

THE ENID BOOTH LEGEND

1948  
1948

By

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Bachelor of Arts

Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College

Goodwell, Oklahoma

1948

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
1953

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THE ENID BOOTH LEGEND

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Miss Elizabeth Thomas, acting Reference Librarian of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, and her entire staff for their excellent job of locating and securing necessary materials. To Dr. George E. Lewis and Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken go sincere thanks for their able advice and for the critical reading of this thesis. Finally, to Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer, who has been a constant source of encouragement and guidance in his supervision of this work, a debt of appreciation is gratefully acknowledged.

Helen Jo Banks

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## INTRODUCTION

John Wilkes Booth, the central character of the Enid Booth legend, assassinated President Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D. C., on the night of April 14, 1865.<sup>1</sup> Booth, a talented actor well known in the capital city and throughout the South, made his way on horseback that evening to Ford's Theater, where Laura Keane was starring in "Our American Cousin." This performance attracted a full house, for the Chief Executive and Mrs. Lincoln were attending.

At the stage door Booth called Edward Spangler, a scene-shifter, to hold his horse. He then went downstairs under the stage and entered the theater from the front door, where he casually visited with the doorkeeper, whom he knew well. Booth then went directly to the President's box.<sup>2</sup> There

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<sup>1</sup>Booth and a group of conspirators led by him had earlier planned to abduct Lincoln. But now that the government of the Confederate States had collapsed, Booth decided on the simultaneous wholesale assassination of important officials of the United States government. George E. Atzerodt was deputed by Booth to murder Vice-President Andrew Johnson in his room at the Kirkwood Hotel; Lewis Payne, guided by David E. Herold, was to kill Secretary of State William H. Seward in his home; Booth was to kill both Lincoln and General U. S. Grant at Ford's Theater. Grant, however, left Washington to visit his daughter immediately preceding the performance. Atzerodt made no attempt to dispose of Johnson; Payne, however, severely wounded Seward with a knife as he lay ill in his home. Of the conspirators, only Booth succeeded in his mission.

<sup>2</sup>The Washington Chief of Police had assigned John Parker to guard the President's box on the night of the assassination. The next day Parker confessed to another guard that he had gone to the front gallery to see the play. See Otto Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), 11-21. Hereafter cited as Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? See also Philip Van Doren Stern, The Man Who Killed Lincoln: The Story of John Wilkes Booth and His Part in the Assassination (New York: Random House, 1939), 109. Hereafter cited as Stern, The Man Who Killed Lincoln.

was some disagreement as to Booth's actions and what he said, but Booth's diary gives this account: "I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends; was stopped but pushed on . . . I shouted 'Sic Semp' before I fired. In jumping I broke my leg."<sup>3</sup>

The entire action of Booth was visible to Laura Keane, the star, and William J. Ferguson, a substitute player, both of whom were off stage waiting to enter. Later Ferguson gave this account:

From the moment he fired the death-dealing shot until he had leaped to the back of his horse in the alley behind the theatre, Booth was never out of my sight . . . As Booth vaulted over the rail one of his spurs caught in the folds of the American flag . . . [He] whirled around in the air and fell heavily on his right knee . . . As soon as he had fired the shot, Booth appeared intent only in making his escape.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the audience thought that Booth's appearance and leap were something new that had been added to the play. After they realized what had happened, most of them were stunned or hysterical. Major A. C. Richards, Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, was present and wanted to pursue the assassin immediately. Because of government red tape, however, his request for horses to mount his men was not granted until the next day.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Diary of John Wilkes Booth, as quoted in Osborn H. Oldroyd, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Flight, Pursuit, Capture, and Punishment of the Conspirators (Washington: O. H. Oldroyd, 1901), 93-94. Hereafter cited as Oldroyd, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

<sup>4</sup>W. J. Ferguson, "I Saw Lincoln Shot!," American Magazine, XC (August, 1920), 15. It is highly doubtful that Ferguson noticed that Booth hurt his leg because it was not known for several days that he was injured and then it was thought that his horse had thrown him. It is also quite definite that it was Booth's left leg that was injured and not his right leg. Ferguson probably confused the facts because of what he had read between the time of the incident and the time he wrote his article.

<sup>5</sup>Oldroyd, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 66.

Meanwhile, Booth rode through the city and across the Navy Yard Bridge into Maryland where he was joined by David E. Herold, a fellow conspirator.<sup>6</sup> They rode some "thirty-six miles that night with the bone of my [Booth's] leg tearing the flesh at every jump."<sup>7</sup> Apparently they had intended to ride straight south of Washington until they reached Richmond, but because of Booth's injury they rode about eight miles out of their way to get Doctor Samuel Mudd, a Confederate sympathizer living southeast of Washington, to relieve Booth's pain.

They arrived at Mudd's home early on the morning following the assassination. There the boot was cut from Booth's left leg, a temporary splint applied, and a crude crutch prepared; the assassin told Mudd he had injured his leg when falling from a horse.<sup>8</sup> While at Mudd's home Booth undoubtedly shaved off his mustache. Mudd, upon his arrest on April 22, made this revelation:

I had noticed that the wounded man had whiskers and a moustache when he came into the house. After dinner I went to see the patient and although he kept his face partly turned away from me, I noticed that he had lost his moustache but still retained his whiskers. . . .<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For a complete account of the encounter between Booth and Herold and the keeper of the bridge, see Francis Wilson, John Wilkes Booth: Fact and Fiction of Lincoln's Assassination (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), 120-121. Hereafter cited as Wilson, John Wilkes Booth. Immediately after the assassination Stanton issued separate orders to each guard unit closing all exits from Washington with the exception of the road which Booth traveled. There was no apparent reason for this as this road to the South was the most logical one for Booth to travel. See Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? 91-96.

<sup>7</sup>Diary of John Wilkes Booth, as quoted in Oldroyd, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 93-94.

<sup>8</sup>George Sands Bryan, The Great American Myth (New York: Garrick and Evans, 1940), 249. Hereafter cited as Bryan, The Great American Myth.

<sup>9</sup>Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, 257.

Booth and Herold stayed at the Mudd home until night came; then they paid the doctor twenty-five dollars for his services and left.

Despite their knowledge of the roads, Booth and Herold lost their way in the marshes after they left the Mudd home. They finally met a Negro who directed them to the home of Samuel Cox, a notorious secessionist. Cox fed them and turned them over to his brother-in-law, Thomas A. Jones.<sup>10</sup> For six days and nights while they were waiting to cross the Potomac River they were hid in a thicket not far from the Cox residence and were taken care of by Jones, who brought them food, newspapers and such information as he could.<sup>11</sup>

When Jones felt that the time was propitious to cross the Potomac into Virginia he provided Booth and Herold with a boat and started them on their way; but they rowed all night and got nowhere. After spending the following day in a swamp, they started out the next night and finally reached the Virginia shore. Here they were aided by a woman referred to as Mrs. Quesenberry, who made arrangements for a neighbor, William Bryan, to take them to a doctor. On the afternoon of the eighth day following the assassination between five and six o'clock, Booth, Herold and Bryan arrived at the home of Dr. Richard Stuart. But Stuart, who had just returned from imprisonment for assisting Confederates, refused to take them in. He did, however, direct them to the cabin of a Negro, William Lucas, where they spent the night.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson, John Wilkes Booth, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Oldroyd, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 103-104.

<sup>12</sup> V. L. Mason, "Four Lincoln Conspiracies, Including New Particulars of the Flight and Capture of the Assassin," The Century Magazine, LI (April, 1896), 908-909. Hereafter cited as Mason, "Four Lincoln Conspiracies, Including New Particulars of the Flight and Capture of the Assassin," The Century Magazine, LI.



The next morning Lucas drove Booth and Herold to Port Conway, Virginia. The ferryman, William Rollins, who was fishing on the opposite bank of the river, would not ferry them across the Rappahannock because there were only two of them.<sup>13</sup> While there, three Confederate soldiers returning home rode up. They were Captain William Jett, Lieutenant A. R. Bainbridge and Major M. B. Ruggles. They helped Booth and Herold to cross the Rappahannock and assisted them to Port Royal, Virginia.<sup>14</sup> Jett then accompanied Booth and Herold to the farm home of Richard H. Garrett, an acquaintance of his. Explaining that Booth was a wounded Confederate, he left him there. Herold, who desired to buy a new pair of shoes, went with Jett to Bowling Green and returned alone to the Garrett farm the next day. That same afternoon the Garretts, very much disturbed by the passing of a Federal cavalry unit, requested Booth and Herold to leave. They left, but returned that night and asked for shelter. When Booth refused to sleep upstairs, he was directed, along with Herold, to a tobacco warehouse used for storing furniture. John Garrett, afraid that Booth would steal his horse (which Booth had openly admired), slept in an adjoining corn crib with his brother Richard.<sup>15</sup>

It was here that Herold was captured and Booth was killed. The three Federal officers in charge of the pursuit, Lieutenant E. P. Doherty (Regular Army), Lieutenant E. J. Conger (Secret Service), and Lieutenant Luther B. Baker (Secret Service), gave conflicting testimony and thereby

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<sup>13</sup>Wilson, John Wilkes Booth, 169.

<sup>14</sup>M. B. Ruggles and E. P. Doherty, "Pursuit and Death of John Wilkes Booth," The Century Magazine, XXXIX (January, 1890), 443. Hereafter cited as Ruggles and Doherty, "Pursuit and Death of John Wilkes Booth," The Century Magazine, XXXIX.

