the mimic ones preposterous—had it not all been rehearsed, in blank, by Booth beforehand?)

Further, in the closing paragraph of his news report and after his description of the cries of Mary Todd Lincoln and the mayhem in the audience that followed, Whitman also observed and commented upon the behavior of the federal agents and soldiers moving into action:

In the midst of all this, the soldiers of the president’s guard, with others suddenly drawn in the scene, burst in—some 200 altogether—they storm the house, through all the tiers, especially the upper ones—inflamed with fury, literally charging the audience with fixed bayonets, muskets and pistols, shouting, “Clear out! Clear out, you sons of bitches.” Such wild scenes, or the suggestion of it rather, inside the playhouse that night!

Whitman would soon follow with his poem, *Captain, My Captain*, which seemed the cry of the nation at the time, at least in the North. The things he saw that night must have been the inspiration for the poem.

After leaping to the stage and snapping the fibula in his left leg (Whitman thought it was only a sprain), Booth limped to the rear door, mounted a horse held by an unwitting confere and rode to the Navy Yard Bridge. Even though it was after the 9 p.m. curfew for leaving the city, Booth talked his way past the sentry by saying that he needed to get home for the night. Most of the sentries had relaxed the rules because the war was by then officially over. Booth then joined up with David Herold on the Maryland side of the district limits and began the ride toward Dr. Samuel Mudd’s home in rural Maryland with the hope of gaining some medical relief for his aching leg.

Booth and Mudd had met at least once the previous autumn regarding the purchase of a horse, and when Booth and Herold arrived at 4 a.m. following the assassination, Herold was riding that horse. Booth wore a false beard in hopes that the good doctor wouldn’t recognize him. But, even if Mudd had recognized Booth, there was no way for him to have known of the deed Booth had committed back in the city six hours earlier. However, out of fear of being implicated, Mudd

said that he didn’t recognize the man he’d helped. This was simply unbelievable to the officials at the military tribunal and probably served more to convict him than anything else. (These trials by the military for a civilian crime were later ruled to be illegal but too late to save all of those convicted.)

Mudd set the leg and put a splint on it, after cutting off Booth’s left boot and stashing it under the bed. Late the next morning, Booth and Herold continued south, eventually crossed the Potomac River into Virginia, and wandered thereabouts for days, receiving little assistance from the locals.

Twelve days after the assassination, on April 26, (the alleged) Booth was surrounded by U.S. Army troops while sleeping in a barn at the Garrett farm in Virginia. The orders to the soldiers were to capture him alive, but when the barn was set afire to flush the men out, a crazed sergeant by the name of Boston Corbett shot Booth through the neck as (the alleged) Booth emerged from the burning barn. “Booth” died two hours later, according to the official story, and his body was taken to the Washington arsenal and buried without autopsy, and this is where the official story began to look suspect, even in 1865.

All the soldiers were sworn to secrecy and threatened with court-martial if they talked to anyone about what actually happened that night. Therefore, the official story was the only one that was ever allowed to make it into the history books. But the quiet record of multiple eyewitnesses attests to the fact that most of the important things about this case were a myth. Even Edwin Stanton’s now-

famous quote, supposedly uttered at Lincoln’s deathbed when the president was pronounced dead at 7:23 the next morning—“Now he belongs to the ages”—was apparently written by Stanton later but never spoken at the scene, according to several who were there. Nobody remembered hearing it that way.

History is written by the winners, and the deification of Lincoln for the future generations was already underway.

In reality, Lincoln was a tyrant willing to stoop to anything to win and the greatest violator of the U.S. Constitution in history—except for possible later equals, Franklin Roosevelt and George W. Bush—of all the 43 presidents to date.

[Editor’s comment: In order to disavow any suggestion of Southern loyalty and bias, let us point out here that this author was born in Lincoln’s home state of Illinois and was an early hoodwinkee and admirer of the renowned rail splitter.—Ed.]