<sup>15</sup>Wilson, John Wilkes Booth, 170-171.

confused the details.<sup>16</sup> It is known, however, that Baker questioned the ferryman at Port Conway who recognized a portrait of Herold and a picture of Booth as the two people whom he had refused transportation. He told Baker of their meeting with three Confederate soldiers, one of whom he knew to be Captain William Jett. He also knew that Jett had a sweetheart at Bowling Green and could probably be found there. When Baker confronted Jett with this information he consented to lead them to Booth; as a safety measure, however, Jett was placed under arrest.<sup>17</sup>

The cavalry troop surrounded the barn. According to the official statement made by Doherty, Booth refused to surrender but stated that a man named Herold was with him who wanted out.<sup>18</sup> After Herold surrendered, the barn was fired. At this juncture Sargent Boston Corbett, Company L, Sixteenth New York Cavalry, shot Booth in the neck.<sup>19</sup> An immediate examination indicated that Booth was near death. He was in intense pain and was partially paralyzed. Although he fainted frequently, he constantly appealed for someone to kill him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Baker's and Conger's testimony was recorded in House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), 324, 333. Doherty's statement was recorded in The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Ser. 1, Vol. XLVI, Pt. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), 1317-1322. Hereafter cited as Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. XLVI, Pt. 1.

<sup>17</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 261.

<sup>18</sup>Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. XLVI, Pt. 1, p. 1320.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 1321.

<sup>20</sup>Otto Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940), 56. Hereafter cited as Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death.

## CHAPTER I

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE BOOTH BODY

Immediately after Booth was shot, his body was carried from the burning barn to the veranda of the Garrett house where Herold and Jett were held under arrest. Herold, the one individual who should have known definitely whether or not it was Booth in the Garrett barn, provided no definite proof as to the identity of his companion. Baker, in his testimony before the committee of investigation concerning the impeachment of President Johnson, testified that as Herold decided to surrender he said: "Let me out, quick; I do not know anything about this man, he is a desperate character, and is going to shoot me."<sup>1</sup> Baker was asked if he had any further conversation with Herold at the time of Booth's death. He replied, "No Sir," . . . "except he [Herold] said that he knew nothing of Booth except that he had fallen in with him as a traveling companion."<sup>2</sup> The day after his capture, Herold supposedly made a voluntary statement to the effect that his companion was Booth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress, 480.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Herold was supposed to have made this statement before John A. Bingham, the special judge advocate who with Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt was in charge of the conspiracy trial. This statement was never published nor was Herold ever interviewed or given a chance to speak in court. See Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death, 57-58.

Doherty, however, related the following conversation between himself and Herold:

Said he [Herold] to me, 'Who is that who has been shot in the barn?'

'Why,' said I, 'You know well who it is.'

Said he, 'No, I do not; he told me his name was Boyd.'

Said I, 'It is Booth, and you know it.'

Said he, 'No, I did not know it; I did not know it was Booth.'<sup>4</sup>

This conversation was not peculiar in view of the fact that during all the talk between the soldiers and Booth (while he was in the barn) "there were no names mentioned at all."<sup>5</sup> Baker did call him Booth after his removal from the burning barn, however, and later testified to this incident:

I washed the wound, and washed his [Booth's] face. He opened his eyes and seemed to realize what was going on. The first words he uttered were, 'Kill me, oh kill me.' I said, 'No, Booth.' When I said 'Booth' he seemed surprised, opened his eyes, and looked about. It had begun to be daylight then. The sun was rising. I said, 'No, Booth we do not wish to kill you.' He repeated the request that I should kill him.<sup>6</sup>

Although Baker's testimony at this point appeared to doubt the identification of Booth, later testimony by him indicated he did consider the man killed in the barn to be Booth. The man in the barn was lame and possessed "his likeness and identified him by it. His manner was distinctive; from the tone of his voice, and his theatrical style every word seemed to be studied."<sup>7</sup> Young Richard B. Garrett, later a distinguished clergyman, said similarly,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>5</sup>House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress, 480.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 482.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 488.

His [Booth's] remains were most thoroughly identified from a photograph and the printed description that was possessed by the soldiers . . . I was there and present at the identification . . . There was the tattoo mark of his initials on his arm, and the comparison with the picture was perfect. God never made two men as exactly alike as that dead man and the one whose photograph there could be no doubt was Booth's. Point by point the printed description held in the detective's hand was followed out. Height, color of hair and eyes, every scar and mark tallied exactly.<sup>8</sup>

At no time in the official statements concerning the events at Garrett's farm was mention made of the wearing apparel of Booth. Later Bainbridge described Booth's clothing (at their meeting on the Rappahannock River prior to going to the Garrett home) as

a dark suit of clothes that looked seamed and ravelly, as if from rough contact with thorny undergrowth. On his head was a seedy looking hat, which he kept well pulled down over his forehead. . . [He wore] a cavalry boot on his right foot. . . .<sup>9</sup>

The statement of one of the Garrett brothers as published in a Baltimore newspaper described the arrival of Booth, Herold and Jett at the Garrett farm:

Two of them wore uniforms of Confederate soldiers, while the third was dressed in the garb of a civilian. . . . Mr. Boyd [Booth had given his name as Boyd] asked one of my brothers if he would trade his uniform for the civilian dress worn by him. . . . My brother declined.<sup>10</sup>

The identification of Booth at the Garrett home consisted of the statements made by Herold, Baker, Doherty and Richard B. Garrett concerning the assassin's actions; the description by Bainbridge and one of the Garrett brothers of the man who came to the Garrett farm; and the articles

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Bryan, The Great American Myth, 268-269. This statement is from an interview at Norfolk, Virginia, in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library.

<sup>9</sup>Bainbridge cited in Ruggles and Doherty, "Pursuit and Death of John Wilkes Booth," The Century Magazine, XXXIX, 444.

<sup>10</sup>H. G. Howard, Civil War Echoes (Washington: Howard Publishing Company, 1907), 96.

taken from his pockets which were officially listed and described as

a pocket compass, soiled handkerchief, a meerschaum pipe, some tobacco, and a bunch of matches; a bill of exchange in triplicate for £ 6l 12s. 10d., drawn on the Montreal branch of the Ontario Bank; a crystal pin, a pocket knife, greenbacks, keys, a little Catholic medal, and a leather bound memorandum book diary.<sup>11</sup>

Booth lived about two hours after he was shot through the neck. In the meantime a doctor had been procured to stay with him. The assassin's body was sewed up in a blanket and placed in a wagon and sent to Port Royal.<sup>12</sup> As there were not enough horses for the entire group to move at a comfortable pace, Baker and his party moved ahead with the Booth body and the prisoner Jett. Doherty moved at a slower rate with the two Garrett Brothers and Herold. When Doherty reached Belle Plain, Virginia, however, Baker had not yet arrived. A detachment was sent in search of the missing party; when they were located Jett had escaped. "After a short delay the body of the assassin, Booth, was placed on board the steamer, John S. Ide, and . . . they proceeded to Washington."<sup>13</sup>

When Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton received news of the death of Booth, he instructed Colonel L. C. Baker to take a boat to Alexandria and take charge of the body. On April 27 at 1:45 a. m. the Booth body was placed on board the Montauk in charge of a Marine guard. Booth's body was still in the blanket which had been sewed about it at the Garrett farm.<sup>14</sup> During the afternoon of April 27 a kind of military coroner's jury had been assembled and under oath a number of these persons stated unequivocally

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<sup>11</sup> House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress, 487.

<sup>12</sup> Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. XLVI, Pt. 1, p. 1319.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 1322.

<sup>14</sup> L. C. Baker, History of the United States Secret Service (Philadelphia: L. C. Baker, 1867), 541. Hereafter cited as Baker, History of the United States Secret Service.

their recognition of the body as that of Booth.<sup>15</sup> Charles Dawson, head clerk at the National Hotel where Booth had lived at frequent intervals, stated:

I distinctly recognize it as the body of J. Wilkes Booth— first, from general appearance; next from India-ink letters 'J. W. B.' on his wrist, which I have very frequently noticed; then by a scar on the neck. I also recognize the vest as that of J. Wilkes Booth.<sup>16</sup>

When Dawson was asked on which hand or wrist the initials were located he replied that they were on the left wrist. Seaton Munroe, a prominent Washington attorney at law who knew Booth socially, expressed this opinion: "I am confident that it is the dead body of J. Wilkes Booth . . . I recognize it only from its general appearance in which I do not think I can be mistaken."<sup>17</sup>

Charles M. Collins, the captain's clerk and signal officer on the Montauk, had known Booth by sight for about six years and personally for about six weeks. He said: "I have not the least doubt that it is the body of J. Wilkes Booth. I recognized it at two o'clock this morning when it was brought on board."<sup>18</sup> William W. Crowninshield, Acting Master in the Navy, who had known Booth for about a month and a half and felt that he was familiar with his features, stated: "I feel satisfied that it is the body of J. Wilkes Booth . . . I cannot be mistaken."<sup>19</sup>

Probably the most important identification was that made by Dr. John F. May, the surgeon who had removed the tumor from Booth's neck and treated

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 542.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Bryan, The Great American Myth, 275. This statement is from the original depositions in the archives of the Judge Advocate General.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

it after this surgery. He described the scar to the Surgeon General of the Army before seeing the body and the description "corresponded exactly."<sup>20</sup> When asked if he recognized the body from its general appearance, he replied:

I do recognize it, though it is very much altered since I saw Booth. It looks to me much older, and in appearance much more freckled than he was. I do not recollect that he was at all freckled. I have no doubt it is his body. I recognize the features. When he came to my office, he had no beard excepting a moustache. . . . From the scar in connection with recognition of the features, which though changed and altered still have the same appearance, I think I cannot be mistaken. I recognize the likeness. I have no doubt that it is the person from whom I took the tumor, and that it is the body of J. Wilkes Booth.<sup>21</sup>

Surgeon General J. K. Barnes, who was present at the identification of the body, when asked about the location of the scar, stated: "The scar on the left side of the neck was occasioned by an operation performed by Dr. May . . . . It was three inches below the ear, upon the large muscle of the neck."<sup>22</sup> The New York Times carried the following item relative to Barnes and Booth's remains:

Surgeon General Barnes says the ball did not enter the brain. The body, when he examined it this afternoon, was not in a rapid state of decomposition, but was considerably bruised by jolting about in the cart. It is placed in charge of Col. Baker, in the attire in which he died with instructions not to allow anyone to approach it, nor to take from it any part of apparel, or thing for exhibition hereafter. . . .<sup>23</sup>

For no apparent reason Barnes cut from Booth's neck about two inches of the spinal column through which the ball had passed; this piece of bone, which is now on exhibition in the Government Medical Museum in Washington,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 277.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 277-278.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 278.

<sup>23</sup>New York Times, April 28, 1865.



is the only portion of the assassin's body above ground. This is the only mutilation of the Booth body that ever occurred, although many conflicting stories appeared.<sup>24</sup>

The government now considered the identification of the Booth body complete. Immediately after the identification the Secretary of War gave orders for the disposition of the body. Colonel L. C. Baker and Lieutenant L. B. Baker took the body from the Montauk to the Old Penitentiary adjoining the arsenal grounds in Washington, D. C.

The ordinance department had filled the ground-floor cells with fixed ammunition—one of the largest of these cells was selected as the burial place of Booth—the ammunition was removed, a large flat stone lifted from its place, and a rude grave dug; the body was dropped in, the grave filled up, the stone replaced, and there rests to this hour [1867] all that remained of John Wilkes Booth.<sup>25</sup>

This was confirmed by Lieutenant L. B. Baker before the Impeachment Investigation Committee in 1867.<sup>26</sup>

As soon as public resentment died down, the Booth family applied for permission to remove John Wilkes' body to the family plot in Baltimore, Maryland. On September 11, 1867 Edwin Booth wrote a letter to General Grant asking for the body:

Having once received a promise from Mr. Stanton that the family of John Wilkes Booth should be permitted to obtain the body when sufficient time had elapsed, I yielded to the entreaties of my mother and applied for it to the Secretary of War— I fear too soon, for the letter went unheeded — if indeed, it ever reached him. . . .<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Baker, History of the United States Secret Service, 703.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress, 486.

<sup>27</sup>There is no record of this letter in government papers. The original is in a private collection. This was taken from a photostatic copy in the article by H. H. Kohlsaat, "Booth's Letter to Grant," Saturday Evening Post, CXCVI (February 9, 1924), 20, 56.

On February 10, 1869 Edwin made a similar request to President Johnson. John Weaver, Sexton of Christ Church, Baltimore, delivered this note and asked that the body be released to him. On February 15 President Johnson gave the Secretary of War an order directing him to release Booth's body to Weaver. That afternoon Booth's body was returned to his family.<sup>28</sup>

Edwin, in trying to protect his family from further ridicule, tried to keep the exhumation and removal secret; consequently, the identification was bungled. There are no records of any of the Booth family identifying the body, although they were close to the scene. There were friends there who felt the body was that of John Wilkes but whatever proof they found was not released to the curious public. Briefly, it was announced that John Wilkes' dentist had identified the body by certain fillings in his teeth, but who the dentist was remained a secret. Nothing systematic was set down for the citizenry's eye.<sup>29</sup> The public received the following information on February 17, 1869:

The remains of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, were removed from Washington on Monday . . . The body or rather skeleton was transferred to a splendid metallic coffin . . . Little of the remains were left, the flesh having all disappeared leaving naught but a mass of blackened bones. Upon one foot was an old Army shoe, and on the other a boot cut open at the top. This covered the left foot, the leg having been broken in his leap. . . . The remainder of his dress consisted of a rough brown coat, black pants and vest . . . His hair was curly and glossy black.<sup>30</sup>

With the removal of Booth's body, the government considered the John Wilkes Booth incident complete and ended.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>29</sup>Lloyd Lewis, Myths After Lincoln (New York: The Press of the Readers Club, 1941), 238. Hereafter cited as Lewis, Myths After Lincoln.

<sup>30</sup>New York Times, February 17, 1869.

CHAPTER II  
THE DOUBTFUL PUBLIC

Booth's body had scarcely reached Washington in late April, 1865 when rumors became current that the corpse was not that of Booth. There would have been fewer rumors and legends if the records of the War Department concerning the capture and burial of Booth had not been prepared in secrecy and if the facts had not been shrouded in wartime mystery. Since the facts were kept secret, the only information that the public received at that time was the conflicting statements of Doherty, Baker, Conger and other members of the pursuing party. Later, as the facts were gradually made public, key witnesses to the identification expressed doubt as to the identity of the corpse.

That the identification of the body was unsatisfactory is an understatement. There were no reasons sufficient to account for the blunders concerning the identification. Many people in Washington knew Booth well. None of these, including his stage associates and his family, were asked to identify the body. When it became known that Booth's body was on board the Montauk, "thousands of persons visited the [Navy] yard . . . in the hope of getting a glimpse of the murderer's remains, but none were allowed to enter."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps fear that Booth would prove to be a southern martyr prevented the disclosure of the body to the public; or possibly the body's appearance had changed to such an extent that recognition of

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times, April 28, 1865.

his features was questionable. If this were so, government officials probably felt it would be more difficult to prove the body to be that of Booth.

Serious errors were made in the government's identification of Booth: (1) there was no coroner's jury worth the name, no close friends or relatives; (2) the identification was not made public; (3) Booth's diary was not mentioned; (4) failure to mention Booth's ring which had been listed in his official descriptions; (5) perhaps the grossest error was the failure of the government to take pictures of the corpse.

There were no definite reasons why the Booth family was not called in to identify the body. The suppositions were that: (1) the government doubted that the body was that of Booth and did not want the Booth family to deny that it was; (2) the government was in a hurry to bury the body to lessen rejoicing in the South; (3) the body was beginning to decompose and they wanted to make the formalities short; (4) the Booth family had to remain inside their homes to prevent bodily injuries from enraged mobs; they were the recipients of threatening notes immediately after the assassination and for several years hence.<sup>2</sup>

People began to feel that the government had withheld much of the evidence and had put pressure on certain witnesses. For example, the statement in the New York Times and New York Tribune that "yesterday a photographer's view of the body was taken before it was removed from the monitor"<sup>3</sup> seemed to indicate that pictures were taken of the corpse; yet, no pictures of the corpse ever appeared, and the public felt that they had been destroyed. Government pressure and censorship was certainly indicated

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<sup>2</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 236.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times, April 29, 1869; New York Tribune, April 29, 1869.

when one reporter wrote: "a hard grizzly face overlooks me as I write. This is the face of Lafayette Baker."<sup>4</sup> Another mystery was that when Booth's diary was impounded at the Surratt trial<sup>5</sup> there were "only two pages covered with writing left in it. Eighteen pages had been cut out. . . ."<sup>6</sup> Other instances which caused comment when made known were the facts that Herold, who certainly should have known Booth, had first denied that the man in the barn was Booth and then later changed his statement; that according to L. B. Baker there were no names mentioned during the conversation with the man in the barn; and also there was no actual necessity for killing him as he was crippled and could not have escaped.

To climax the mysterious identification of the body, as far as the public was concerned, stories appeared in the newspapers about the sudden disappearance of the body from aboard the Montauk. One such story concerning the disposal of the body read:

The body will be disposed so that no traces of it can hereafter be found. . . in corroboration of this, we have statements of persons who claim to have witnessed and saw the body dissected and in separate pieces sewed in cloth, with heavy weights and placed in a small vessel which made a short circuitous trip upon the Potomac and without landing returned to the Navy Yard minus the body again. Another still in confirmation of this says he watched his opportunity and secured a part of the body which he now has in his possession.<sup>7</sup>

Another story maintained:

Out of the darkness Booth's body may never return. In the darkness like his great crime, may it remain forever; impassable,

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<sup>4</sup>W. G. Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX (November, 1924), 703. Hereafter cited as Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX.

<sup>5</sup>John Surratt, who had escaped at the time of the assassination, was the only one of the conspirators who was tried by a civil court (1867). The jury could not reach a verdict and Surratt was allowed to go free.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in a pamphlet accompanying Stern, The Man Who Killed Lincoln, 28.

<sup>7</sup>New York Times, April 29, 1865.

invisible, nondescript, condemned to that worse than damnation -- annihilation. The river bottom may ooze about it, laden with great shot and drowning manacles. The fishes swim around it or the daisies grow white above it; but we shall never know.<sup>8</sup>

Still another report indicated that the body had been sunk among the carcasses of mules in the Potomac River. "Scores of people could be seen wading and rowing in the morass . . . raking, dragging, feeling for the corpse . . . fishermen who never found what they were dredging for."<sup>9</sup> The appearances of these people set curiosity burning in Washington more feverishly than before. Rumors and legends reached an unprecedented high.

Official cognizance of the mystery and uncertainty surrounding the Booth body was taken as late as 1867 when a Congressional Committee asked Secretary Stanton the following questions:

Question: 'Have you any reason to believe that Booth is not dead?' was asked.