Lincoln himself stressed how important it was that the races remain separated, lest we experience the integration strife we see today, making his 1863 “Emancipation Proclamation” that of a hypocrite. That whole thing was no more than a move of political expediency and, outside of Washington D.C. and other federal enclaves, had no power of law anyway—

“The orders to the soldiers were to capture him alive, but when the barn was set afire to flush the men out . . . Boston Corbett shot ‘Booth’ through the neck as he emerged from the burning barn.”



1) John Wilkes Booth. 2) His wife, Izola D'Arcy Booth. 3) Ogarita Rosalie Booth, their first child born in 1859. "Rita" caught pneumonia while on the theater circuit and died in Indianapolis in 1891 before her 33rd birthday. Her daughter, the author of *This One Mad Act*, was only 13 at the time. In the last few years of her life, Rita tossed caution to the wind and began to wear the likeness of her father in the brooch shown around her neck and in the inset. 4) The Booths' son (and author's uncle) who grew up and lived his life as "Harry Stevenson," was born in 1870, nearly five years after the assassination. He learned the truth at 19 but was never happy with his legacy.

least of all in the South. The Confederate States of America (C.S.A.) was a separate nation from the U.S.A. Therefore, the proclamation had no more power of law in the Southern states, *formerly* of the United States, than it would have had in China or France.

So that signing was benign and merely a slick political trick of the times (which happens to live on in the deceptive history of today) compared to the shredding of the Constitution Lincoln did whenever it suited him. In addition to deporting to Canada an Ohio senator who was outspoken against the administration and sending Union soldiers to raid and destroy, in an attempt to put out of business, newspaper offices critical of his tactics, even in his home state of Illinois, Lincoln's most outrageous acts—long hushed by the history books—were his forced incarcerations of a hundred Maryland state legislators.

Imagine: you are a lawfully elected Maryland state representative, certainly more secure in your freedom and position than the average citizen in any society, and you get a boisterous knock on your front door in the middle of the night that results in your arrest and incarceration in the hoosegow. That was the picture in 1861. Lincoln's problem was that Maryland was about to vote to secede from the union and become the 12th state of the Confederacy. This would have created the surrounding of the District of Columbia on all sides by the enemy, and Lincoln refused to tolerate such a certain result. Instead, the entire contingent of Maryland state legislators, totally innocent of any crime, was arrested before they could vote and spent the duration of the war in jail.

Scoundrel Lincoln was not nearly as popular as the history books would like for us to believe. In fact, there seems to be far more recorded incidents of cheering rather than weeping at the hearing of the news that Lincoln had been shot down, but

one must read uncensored history to learn of this and other astounding recorded facts.

Twisting of the news in order that it always remains favorable to the current regime is no new thing, and it certainly hasn't changed to this day, as anyone who pays attention to television can attest. Just as Lee Harvey Oswald had to be portrayed as the "lone nut" assassin of JFK a century later, the world had to believe that John Wilkes Booth and a few ragtag followers had pulled off this crime of the century. In both cases the conspiracy reached into not only the highest echelons of power but also into secret groups that had every intention of remaining secret. Hence, the news distortion and the suppression of truth.

What the soldiers reported initially, before being quieted, was that they had been told by Mr. Garrett and one of his sons that there were three men in the barn instead of two and that several of them had heard a horse gallop away just as they were approaching the barn and readying for a confrontation. If this was Booth escaping on horseback, which now seems likely when coupled with his granddaughter's personal knowledge and collected information, then only David Herold was left to know, and he remained close-mouthed for the next two months until he was executed on July 7.

Together with Dr. Mudd, Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin, Ned Spangler received a life sentence at Fort Jefferson, on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas, Florida. O'Laughlin died there in the yellow fever epidemic of 1867, which earned Dr. Mudd a pardon for his medical assistance to all the ailing. Arnold and Spangler were also pardoned by President Andrew Johnson in the spring of 1869, and Spangler made his home with the Mudds in Virginia for the rest of his life.

Lewis Powell (Payne), George Atzerodt and David Herold

all died on the gallows with Mary Surratt at Fort McNair prison on July 7, 1865.

The body of the alleged assassin was taken to the city and buried in a secret unmarked grave beneath the floor of the Washington arsenal, which at one time served as a penitentiary. It would remain there until 1869.

Although this man had “JWB” tattooed on the back of one hand, he had red hair, a scruffy beard and a broken *right* leg, and looked nothing like the strikingly handsome Booth. One soldier who knew Booth was threatened by Lafayette Baker, head of the Secret Service, for voicing his emphatic opinion that the body was not that of John Wilkes Booth. Some accounts had it that the dead man was actually one John W. Boyd, but this information was never confirmed. One theory was that, because Booth actually had his initials tattooed on the back of his hand, Union officers inked the same onto the dead man’s hand to give more credence to the false identification.

John L. Smith was a member of the party that surrounded the Garrett barn. He knew Booth and had seen him only a week before the assassination but waited until 1904 to give an interview to the *New York Herald*, wherein he said Booth looked “well and as fleshy as I had ever seen him. But as he lay there on the [Garrett] porch with his head in my lap, I would not have known him for John Wilkes Booth. His face was very thin; his black hair had turned quite gray [Booth was 26 at the time].

It is obvious from his words that Mr. Smith, nearly 40 years later, still feared the repercussions should he state emphatically what he knew to be true: that the dying body in his arms that night did not belong to his friend, John Wilkes Booth. Such was the lingering fear of the day.

It should be noted that all the descriptions of Booth, when alive, by the members of the Garrett family as well as soldiers and cohorts, including Confederate officers Capt. William Jett, Maj. R. Ruggles and Lt. Bainbridge, who had aided him during his flight through Virginia, dwelled upon his outstanding feature: his hair, of “a glossy, raven-black hue.”

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES . . .

Many people, at both the Garrett farm and the Washington arsenal, knew that the corpse with them was not that of the real presidential assassin John Wilkes Booth. Since we know Booth was definitely at the Garrett farm earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the third man in the barn (as noted by Garrett and his son) who escaped on horseback in the nick of time, could have been nobody else but John Wilkes Booth.

The facts contributed later by both his wife and his slave

boy (who would travel with him overseas for the next five years) fit with this assumed scenario.

Booth’s marriage to Izola D’Arcy in January and the birth of their daughter in October of 1859 were kept secret from the public. This allowed him the freedom to acquire the reputation of being a “ladies’ man” throughout the rest of his career. They maintained a house on a secluded farm in northwest Virginia, where Izola raised the child and Wilkes stayed when he was not on the road with his theater appearances. The author (“Izola II”) never knew the exact location of her grandparents’ farm, never naming a town or a county. She said repeatedly that the house and farm were in the Shenandoah Valley, but as close as she ever came to pinpointing it was when she wrote that it was between Winchester, Virginia and Martinsburg, which are 23 miles apart.

Martinsburg, of course, has been a part of West Virginia since West Virginia seceded from Virginia and officially became a (Unionist) state in 1863 (putting it at odds with its former brothers in Confederate Virginia).

She concludes that John Wilkes Booth escaped on horseback from the burning barn outside of Bowling Green, Virginia in the early morning hours of April 27, with the help of the Knights of the Golden Circle. This would explain why he lingered so long in this very dangerous area after his successful escape from Washington. He was waiting to hook up with his helpers who not only had fresh horses and supplies but money for his much longer ultimate escape

route. Apparently, this help arrived shortly before the Union soldiers got there to apprehend him.

“John W. Boyd,” real or contrived, was undoubtedly the KGC contact who brought Booth money and a fresh horse and somehow located him at the Garrett farm. (Could Garrett have been an active KGC player who managed to get word of Booth’s needs to his cohorts in Mosby’s raiders? This is not unlikely.)