Answer: 'None whatever,' Stanton replied. 'I had a board to inspect and examine his body when it was on the iron clad. They reported that it was John Wilkes Booth.'<sup>10</sup>

Later, when the interment of the corpse was under discussion, he was asked again:

Question: 'There was nothing about the identity of Booth that entered into your consideration in making the burial a secret?'

Answer: 'Nothing whatever,' Stanton replied. 'It was done simply and solely for the purpose of preventing him being made the subject of rebel rejoicing.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>An unidentified contemporary newspaper quoted in Lewis, Myths After Lincoln, 193.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>House Report Number 7, Testimony, 1st Session, 40th Congress, 408.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 409.

L. B. Baker indicated doubt when he testified that he "addressed the person in the barn"<sup>12</sup> and when he stated that the man had seemed "surprised, opened his eyes, and looked about"<sup>13</sup> when he called him Booth.

Another uncertainty was advanced when it was realized that all of the government witnesses at the identification, except Dr. May, based their identification on the general features of the corpse. These witnesses had known a John Wilkes Booth with silky black hair, mustache, and a smooth complexion. How could these witnesses have been so certain when it was known that Booth had been subjected to severe pain during his escape and also that he had shaved his mustache and grown a beard?<sup>14</sup>

L. B. Baker and young Richard B. Garrett based their identification of the corpse on the comparison of it with a photograph of John Wilkes Booth carried by Baker. Doubt was thrown upon the validity of this identification because there was a question as to whether the picture carried by Baker was that of John Wilkes or his brother Edwin, for the photograph used at the conspiracy trial<sup>15</sup> for John Wilkes' identification was that of Edwin.<sup>16</sup>

Probably the most damaging statements to the government's case were made by Dr. May. At the time of the identification Dr. May was actually the only one who could identify the body except for its general

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 481.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 482.

<sup>14</sup>Dr. Mudd had testified to this when he was arrested. See ante, 3.

<sup>15</sup>This was the military trial of the conspirators who planned the assassination of Lincoln with the exception of John Wilkes Booth and John Surratt. All conspirators tried at this trial were found guilty of treason and were hung.

<sup>16</sup>Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death, 48.

features. Without any particular reason for remembering the exact location of the scar on Booth's neck, Dr. May supposedly gave Barnes its exact location. Two years later, after all the publicity and with a very good reason for remembering the scar, he testified at the Surratt Trial: "The tumor was on the back of his neck, a little to one side. I do not recollect whether it was on his right or left side."<sup>17</sup> In a paper, "The Mark of the Scalpel," published in 1869, Dr. May again remembered the exact location of the scar. Dr. May stated in the paper that when the cover had been removed from the corpse for him to see ". . . to my great astonishment [it] revealed a body in whose lineaments there was to me no resemblance of the man I had known in life."<sup>18</sup> He also contradicted his original identification and that of several others in stating that "the right leg of the corpse was broken."<sup>19</sup> The inconsistency of Dr. May's statements concerning the broken leg, the scar, and the fact that Dr. May had described the body as being "freckled"<sup>20</sup> in his original identification, did more to substantiate the rumors concerning the body than to strengthen the official identification.

In short, there was enough mystery and secrecy surrounding the capture and burial of Booth to render it not unreasonable that the government had made a mistake and buried the wrong man. Consequently, many rumors came into being about an "alive" Booth.

Probably the earliest story of Booth being alive concerned a minister in Richmond, Virginia. This minister was unusually dramatic and

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>18</sup>"The Mark of the Scalpel," Records of the Columbia Historical Society, XIII (1910), 51-68, as quoted in Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death, 38.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>20</sup>Ante, 12.



had facial characteristics similar to Booth. He had long black hair which many thought was to hide the scar on the back of his neck. Nothing was known of his background and this contributed all the more to the mystery. The minister declared in vain that he was not Booth. Upon his death his history was completely examined and all of the claims that he was Booth evaporated.<sup>21</sup>

In April, 1898 newspapers carried reports that Booth had been seen in Brazil.<sup>22</sup> As a result two witnesses appeared to testify that Booth had escaped in 1865. One of these was Mrs. J. M. Christ of Beloit, Wisconsin. In 1865 she had been Mrs. Thomas Haggett, the wife of a Confederate blockade runner. According to Mrs. Christ, she and her husband were aboard the Mary Porter in Havana, Cuba, six weeks after the assassination, when Booth came on board and sailed with them to Nassau.<sup>23</sup> She gave her cabin to Booth because his leg was broken. Booth then rewarded her by giving her his ring, with J. W. B. engraved inside. According to Mrs. Christ, Booth next sailed from Nassau to England.<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Christ's story appeared in the Beloit Daily News of April 19, 1898.

The very next day, a fellow townsman, William D. Kenzie, told his story of Booth's escape. Kenzie said that as a member of Company F., First

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<sup>21</sup>Lewis, Myths After Lincoln, 239-240.

<sup>22</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 329.

<sup>23</sup>There is some evidence that Booth had planned to go to Nassau if he had escaped. After his release, Samuel Arnold, one of Booth's accomplices, wrote an article concerning the scheme to abduct Lincoln. One of his statements was that delay had resulted because John Wilkes Booth had busied himself with arrangements to ship his stage wardrobe and their effects to Nassau. See Alva Johnston, "John Wilkes Booth on Tour," Saturday Evening Post, CCX (February 19, 1938), 13, 36. Hereafter cited as Johnston, "John Wilkes Booth on Tour," Saturday Evening Post, CCX (February 19, 1938).

<sup>24</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 329-330.

U. S. Artillery, he had been stationed at New Orleans during the winter of 1862-1863. There he had become thoroughly acquainted with Booth, who was spending the winter there. In April, 1865 the company was at Arlington Heights, just across the river from Washington, and was a part of the troops sent in search of Booth. When Kenzie arrived at the Garrett farm where Booth had already been killed, he was asked to dismount and view the corpse. "I [Kenzie] had never seen the man before. It was not Booth nor did it resemble him and I said so. [Boston] Corbett overheard my remark and was much displeased. . . I received very distinct orders to thereafter keep my mouth shut."<sup>25</sup>

Serious doubts as to Booth's death were thus perpetuated to the close of the last century. However, the most popular and credible story was to come to light in the early 1900's, when a man died in Enid, Territory of Oklahoma, after confessing to be John Wilkes Booth.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 330-332.

CHAPTER III  
THE ENID BOOTH

On page 3 of the January 13, 1903 issue of the Enid Daily Wave (Enid, Territory of Oklahoma) there appeared an inconspicuous article concerning a suicide at the Grand Avenue Hotel of that town. On that morning at about 10:30 o'clock a man had aroused consternation among the other guests with his screaming. The hotel clerk and several others ran up to "room number 4, occupied by David E. George, a man some 60 years of age, who had been a guest of the hotel some four or five weeks."<sup>1</sup> A doctor was summoned from across the street, but George was soon dead. "Doctors are confident, from his symptoms, that he died of arsenical poison, self-administered."<sup>2</sup>

The body was taken across the street to Penniman's Furniture Store (undertaking functions were also carried on by this business) where a coroner's jury was impaneled. Although the jury was still hearing evidence as the issue of the Daily Wave carrying the suicide story went to press, the following information was published: David E. George was sixty years old and had come to Enid from El Reno, Territory of Oklahoma. Letters found in his personal effects indicated that he had been supplied with money by George E. Smith of Colfax, Iowa.<sup>3</sup> "Those who know . . . say this money was spent at saloons."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 13, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Attempts were being made at this time to contact Smith.

<sup>4</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 13, 1903.

Prior to his death, George had claimed to have considerable money and property. He had made two wills bequeathing large amounts to different people. Just before his death he wrote a letter denying and annulling the bequests.<sup>5</sup> In his first will, however, he left all of his estate to Anna K. Smith of El Reno.<sup>6</sup> In his second will he mentioned a nephew, Willy George (who was never located), to whom he left the bulk of his estate with considerations for the Sisters of Charity of Dallas, Texas, Isaac Bernstein, George E. Smith, S. S. Dumond, and L. H. Houston.<sup>7</sup> No estate was ever located. It was generally believed in Enid even before his death that he had nothing of value.

On January 14, the day following George's suicide, the coroner's jury was still deliberating. A member of the previous day's jury had been ineligible and the evidence had to be presented again. A drug clerk from the Watrous Drug Store of Enid testified that at "twenty minutes before eight o'clock yesterday morning the deceased purchased fifteen grains of strychnine; as he said, 'to kill a d\_\_d hound with.'"<sup>8</sup> It was also discovered that he had bought five grains of strychnine from the store's

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<sup>5</sup>This letter disappeared but when W. G. Shepherd was making his investigations he found people who had read the note. They testified to the following written statement: "I am informed that I made a will a few days ago and I am indistinct to having done it. I hereby recall every letter, syllable, and word of that will that I may have signed in Enid. I owe Jack Bernstein about ten dollars but he has my watch in pawn for that amount. D. E. George." See Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 718.

<sup>6</sup>David E. George, Will No. I (June 17, 1902), Public Records, Garfield County, Enid, Territory of Oklahoma.

<sup>7</sup>David E. George, Will No. II (December 31, 1902), Public Records, Garfield County, Enid, Territory of Oklahoma.