To his home and the trustworthy Izola was the most likely place he went first to further plan and execute the details of his more permanent escape. Few people even knew of the existence of this house, let alone its location. Because of an earlier falling-out with his family, it may have been that he never even told his own mother of the whereabouts of the remote farm and home.

(This might be indicated again in 1869, when the body buried as Booth in the Washington arsenal was ordered released to the family by President Johnson: It was Booth’s mother—and not the legal next of kin, Izola—who took possession and had it buried in the Booth family plot in Baltimore’s Green Mount Cemetery. On the other hand, public mythology had it that Booth was never married anyway, so his mother

“John W. Boyd, ’ either real or contrived, was undoubtedly the Knights of the Golden Circle contact who brought Booth money and a fresh horse and somehow located him at the Garrett farm.”

The Cryptic Confession of a Top Union Spymaster?

Some people say the following decoded writing of Maj. Lafayette Baker, printed in *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, an English military journal dated Feb. 5, 1868, was a confession by Baker of his inside knowledge of the Lincoln assassination. (Baker served as a counterintelligence officer and oversaw security for Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army.) The cryptic message and a possible interpretation of its meaning follow:

I am constantly being followed. They are professionals. I cannot fool them. In new Rome there walked three men: a Judas, a Brutus and a spy. Each planned that he should be king when Abraham should die. One trusted not the other but they went on for that day, waiting for the final moment when, with pistol in his hand, one of the sons of Brutus could sneak behind that cursed man and put a bullet in his brain and lay his clumsiness [sic] corpse away. As the fallen man lay dying, Judas came and paid respects to the one he hated, and when at last he saw him die, he said "Now the ages have him and the nation now have I." But alas, fate would have it [that] Judas slowly fell from grace, and with him went Brutus down to their proper



LAFAYETTE BAKER

place. But lest one is left to wonder what happened to the spy, I can safely tell you this, it was I.

The message was signed Lafayette C. Baker.

And he was not as safe as he thought. Numerous attempts would be made on his life until he was finally poisoned with arsenic in 1868.

When John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln, he was already famous for playing in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and the allusion to Booth is obvious—he's "one of the sons of Brutus." Andrew Johnson—said to be in possession of a letter from Booth before the assassination—is also one of the "sons." Judas was Edwin Stanton—Lincoln's secretary of war.

Baker wrote just before his murder:

There were at least 11 members of Congress involved in the plot, no less than 12 Army officers, three Naval officers and at least 24 civilians, of which one was a governor of a loyal state. Five were bankers of great repute, three were nationally known newspapermen and eleven were industrialists of great repute and wealth. Eighty-five thousand dollars were contributed by the named persons to pay for the deed. Only eight persons knew the details of the plot and the identity of the others. I fear for my life. ♦

would have been the logical one to contact for the reburial. Ironically, Izola I was in San Diego in 1869, sleeping with the real John Wilkes Booth and conceiving their son at about the same time his mother was burying the fake Booth in Baltimore.)

Incidentally, Izola II remembered her great-grandmother Booth in her last years with fondness and was treated very kindly by her.

Therefore, we can know that the Booth side of the family eventually became totally aware of JWB's offspring. Izola II believed her grandfather would have gone there first to tell his wife the details of the trouble she already knew from newspapers that he had gotten himself into, knowing that she was the one person left in the world upon whom he could depend and trust (even Edwin Booth, himself a famous actor, had not only condemned his younger brother's act but had disowned him for a time). He knew that he could explain to her how the

KGC had funded him from the start and how they would protect him in the underground travel that would take him to the West Coast. The well-known "fact" that he was already dead would assist him greatly in his movement across country. He was headed to California, but apparently used a safer, circuitous route through both Canada and Mexico.

Certainly they laid out many plans that final night or two they had together before Booth had to skedaddle quickly. He must have told her that she would have to quietly sell the house and small farm before slipping out to California to meet him, which is what she did. Somehow Booth was able to slip through whatever security might still have been on guard, likely being protected and guided by his KGC supporters en route to an obscure train station. The train ticket would not have been purchased by him but handed to him (in disguise) just before he boarded. It is also unlikely that he traveled alone and unprotected for that long a time.



Long before Lafayette Baker fingered Edwin Stanton as “Judas,” Lincoln’s ambitious secretary of war was already the No. 1 suspect in the eyes of the public. When Booth’s (planted) diary was taken from Boyd’s dead body, it was delivered to Baker, who passed it on to Stanton in the presence of Col. Everton Conger. However, when Stanton finally released it to the prosecuting attorney, 18 pages were missing. It was always believed that Stanton removed pages naming him as a player in the killing. Stanton also had ties to a New York firm that had supplied Booth with large sums of money. Some years later, Abraham Lincoln’s only surviving son, Robert, was visited by a family friend in his home. Robert Lincoln was burning papers in the fireplace. The

friend tried to prevent the destruction of these historic documents, written in President Lincoln’s own hand, but Robert was persistent. He continued tossing sheaves of paper into the fire, saying: “I must. Some of these letters prove that there was a traitor in my father’s cabinet.” Baker’s fears were realized when he was poisoned and died on July 3, 1868. Stanton died Dec. 24, 1869 of what are described as “natural circumstances.” Shown above, left to right: Secretary Stanton, unidentified man on bed, Dennison, Charles Sumner, Surgeon General Barnes with hands on Lincoln, Robert Lincoln with hand on forehead, General Halleck, Hay (short man) and General Meigs with hand raised. Two men seated in chairs with backs to viewer are unidentified.

THE REAL STORY

Long before she wrote her book (published by Colonial Press, Clinton, Mass.) in 1937, “Izola II” suspected that her grandfather’s source of funds and assistance was the KGC. Her grandmother had told her that he was “the tool of others,” and she often picked up inklings of the same from the writings of several other people.

Izola II’s earliest memory of the conflict within the family regarding her grandfather went back to the living room of her grandmother’s home in Boston when she was only four or five. Her grandmother Booth was visited for a few days by her own elderly Aunt Fanny, who had raised Izola I, and the two were very close—except on the subject of John Wilkes Booth. Aunt Fanny had been against the marriage from the start and now hated Booth more in “death” than she ever had when she knew him. A large portrait of Booth hung over the couch in the living room, and Aunt Fanny was knitting.

“The portrait of such a man should be destroyed or concealed forever,” she said firmly, “instead of being shamelessly hung there for all the world to see.”

Izola laughed at the folly of her aunt’s words, “for all the

world to see,” when there wasn’t a living soul but her own family around her home for miles. She declared that she was the head of this household and if she wanted to hang the portrait of the one man she had ever loved in this lifetime, it was nobody else’s business.

It was then that Izola II realized that the handsome man on the wall that they were talking about, and whom she had always wondered about, was her grandfather.

She continued to pick up tidbits of information through her early years without realizing the seriousness of the situation. In third grade in a Boston elementary school in 1886, she volunteered when the teacher asked who in the class had relatives killed in the Civil War on either side. Izola raised her hand and proudly told of her grandfather who was a hero for the Southern cause and was killed in battle but she didn’t know which one. Then she said, “. . . and his name was John Wilkes Booth.”

Her teacher was aghast but quickly recovered enough to realize that rather than risk embarrassing the child in front of the others, she asked that Izola II remain for a few minutes after school. Even then she did not divulge the truth about her

grandfather's "heroism," believing that her family would tell her when she was older, but only warned her that she must not ever mention again what she had told the class. Nearly a half-century later, Izola wrote that it was the kindest thing that her teacher could have done at the time—a time when passions were still hot, and an eight-year-old did not need that stigma attached to her while she was growing up.