<sup>8</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 14, 1903.

owner. Because of the possibility of an autopsy, the embalming of the body was delayed until, "late this afternoon [January 14, 1903] when the county attorney ordered Penniman to do anything necessary for the preservation of the remains."<sup>9</sup> A telegram had arrived from George's friend, George E. Smith of Colfax, Iowa, stating that he would arrive in Enid on January 15, but he gave no other information.

The next day most of the people in Enid were shocked. It seemed there was something dark and mysterious concerning the antecedents and identity of George. While W. H. Ryan<sup>10</sup> was embalming the body, the Reverend E. C. Harper of the Methodist Church in El Reno came to see him. Harper knew George and had come to Enid to identify him. In an interview some years later, Ryan said:

He [Harper] gave sort of a cry and then said to me [Ryan] 'Do you know who that is?' I said, 'Why, his name is George.' 'No, sir, it isn't,' said the Reverend Mr. Harper. 'You are embalming the body of John Wilkes Booth -- the man who killed Abraham Lincoln.'<sup>11</sup>

There was no light shed on George's identity by his friend Smith. Smith's story was "that he first met George a year and a half ago in Iowa, and the acquaintance ripened into a close friendship. . . ."<sup>12</sup> He described George as a well-traveled, highly-educated man. He knew nothing as to whether George was Booth or not; nor did he enlighten the public as to the assumption that he, Smith, was furnishing George money. The following statement by Smith was published in the Daily Wave: "Incidentally it may

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>An assistant of the undertaker, W. P. Penniman.

<sup>11</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 716.

<sup>12</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 16, 1903.

be said, George said that he at one time lived in Mississippi and that he had killed a man in Texas."<sup>13</sup>

George was a strange fellow who had no visible means of income. Yet he was seldom short of money. He frequented many bars, drank considerably, and was often heard quoting Shakespeare. Consequently, the immediate background of George was not hard to trace.

In the spring of 1901 George had appeared in El Reno and had registered at the Anstien Hotel. Mrs. N. J. Anstien, wife of the proprietor of the hotel, described George in these words:

. . . hair curly and jet black, he dyed it of course . . . about sixty years old . . . fascinating talker who professed to be a house painter. . . but his fingers were long and slender like a womans.<sup>14</sup>

Mr. N. J. Anstien had hired George to do some painting. It quickly became evident, however, that he was not a painter by trade. He spent most of his time sitting in the hotel lobby reading theatrical journals and visiting with the other guests. Very often he would drink too much and at these times Mrs. Anstien took care of him.

In an interview with W. G. Shepherd, a reporter for Harper's Magazine, Mrs. Anstien told the following story:

Once a father and mother brought their daughter to him [George] and insisted that he should marry her because she had fallen in love with him. They said he hadn't wronged her except mentally. 'I [Mrs. Anstien] heard him shout, 'Madame, I have not wronged your daughter. She does not say I have wronged her. Out! Out! All of you. Begone!!'<sup>15</sup>

George had carried on like an actor in a tragedy. After the people left, George spoke to Mrs. Anstien: "Me! Me! They challenge me! Why, they don't

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 712.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

know who I am. Why I killed the best man that ever lived!"<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Anstien disregarded this statement because of George's anger and thought little more about it until she read the notices of his death in the Enid paper.

Not long after this incident, George decided he had reached the age when he should settle down. He bought a four-room house in El Reno and found a married couple to live with him. The couple, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Simmons, were to live in the house rent free and give him care, board and lodging. It was at this house that George made the confession that he was Booth to Mrs. Harper, wife of the El Reno minister.

One afternoon about a month after George and the Simmonses had established themselves,<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Harper and another woman were visiting Mrs. Simmons. George entered the house, greeted the visitors, and proceeded to his room. In a short while the ladies heard George calling for help; they found him lying on his bed apparently quite ill. While the other two women hurried out of the room to make some strong coffee, George called Mrs. Harper to his bedside:

'I believe I'm going to die,' he said, 'I'm not an ordinary painter. I killed the best man that ever lived'. . . I [Mrs. Harper] asked him who it was he killed and he said, 'Abraham Lincoln.' I could not believe it so; I thought he was out of his head so I asked, 'Who is Abraham Lincoln?' 'Is it possible you are so ignorant as not to know?' he answered. Then he took a pencil and paper and wrote, in a peculiar but legible hand, the name, Abraham Lincoln. 'Don't doubt me,' he said. 'I am dying now.'<sup>18</sup>

George told Mrs. Harper that he was well off and rational. He told her that some of the higher officials in Washington were implicated in the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>About three months before the death of George.

<sup>18</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 714.

assassination and that Mrs. Mary E. Surratt was innocent.<sup>19</sup> Briefly he told her of his escape from Washington. After friends had secreted him, he rowed down the Potomac River to the ocean, where he took a steamer for Europe. George concluded by pointing out that he stayed abroad more than fifteen years before returning. While George was talking a doctor came into the room and helped to draw him back to life. Then George made Mrs. Harper promise to keep his secret until after his death. This promise was never violated by Mrs. Harper.

Because of his habits and peculiarities, George soon became unbearable to Mrs. Simmons. So the Simmons family "bought the house, giving a note to George for three hundred and fifty dollars, and the old man went away."<sup>20</sup> From El Reno, as has been noted, he went to Enid.

The impression rapidly grew that the remains of George were the remains of Booth, especially after the Daily Wave published the following statement: "His [George's] likeness to a picture of J. Wilkes Booth is very striking as a great many have remarked. And the dead man's right leg had been broken below the knee."<sup>21</sup> After Mrs. Harper's story was published the undertaker did "the best job of embalming [he] had ever done, in case

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<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Surratt was the owner of a tavern in Surrattsville, Maryland, about eleven miles southeast of Washington. On several occasions Booth and his band of conspirators stayed there and Booth stopped there in his flight from Washington. Mrs. Surratt was accused of being a member of the conspiracy and was tried, convicted and hung. Actually, she was not guilty as charged; however, it is highly probable that she was aware of the plot.

<sup>20</sup> Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 715.

<sup>21</sup> Enid Daily Wave, January 15, 1903.



the Washington officials wanted to see it."<sup>22</sup> The Daily Wave article carrying Mrs. Harper's story concluded with this statement:

It is a well-known fact that the government was never quite sure of the death of Booth, at least it never paid the reward offered . . . It is a most remarkable circumstance that his right leg was broken, just above the ankle. . . There is remarkable likeness to Booth as found in Volume 2 of Grant's Memoirs. Besides these links, comes the fact that J. Wilkes Booth was born in 1839 and was twenty-six years of age when the assassination took place and sixty-three years old in 1902 if living, which is the exact age of George as found in examining his papers. Several years ago, it might be ten years ago, the writer remembers reading an article, credited to the Atlanta Constitution that J. Wilkes Booth still lived and was at that time in Mississippi. . . If it is Booth, why did he come to Enid to pass in his checks voluntarily? There is only one answer to this question. He probably read in an eastern newspaper that Enid was destitute of a cemetary [sic.] and did not wish to be buried. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Soon people began to swarm to the undertaker's shop; many of them felt that the body was actually that of Booth.

The December, 1901 number of the Medical Monthly Journal was devoted almost entirely to a consideration of the murderers of presidents of the United States and European potentates. This description of J. Wilkes Booth in the journal was reprinted in the Daily Wave:

J. Wilkes Booth was kephalonord [sic.]. The ear excessive, and abnormally developed; inclined to the so called satanic type. The eyes were small, sunken and unequally placed. The nose was normal. The facial bones and jaw were arrested in development and there was a partial V-shaped dental arch. The lower jaw was well-developed.<sup>24</sup>

The editor of the Daily Wave and a doctor visited the corpse and compared it with the description provided in the medical journal. Their statement concerning their findings read in part:

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<sup>22</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 716.

<sup>23</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 17, 1903.

<sup>24</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 19, 1903.

The Booth chin, mouth, upper lip and general description is almost perfect in the corpse. . . We must acknowledge that the dead man shows all the marks credited to Booth in every particular. . . We were really startled when we compared it [Booth's writing] with the large round lettered school-boy writing of D. E. George. We placed the very last words George wrote by the side of the facsimile writing of Booth and it really seemed to us that one and the same had written both.<sup>25</sup>

On January 20 the Daily Wave carried the following statement: "The Wave is in possession of further startling news in regard to the identity of the corpse as the remains of Booth, but we promised not to publish the same today."<sup>26</sup> This was followed by a statement to the effect that if the body were that of Booth the government should take charge and dispose of the body. Then this disquieting statement appeared:

A man by the name of Martin who claimed to have known Booth personally appeared on the streets yesterday and said that if the corpse had certain marks or scars below the right knee and on the right side of the face below the eyebrow it was Booth. The scars were found before Martin was allowed to view the body.<sup>27</sup>

The people of Enid were quite disturbed at the stories; most of them actually felt that the body was that of Booth and for that reason some wanted to burn it.<sup>28</sup>

Because of the vast crowds that visited the Enid morgue (Penniman's Furniture Store), the exhibit of George's body was declared at an end: "As far as the undertaker and the Wave is concerned the identification of the remains of D. E. George as those of J. Wilkes Booth is closed."<sup>29</sup> The body was then placed in cold storage out of the morgue.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 20, 1903.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 716.

<sup>29</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 22, 1903.

The "startling news" referred to in the Daily Wave of January 20 was contingent upon the arrival of a man from Memphis, Tennessee. This individual claimed to have considerable information concerning Booth but he failed to arrive in Enid at the time. In the meantime, federal authorities failed to take any interest in the case. Although "officially" the George case was closed in Enid by the Penniman undertaking establishment and by the Daily Wave, other newspapers in surrounding towns carried the stories and thereby enlarged and perpetuated the legend. These stories would probably have died a rather quick death, however, except for the somewhat belated appearance of Finis L. Bates of Memphis, Tennessee. Bates provided the background necessary for the continuance of the legend.