There was also the question of her teenage Uncle Harry, who was only eight years older than she and lived with them, but she would not fully resolve that question until just before his death in 1918 at age 48.

But Harry was the greatest evidence that anyone could imagine to prove Booth had not died in 1865. His mother, Izola I, quietly sold the homestead and left Virginia in 1867, taking the seven-year-old Rita (Ogarita Rosalie, almost 8, Izola II's mother-to-be) to San Diego, California. There she reunited with her husband, John Wilkes Booth, and remained with him for more than two years. Many witnesses remembered them there from this era, but for reasons unknown Izola returned to the East Coast in 1869, this time arriving with 10-year-old Rita and pregnant with a son, Harry.

Rita also related to her daughter later of the last time she remembered seeing her father before he left in the night from their Shenandoah Valley home in 1865 with his Negro slave aide, Henry. She had been awakened from a sleep by her black "mammy" in what seemed to be the dead of night, and wrapped hastily in a shawl. She thought there must be danger again from U.S. Army forces in the neighborhood for she had often been taken like this and carried into her mother's room, while the household waited fearfully. But this time she was taken downstairs to the front veranda where she saw her mother standing, leaning over the railing to talk to someone on horseback. Then she remembered her nurse lifting her over the rail to the arms of her father, who held her while he spoke in low tones to her mother.

"With him, she told me," said the author, "and also on horseback, was Aunt Sarah's son, Henry, the young Negro who had been Booth's dresser (for the stage) in Richmond in 1859. My mother said that she wondered why both women were weeping and embracing their loved ones in farewell, and why the two men rode away into the night. She told me she always associated this scene with the silky mane of the horse, as she had sat there before Booth in the saddle, listening to voices and broken words, and trying to braid the long wavy hair of the horse's mane. Even at five-and-a-half years old she knew something serious was happening. Her father had often come and gone like this by night. But why, she thought, was this time so strangely different? She knew partly the reason

when her father never came again to see them. Later she was told that her father had been killed on "special duty" for the Confederacy.

"Harry had told me that he, too, had heard the story from his sister's lips, and even from his mother's, but to the effect that Booth had been hidden away in his home for several days, at the time of his escape. This could only have happened after he left the Garrett Farm, because there would have been no time for him to have done it during the period of his escape that has been so fully accounted for."

HARRY'S CONFESSION

Harry was 48, living in New York City, and not in good health during this last year of his life. True to the Booth heritage (he was 6'2," dark haired, slender and handsome as his father), he loved the limelight and had a wonderful singing voice. But Harry was tormented, and his niece, the author, knew why.

Izola II had been intrigued by the story of her grandfather ever since the incident with her third grade teacher, and, after she was grown, made it her life's mission to learn the truth. The whispers, the abrupt cutoff of conversations when she would enter the room during her childhood, and the suppression of information after her grandmother and mother had passed on had only served to encourage her. She had

first broached the subject with Harry Jr. in 1902 but didn't get very far at the time. She would have been 24 that year, "blessed or cursed with incurable curiosity," she said; and Harry 32.

"Let the dead past bury its dead, my dear," her uncle told her. "You will do no good by dragging out family skeletons or in trying to find out a secret that those we love have thought best to conceal. The lives of our mothers were shadowed by tragedy. Try to escape from it as I do, by forgetting it. We have a new generation to consider in our children."

Izola II was unable to do that and continued to gather information over the years from others.

Finally, literally on his deathbed with but 24 hours left, Harry Stevenson told Izola II that the man who posed as his father all the years of his youth, Harry Sr., had told him the whole story after he was grown—that his real father was John Wilkes Booth.

"You are not my son, Harry. You are Ogarita's own brother," Harry Sr. told him when he was 19. The young man was not surprised to hear it. The message arrived as more of a confirmation than a revelation. He had suspected for a long time. His first sensation was one of deep thankfulness, he told his niece, because he loved his sister more deeply than anyone in the world. He listened while the older man told him in the

"And also on horseback was Henry, the young Negro who had been Booth's [stage] dresser in 1859. She wondered why both women were weeping and embracing their loved ones in farewell."

The Mystery of Booth's Mummy . . .

On January 13, 1903 a little-known man in Enid, Oklahoma, one "David E. George," as he was called, died. In his dying statement, "George" confessed to his landlady that he was in fact John Wilkes Booth. The remains of David E. George's body were embalmed or "mummified" and kept on display at the undertaker's for many months. Memphis lawyer Finis L. Bates bought the mummy and began presenting it at circus sideshows. The mummy acquired a reputation for bad luck. Nearly every showman who exhibited the mummy was ruined financially. In 1902 eight people were killed in the wreck of a circus train the mummy was traveling on. Bill Evans, a well-heeled carnival king who bought the "exhibit" in later years, was financially ruined by continual strokes of bad luck after buying it. Bates, the original owner, wrote a book in 1908 entitled *The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth*, which naturally attempted to prove the mummy was Booth. He suffered much ridicule because of his tome and died in 1923, penniless. William G. Shepherd, in an article published in *Harper's Magazine*, November 1924, "Shattering the Myths of John Wilkes Booth," stated that after months spent in investigations, Mr. Bates' claims were found to be without merit. In addition to the blue eyes of David George (Booth's were famously black) as attested to by his acquaintances, Shepherd compared the known handwriting of the two men and proved conclusively that it was not of the same hand. In 1869, when the body from Garrett's barn was finally turned over to the Booth family, they had the family dentist examine the remains to make absolutely certain the body was really John Wilkes. Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes, represented that the family dentist identified the body as that of John Wilkes by a close examination of the teeth. The dental work, he said, corresponded. Edwin and the rest of the family seemed satisfied that the body was none other than John Wilkes. However, this Booth family cooperation may have been contrived. JWB's Negro aide later told of Booth's mother and Edwin meeting with JWB on the streets of London in the 1870s.



same calm, detached manner how it had been deemed expedient for his mother to travel out to California secretly, to meet her husband there in the late 1860s, and Harry learned the truth of the circumstances of his birth. Harry Sr. said he had given her the security of his own name, and personal services in making the long, overland journey and had delivered her safely into the care of Booth, when they met him in San Diego in 1868. (Izola later saw this information confirmed in her grandmother's family Bible, where she had recorded the date of Harry's birth and her imaginary marriage to Harry Sr. to legitimize it.)

Afterward, the elder Stevenson said that he traveled north to Sacramento and San Francisco, where he had friends living who had been KGC members in the South and had settled out west after the war. He was an excellent poker player and often did it for a living.

After two years had elapsed, he accompanied her back to Baltimore. When she and Rita arrived in San Francisco, Booth was not with her, and he had no knowledge of where she had spent the intervening months or what had become of Booth, except that she told him that he was in Asia. He imagined that she had gone there with him but didn't ask. He did not want to possess any knowledge that might implicate and incriminate her in the future. All of the KGC members knew that each was told

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only what was necessary to know, and Harry Sr. had already done his part. He was no longer in the "need to know" category.

BOOTH'S NEGRO CONFIDANT

During the war, Grandmother Izola, Booth's wife, enjoyed the household services of a Negro maid, affectionately known as "Aunt Sarah." Sarah had a son named Henry who became Booth's traveling mate on suspected spying missions in the North, dresser for the stage and confidant. It was Henry who left the Shenandoah Valley home with Booth around the first of May 1865, never to see his mother again. He did surface in New York City in the mid-1870s and confided some secrets of his long-ago past with at least one other close friend of Booth's from the Richmond theater days. Jimmy Wells had always suspected that Booth had escaped but kept quiet for 10 years.