CHAPTER IV  
THE BATES STORY

Bates arrived in Enid some days after the death of George to look at the body.<sup>1</sup> Because of the desire of the Enid people to dispose of the remains of George, Penniman secretly met Bates at the station and urged his silence. Penniman felt that if Bates did identify the body as that of Booth, there would be trouble and possibly violence from the townspeople. There had been discussion to the effect that if the body were that of Booth it should be burned.<sup>2</sup>

Penniman and Ryan were both present at the Bates' identification. As he looked at the body, Bates said: "My old friend! My old friend St. Helen!" and then he began to weep."<sup>3</sup> Bates described identifying marks that he recognized on George's body as a high thumb-joint; a scar on the right eyebrow, throwing it out of alignment with the left; and a slight indentation of the front shinbone of the right leg.<sup>4</sup> Penniman, who had seen

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<sup>1</sup>There is no reliable record of the exact date of Bates' arrival in Enid. In his book he states: "I left Memphis that same afternoon [January 17, 1903]. . . I was several days reaching Enid." See Finis L. Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, Assassin of President Lincoln (Memphis: Pilcher Printing Company, 1907), 253. Hereafter cited as Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth. George Sands Bryan contends that Bates arrived in Enid on January 23, 1903. See Bryan, The Great American Myth, 338.

<sup>2</sup>Enid Daily Wave, January 20, 1903.

<sup>3</sup>From an interview of Shepherd with Penniman, quoted in Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 716.

<sup>4</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 262-263.

many identifications, felt that the identification was genuine. He was sure that Bates had known George. Bates did not, however, convince Ryan, who did not believe George to be Booth. The principal reason for Ryan's scepticism was that "Booth had black eyes, they say . . . A hundred times I [Ryan] went to the corpse and raised the lids and looked at those eyes and they were dark blue. . . ." <sup>5</sup> After Bates had identified George, he told the story of his contact with him and how he knew him as Booth. Newspapers published the story; and once again thousands of people thronged to Enid to see the body in Penniman's Furniture Store. <sup>6</sup>

Bates' story started in the spring of 1872 when he was twenty-one years old and starting his career as a lawyer in Grandberry, Texas. One day a client came to him saying that he had been indicted unjustly by the federal court at Tyler, Texas. The client has sold his store, at Glen Rose Mills, Texas to a man by the name of John St. Helen who had failed to obtain the necessary federal license for selling tobacco and alcoholic drinks. Bates' client instead of St. Helen had been indicted.

St. Helen had owned the business for a year and openly admitted his guilt to Bates but refused to go before the court to testify in behalf of the innocent client. At their first interview Bates felt that St. Helen had a "restless, hunted, worried expression constantly on his face, while the flashes which came from his keen penetrating black eyes spoke of desperation and capacity for crime. . . ." <sup>7</sup> A few days later St. Helen

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<sup>5</sup>From an interview of Shepherd with Ryan, quoted in Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 716.

<sup>6</sup>So many people came to see the corpse that Penniman brought it out of cold storage and once again displayed it.

<sup>7</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 11.

came to Bates and said: "I desire to retain you for my attorney. . . I say to you as my attorney, that my true name is not John St. Helen, as you know me and suppose me to be, and for this reason I cannot afford to go to Tyler before the federal court, in fear that my true identity be discovered."<sup>8</sup> Bates carried out St. Helen's wishes by going to Tyler, paying the fine, and arranging for the charges to be dropped. As a result the two men became good friends.

According to Bates, St. Helen assumed the role of an orator in Glen Rose Mills. At a fourth of July celebration where Bates was to be the guest speaker, St. Helen completely captivated the crowd as master of ceremonies. Bates often heard him quote Shakespeare and criticize various actors of that time. In fact, St. Helen seemed to be "master of the art of which he was speaking."<sup>9</sup>

Five years after St. Helen had first come to Bates, he became very ill. When he thought he was dying, he asked to speak to Bates alone:

I am dying. My name is John Wilkes Booth, and I am the assassin of President Lincoln. Get the picture of myself from under the pillow. I leave it with you for future identification. Notify my brother, Edwin Booth, of New York City.<sup>10</sup>

Bates apparently attributed little significance to what St. Helen said, for "after getting the picture my attention was turned to giving St. Helen relief, if possible, not at the time thinking of his startling and important confession."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

St. Helen's condition improved greatly and he eventually completely recovered from his illness. When he was feeling better, he inquired:

'Do you remember anything I said to you when I was sick?' and waited with an anxious look for a reply. I [Bates] said to him that I remembered many things which he had said to me. Then St. Helen said, 'Then you have my life in your keeping, but, thank God, as my attorney.'<sup>12</sup>

Bates, thinking that St. Helen had been completely out of his head at the time of his statement, asked him if he were referring to the comments he made of his sweetheart and last love. St. Helen replied:

I have had a sweetheart, but no last love, and could not, in my wildest delirium have mentioned a subject so barren of concern to me. But your suggestion is a kind evasion of what I did say to you, . . . and when I get well and feel like talking and you like listening, I will tell you the story of my life and the history of the secrecy of my name.<sup>13</sup>

After his recovery, St. Helen gave Bates a complete account of the assassination of Lincoln and his subsequent escape. He began his story by telling of his family and their private affairs. Bates said: "St. Helen continued to relate many family affairs, the publication of which would be to speak of the private concerns of the Booth family, which I deem unnecessary to make public."<sup>14</sup> St. Helen then told of the plan to assassinate Lincoln, insisted his motive for the assassination was purely patriotic, and proclaimed the innocence of Mrs. Surratt. While he did not mention the Vice-President by name, he indicated that he conspired with Johnson, who was in on the plot and who arranged for General Grant to be called out of town and for Booth and Herold to know the password necessary for crossing the Navy Bridge. Bates then quoted St. Helen in telling the story of the assassination:

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 33.

As I [St. Helen] fired the same instant I leaped from the box to the stage, my right spur entangled in something in the drapery on the box, which caused me to miss my aim or location of the stage and threw my shin bone against the edge of the stage, which fractured my right shin bone about six or eight inches above the ankle.<sup>15</sup>

At this point in his story, St. Helen showed Bates the scar on his right leg that he claimed to have received.

St. Helen then told of the visit at the home of Dr. Mudd and of the trip to the Cox home where a relative of Cox's "named Ruddy or Roby"<sup>16</sup> took care of them and arranged for the trip between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers with Ports Conway and Royal as their destination. A wagon loaded with all sorts of paraphernalia in which an old Negro was moving was St. Helen's hiding place and his method of transportation. Bates then quoted St. Helen in the following story of his escape:

In my concealment, of course, I had to be very quiet. I could not talk to old Lewis, the old negro driver, and made myself as comfortable as I could be in my cramped position. In my side coat pocket I had a number of letters, together with my diary, and I think there was a picture of my sister, Mrs. Clark, all of which must have worked out of my pocket enroute or came out as I was hurriedly taken from the wagon . . . After I had crossed the river and was feeling in my pocket . . . I discovered I had lost these papers. I asked Ruddy to go back and bring them to me at the Garrett home . . . About one or two o'clock in the afternoon of April the 23d, 1865, the second day of my stay at the Garrett home, I was out in the front yard, lounging on the meadow, when Lieuts. Bainbridge and Ruggles came up hurriedly and notified me that a squad of Yankee troops had crossed the Rappahannock river in hot pursuit of me, and advised me to leave at once and go back into the woods north of the Garrett house, in a wooded ravine, which they pointed out, giving me a signal whistle by which I would know them, and hurriedly rode off, saying that they would return for me in about an hour at the place designated, and bring with them a horse for my escape. I left immediately, without letting anyone know that I had gone or the direction I had taken. I reached the woods at about the place which had been pointed out to me, as nearly as one could, traveling in a strange wooded section with the impediment of a lame leg. At about the time fixed I was delighted to hear

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>16</sup>St. Helen could not remember the exact name of the man.



the signal, and answered, to the best of my recollection, about three or four o'clock p. m. My friends came up with an extra horse, which I mounted, and we rode away in a westerly direction, riding the remainder of the afternoon and the following night until about twelve o'clock, when we camped together in the woods, or rather dismounted to rest ourselves and horses until daylight. We talked over the situation, they giving me directions by which I should travel. When we at last separated in a country road, they said about twenty or twenty-five miles to the west of the Garrett home or Ports Royal and Conway . . . As advised by them I rode on westerly through all the country roads as I came to them leading in that direction until about ten o'clock a. m. of the second day out from the Garrett home, when owing to the fatigue of myself and horse, and suffering from my wounded leg, I found it necessary to rest and stopped at a small farm house on the country road, where there seemed to live only three elderly ladies, who at my request took me in as a wounded Confederate soldier, fed my horse and gave me breakfast, and as I now best remember, I compensated them, paying them one dollar in small silver coin . . . I followed this direction day after day impersonating the character of a Confederate soldier. Continuing on down through West Virginia, I crossed the Big Sandy River at Warfield, in Eastern Kentucky, and after traveling from Warfield, I, as well as my horse, was about worn out, and I was therefore compelled to rest for about a week, claiming to be a wounded Confederate soldier. The parties with whom I stopped was a widow lady and her young son, whose name I can not now remember. But after receiving their kind attentions and needed rest, I resumed my journey with the purpose of traveling to the south until I could reach the Mississippi River at a safe point for crossing it, and find my way into the Indian Territory as the best possible hiding place, in my opinion. I finally reached without incident worthy of mention the Mississippi River and crossed the same at what was called Catfish Point, in the State of Mississippi. This point is a short distance south of where the Arkansas River empties into the Mississippi River. I followed the south and west bank of the Arkansas River until I reached the Indian Territory, where I remained at different places, hiding among the Indians for about eighteen months, when I left the Indian Territory and went to Nebraska and was at Nebraska City employed by a white man to drive a team connected with a wagon train going from Nebraska City, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City, Utah. This man was hauling provisions for the United States government to the Federal troops encamped at Salt Lake City. But I left this wagon train while enroute, just before we got to Salt Lake City, and proceeded to San Francisco, California, to meet my mother and brother and remaining a while there, I left and went into Mexico. From there I went up through Texas, finally stopping at Glenrose [sic.] Mills and Grandberry, Texas, where we are now.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 52-58.