When he ran into Henry while walking up Broadway, he recognized him at once because Henry had been his attendant also in the Richmond theater. Wells managed to draw him into the lobby of a nearby hotel and press him for some delicate details known to very few, even though Henry tried to evade questioning.

Henry reluctantly admitted that he had returned from the Orient in 1871 and that he had been there with John Wilkes. When asked what he was doing now, Henry replied, "I's been wif Marse Edwin ever since Marse John got away."

Wells persisted until he could obtain an address in Bombay for Booth, then corresponded back and forth with the "dead" man for some time. The signature on the bottom of each letter—"John Wilkes"—examined by others later, was identical

BOOTH LETTER

Continued from page 3

shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends and every thing to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than \$20,000 a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South has never bestowed upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar.

To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters, whom I love so dearly (although they so widely differ with me in opinion), seems insane; but God is my judge. I love justice more (Heaven pardon me if wrong), more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battlefield; but oh! my countrymen, could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war as I have seen them (in every State, save Virginia), I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice (even should it possess no seasoning of mercy), and that he would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider.

Alas! poor country, is she to meet her threatened doom? Four years ago, I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was.

Oh! my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor! How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since, and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds, of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown. Oh! how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor.

But no, day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand today) is for the South alone. Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make for her a prisoner of this man, to whom she owes so much of misery.

If success attend me, I go penniless to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North have so long derided and that it is impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety, and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that same "ditch" by her side. A Confederate doing duty upon his own responsibility. ♦

—J. WILKES BOOTH

to those manuscript parts of old plays signed by Booth, which Wells still possessed. Of course, Wells had no doubt all along as to whom he had been writing to and from whom he was receiving mail, because of the content of each letter.

The author found Wells's son in Seattle in 1932 and exchanged letters. Mr. Wells wrote, "I heard my father say many times when I was a boy, 'I know John Wilkes Booth was never captured.'"

Many years after the fact, Booth's boyhood friend and fellow actor, John Matthews described bumping into "Johnny," as he always called him, on Pennsylvania Avenue near 13th Street on the late afternoon of April 14, 1865. Matthews remembered with startling detail not only his final meeting and conversation with his old friend but the words of the letter Booth handed him for delivery to John Coyle of the *National Intelligencer* newspaper. Matthews never delivered the envelope but instead, upon learning what Booth had done later the same night, opened it, read it, contemplated the contents and its likely incriminating effect on himself and promptly burned it his fireplace. His recall of the words, however, was remarkable, undoubtedly aided by years of memorizing theater lines.

It was not published until December 3, 1881, when all danger from being charged with complicity had passed. Izola II discovered the long, detailed statement in a newspaper clipping in one of her grandmother's old scrapbooks. Afterward, she looked up the elderly Matthews while in New York in 1902. When Matthews learned that the visitor in his parlor was Rita's daughter, he dropped what he was doing and welcomed her with open arms. They spent the balance of the afternoon together sharing and reminiscing, and his recall was still keen. He told her again many of the same details that he had told the newspaper man in 1865.

On the last page of her 1937 book, Izola Forrester, at age 59, synopsised her lifetime of research with this paragraph:

The strongest proof of the escape, to me, is Booth's son, Harry. No one who had ever known him could question the relationship. Even strangers, all during his life, observed the resemblance and commented on it, to his everlasting embarrassment and unhappiness. He was not proud of the fact that he was Booth's son. He dreaded being connected or involved with the tragic circumstances around the assassination, just as my mother did. Grandmother stood apart from it when I knew her. It was as if she had outlived its personal horror and only lived the romance of her youth in her memories of Booth. But to my mother and her brother it was an ever-present secret menace, that people might find out they were the children of the assassin of Lincoln. Whether, so far as she was concerned, this feeling died away, I cannot say, but during the last three years of her life, she wore his picture openly in the medallion brooch at her throat. ♦