At this point in the Bates-St. Helen relationship, Bates indicated that he did not believe the story to be true. He had begun to regard St. Helen as an "insane man, bordering in fact upon violent madness. . . ."18 He did, however, continue to question St. Helen about his escape and asked him who the individual was that was killed in the Garrett barn, if it were not Booth. St. Helen replied:

As you have heard that a man was killed at the Garrett barn, and without positive or direct proof as to who this man was, yet from the circumstances I would say that it was Ruddy the man with whom I had negotiated for my personal deliverance, together with that of my accomplice, David E. Herold, to the Confederate soldiers. . . They found on the body of Ruddy the check for sixty pounds, together with my letters, and I think a picture, and by reason of finding these belongings of mine on the body of Ruddy, I presume they identified it as the body of myself. . . And I do not for one moment doubt the sincerity of the individual members of the government or officers and men who captured Herold and killed, as I suppose, Ruddy, in believing that they had killed me, and it was certainly a reasonable and justifiable mistake if they had no other means of identifying me than the check and documents found on the man or body of the man whom we have called Ruddy.<sup>19</sup>

Bates told St. Helen that while his story might be true it by no means convinced him that he was Booth. He concluded: "Your story could be as well told by anyone else of your genius for some purpose hidden from me, as I must continue to know you as John St. Helen."<sup>20</sup>

Bates and St. Helen developed a close friendship and subsequently spent many hours together. Their entertainment consisted primarily of card games and recitations by St. Helen. St. Helen often admitted that in his younger days he sometimes drank in excess but during their association Bates "never knew of his taking strong drink of any character nor did he

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 62-64.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 78.

use tobacco in any form."<sup>21</sup> In 1878 St. Helen left for Leadville, Colorado, and Bates located in Memphis, Tennessee, where they were "lost to each other and comparatively forgotten for a period of twenty years."<sup>22</sup> During this interval of time Bates took advantage of the sources at his disposal and "investigated the subject of the assassination of President Lincoln and its attendant circumstances in view of the statements made . . . by St. Helen."<sup>23</sup>

Bates, having identified the body of George as that of St. Helen, returned to Memphis with the desire to prove his belief that Booth had escaped. To this end Bates collected written testimonies under oath from people who knew St. Helen and George. In 1907, Bates published his opinions and research findings in a sensational volume entitled The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, Assassin of Abraham Lincoln.

The story that Bates told in Enid forms the first part of his book and the remainder is devoted to his proof that St. Helen and Booth were the same person. Bates did not attempt to prove that George and St. Helen were the same person. He probably felt that his identification of George as St. Helen was proof enough. Consequently, "many who believed George to be Booth did not think that George was St. Helen."<sup>24</sup>

When St. Helen left for Colorado in 1878, according to Bates, they were separated for some twenty years.<sup>25</sup> This implies that Bates met St. Helen in 1898, but no such meeting was mentioned in the book. Instead,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>24</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 347.

<sup>25</sup>Ante, 39.

he indicated that his identification of the corpse in Enid was the first time he had seen St. Helen since their days together in Texas. What he meant by "comparatively forgotten" is questionable, for he spent much of the first part of his book quoting verbatim statements that St. Helen had made to him approximately thirty-five years earlier. He also wrote that "during this interval he investigated the subject of the assassination of President Lincoln and its attendant circumstances in view of the statements made by St. Helen."<sup>26</sup> It is probable that Bates took the story St. Helen told him and the evidence he had gathered and mixed them to his greatest advantage.

Twice Bates made it clear in his book that he did not believe the story St. Helen told him. He stated this first of all when he said that he "sought to close an interview as abhorrent as it was unbelievable by me. And out of charity I had begun to regard St. Helen as an insane man, in fact bordering upon violent madness."<sup>27</sup> Later he pointed out that he determined to drop the subject for all time to come, "treating it as a myth unfounded in fact --a story that existed only in the mind of St. Helen, a comparatively demented man . . . and in our after association, we made no further reference to the subject."<sup>28</sup> Although he claimed to have discounted St. Helen's story at the time it was told, he remembered minute details for his book. For example, as St. Helen was leaving from their first meeting, he uttered the words "until then." With reference to these words, Bates said:

the words--until then--spoken with a soft voice and gentle tone, was a pleasant adieu, in fact, the entire sentence having been

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<sup>26</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 83-84.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 80-81.

said, and I should say dramatically acted in eloquence by word, motion of the body, jesticulation [sic.] of the hand and utterance of the voice, not before or since equalled by any person in my presence or experience.<sup>29</sup>

This is probably the manner in which Bates would have expected Booth to have talked.

Bates then quoted the story St. Helen told him of the assassination and his escape. Concerning the assassination, Bates found in the Boston Globe of December 12, 1897 the statement of General D. D. Dana which was "almost a verbatim copy of that made by St. Helen to me in the State of Texas, though more than two thousand miles of territory divided them and a difference in time of some years intervened."<sup>30</sup> Bates then told of the story of "a Mr. Treadkell, who employed him [Booth] later as a teamster . . . for hauling overland the supplies to the West."<sup>31</sup> His story was almost identical with that told Bates by St. Helen. These stories leave much room for speculation concerning the confession made by St. Helen, especially after Bates admitted that "after reading the publication of Gen. Dana in December, 1897, I remembered anew the incidents connected with the confessions of St. Helen."<sup>32</sup> Bates probably read the accounts by Dana and Treadkell before he recorded any of St. Helen's statements. It is certain that he had read them before his book was written.

In his effort to prove his story, Bates made a number of glaring errors: (1) Bates told in detail St. Helen's story of Booth's fall and injury to his "right" leg and his visit to Dr. Mudd who "removed my [St. Helen's] riding boot from the injured right foot and leg and dressed

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 168.

it."<sup>33</sup> This is in direct conflict with the testimony given by Dr. Mudd, who reported dressing Booth's left leg.<sup>34</sup>

(2) When Bates told of William Rollins, the ferryman, identifying the photograph of Booth carried by Lieutenant Baker, he claimed that Rollins said: "They are the men, only this one," pointing to Booth's pictures, "had no mustache!"<sup>35</sup> This, Bates concluded, was proof that the man Rollins had ferried across the river was Ruddy and not Booth, since Booth had a mustache and Ruddy did not. This reasoning is fallacious for by St. Helen's own statement he admitted arriving at the Garrett farm. Moreover, according to Dr. Mudd's testimony, Booth had removed his mustache while at his home.<sup>36</sup>

(3) Bates must have been conscious of the fact that there was little resemblance between the tintype given to him by St. Helen and good portraits of Booth. In his book the portrait facing page 202 and entitled "John Wilkes Booth, Aged 38" is not authentic. "It is from an independent and extremely wooden original, based on the tintype but with a scenic background painted in, with the dress altered. . . ."<sup>37</sup> Bates' alleged portrait of Booth at twenty-seven, facing page 2, also is a fake. However, the picture opposite page 2 resembles authentic pictures of John Wilkes Booth more than does the picture opposite page 202. "Both [pictures] are indeed counterfeit presentments --and look so."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>34</sup>Ante, 3.

<sup>35</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 139.

<sup>36</sup>Ante, 3.

<sup>37</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 351.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

(4) Bates altered the affidavits signed by S. S. Brown and B. B. Dumont, owners of the Grand Avenue Hotel in Enid, to read "and died from the effects of said poison at 6:30 o'clock a. m., on the 14th day of January, 1903."<sup>39</sup> Bates also referred to the date of the suicide as January 14, 1903, in the closing paragraph of his book. This was impossible since the Enid Daily Wave had carried the news of the suicide on January 13, 1903.<sup>40</sup>

(5) Bates probably desired the date on the affidavits changed in order to allow for the death-bed confession he mentions in his book, which has "George declaring on his death bed that he was John Wilkes Booth."<sup>41</sup> There is no evidence of a confession except in Bates' book. He even quoted the Daily Wave on a confession made by George.<sup>42</sup> This was not the truth because the first that the Daily Wave knew of the George-Booth confession was told to them by Harper.<sup>43</sup>

(6) Bates also indicated that George left a note stating that he, "Finis Bates of Memphis, Tennessee, should be notified of his death."<sup>44</sup> There is no record of any such note. Upon reading the newspaper accounts of the suicide in Enid, Bates sent word to the Daily Wave that he was coming to identify the body. This was received as "startling news."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 272. Bryan, The Great American Myth, 347, proves these affidavits were altered.

<sup>40</sup>Ante, 23.

<sup>41</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 272.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 243.

<sup>43</sup>Ante, 25.

<sup>44</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 254.

<sup>45</sup>Ante, 30.

This communication from Bates would not have been startling if there had been a note left to notify him.

Bates obtained for his book four positive statements concerning different burial places of the Booth body. He felt that this was definite proof that the government doubted the identity of the corpse on board the Montauk. (1) General Charles A. Dana stated that the body was "buried near the old jail and a battery of artillery drawn over his grave to obliterate all trace of it."<sup>46</sup> (2) General Lew Wallace, a member of the military court which tried Herold, Mrs. Surratt and conspirators, stated: "to my certain knowledge John Wilkes Booth was buried under a brick pavement in a room of the old penitentiary prison of Washington City."<sup>47</sup> (3) W. P. Wood, a colonel in the Secret Service at the time of the assassination, said that Booth's body "was placed on a boat and carried to an island twenty-seven miles from Washington and buried. The story that it was buried under the flagstone in the district jail was only told to keep the public mind at ease and satisfy public curiosity."<sup>48</sup> (4) E. W. Hillard said that he was "one of the four privates who carried the remains of Booth from the old Capital Prison in Washington to a gunboat, which carried them about ten miles down the Potomac River, when the body was sunk in the river."<sup>49</sup>

Bates contended that these contradictory statements were proof of the error made in the identification of the Booth body. He felt that if the government had been certain of the identification the body would have been placed on exhibition. Actually, this would have been the last thing that

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<sup>46</sup>Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 172.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 177-178.



would have been done. Secretary Stanton was positive in his statement before the Impeachment Investigation Committee when he stated that the secrecy maintained by the government was to prevent rebel rejoicing.<sup>50</sup>

There is no doubt that there was a resemblance between the tintype given to Bates by St. Helen and the corpse. This was by no means conclusive proof, for as F. L. Black, an undertaker, remarked: "I buried a hundred fellows that looked very much like that, back in the early days."<sup>51</sup>

Bates relied most upon the following witnesses for identification: Junius Brutus Booth 3rd., a nephew of John Wilkes; General Albert Pike; a Mr. Grant, whom Bates referred to "as the editor and publisher of the Republican, a daily newspaper of El Reno;"<sup>52</sup> Joseph Jefferson; and Bentley Sage, a palmist. With the exception of Pike and Sage, all of these witnesses based their identifications upon comparisons of the tintype and pictures.

Pike's identification consisted of a story he told in which a stranger walked into a bar room in Fort Worth, Texas where Pike was at the time. Pike looked at him and gasped: "My God, John Wilkes Booth."<sup>53</sup> Overhearing Pike, the stranger turned pale and left the room. The identification presented by Sage, a palmist, was a character reading of the palm

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<sup>50</sup> Ante, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Bryan, The Great American Myth, 351.

<sup>52</sup> Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 284. There was not a paper entitled Republican being published in El Reno at this time. The El Reno Republic was established in 1906, but the publisher was not named Grant. The only publisher or editor in the El Reno area before statehood named Grant was William J. Grant who published the Reno Herald from 1890 to 1891. See Carolyn Foreman, Oklahoma Imprints, 1835-1907: A History of Printing in Oklahoma Before Statehood (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 307.

<sup>53</sup> Bates, Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, 307.

of George. This reading was very general and could have fitted Booth or any number of people. To each of the other three witnesses Bates presented the tintype and asked for an opinion. Grant identified it as a picture of George.<sup>54</sup> Junius Brutus Booth stated: "I recognize the likeness of John Wilkes Booth, . . . but I can also trace a strong family resemblance and a likeness to different members of my family in the said tintype."<sup>55</sup> Joseph Jefferson looked at the picture and remarked: "This is John Wilkes Booth — if John Wilkes Booth was living when this picture was taken!"<sup>56</sup>

The statements made by these witnesses actually proved nothing. Junius Brutus Booth, while he admitted a resemblance, stated that the picture also resembled other members of his family. In reference to his identification, Jefferson made this statement:

He [Bates] showed me a tintype much disfigured and asked me if I did not recognize it as John Wilkes Booth. I told him that it bore a kind of resemblance to him, but that I had not seen Booth since he was nineteen years old, and as the tintype was evidently that of a man of fifty-five or sixty it was quite impossible for me to give him any satisfactory information on the subject — and this is what he calls my 'identification of Booth's remains' — rather weak evidence for such an important case.<sup>57</sup>

Many of the champions of the theory that Booth and George were the same have held that their greatest obstacle was the Bates' book. Of the book, the New York Herald said:

If the style be the man, then one must premise that Mr. Bates' intelligence, attainments and taste, as revealed through this median are not such as would win his case with an impartial jury. The style is at once slipshod and gaudy. . . The story

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 284.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 306-307.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 302.

<sup>57</sup>Joseph Jefferson to Oliver D. Street, Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts, June 10, 1903, as quoted in Wilson, John Wilkes Booth, 232.

Mr. Bates has to tell is one that awakens a distrust more logical than mere prejudice.<sup>58</sup>

In the opinion of George Sands Bryan, the Herald was mild in its criticism. He felt the book was crude to the verge of illiteracy and "marked throughout by wild implausibilities, by ignorance, misstatement, suppression, evasion, and plain disingenuousness."<sup>59</sup>

Despite the Bates book's obvious untruths, its fallacious reasoning, and its poor quality in general, there were some "75,000 copies . . . sold . . ., mainly in the South and Southwest."<sup>60</sup> It was this book, however, that provided the continuing basis for the Enid Booth legend.

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<sup>58</sup>From an unidentified issue of the New York Herald, as quoted in Bryan, The Great American Myth, 333.

<sup>59</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 333.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RECURRING BOOTH LEGEND

By the end of January, 1903 the exhibition of the George body in Enid closed and the Enid Daily Wave dropped the subject.<sup>1</sup> This was easier contemplated than carried out because of the reaction of the public. For example, after the story of George appeared in the newspapers over the country, a rash of articles were published indicating certain knowledge as to whether Booth had died at the Garrett farm or whether he had escaped. From time to time the Daily Wave deemed it necessary to print some of this material.

C. B. Bristol, a St. Louis showman, wrote an article for the St. Louis Republic and accompanied it with a picture of Booth. In his article Bristol did not refer to George or the Enid affair. He did, however, state that he did not believe that Booth was killed, although he had no definite proof except that "I [Bristol] believe that Edwin Booth knew his brother was living when upon his deathbed, he said, 'I wish I could see my brother before I die.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Weekly Times-Journal of Oklahoma City carried an article covering three columns on February 13, 1903 which was headed by the banner, "Still Believes He Was Booth." After printing the story that had taken place in Enid and some of the accounts that had been told there, the article pointed out that from the time Booth escaped until the body was brought to

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<sup>1</sup>Ante, 30.

<sup>2</sup>Enid Daily Wave, February 9, 1903.

Washington not one person saw him that knew him personally. "Those who met the fugitives did not recognize Booth but were informed of his identity either by himself or by Herold. Neither Capt. Doherty nor Boston Corbett nor any of their company knew Booth by sight."<sup>3</sup> It concluded that the man identified aboard the Montauk was not Booth, but that the real Booth had died at Enid.

After the visit of Finis Bates in Enid there was another series of identifications of the mummy. The New York Tribune of June 3, 1903 carried the story that Junius Brutus Booth, nephew of John Wilkes, "has fully identified the remains of the man known as David E. George as his Uncle."<sup>4</sup> Actually Junius Brutus Booth had never seen his uncle and had only remarked that there was a likeness between the mummy and pictures of his uncle. This was evidently a story released by Bates as it also dated George's suicide as January 14, instead of January 13, 1903. The Daily Oklahoman carried the same story and also included the statement that Bates had obtained positive identification of the remains from "Joseph Jefferson, Miss Clara Morris and a score of others known by him in his early days . . . According to Bates, the man who was killed [at the Garrett farm] was named Ruddy."<sup>5</sup> The article was entitled "Dead Man is Booth" and it had the subtitle, "Proof That the Man Who Died at Enid Was the Assassin." Only two days later the Perry Republican carried the same story with this assertion: "It has now been fully developed that the man at Enid was John Wilkes Booth."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The Weekly-Times Journal, Oklahoma City, Territory of Oklahoma, February 13, 1903.

<sup>4</sup>New York Tribune, June 3, 1903.

<sup>5</sup>The Daily Oklahoman, June 3, 1903.

<sup>6</sup>Perry Republican, Perry, Territory of Oklahoma, June 5, 1903.

Along with these stories the Enid Daily Wave carried the statement of Basil Moxley, the aged doorkeeper at Ford's Theater. He had known Booth well and had acted as a pall bearer at the Baltimore burial. Moxley stated: "the man who was brought to Baltimore did not resemble Booth. He had brown hair, while Booth's was jet black. There was also a difference in their general appearance."<sup>7</sup> He made no statement, however, concerning the body at Enid.

In August of 1903 the Daily Wave published the story of what it supposed would be the final disposition of the body:

#### HE WILL BE JARRED

And Exhibited, The Same As Other Oklahoma Fruit It Goes to the World's Fair<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Eugene Watrous who is one of the designate World's Fair Chemists, has been authorized to order a preserving jar large enough to hold a man sitting up right. Just as soon as the large clear plate glass jar arrives Booth will be placed in it, in full dress suit, sitting on a chair. This jar will be filled with the same embalming fluid, used in the preservation of fruit, surrounding the body.

A pair of fresh and beautiful jet black eyes will be provided for Booth from which an automatic wire will extend through the cork of the jar down the back way, under the floor, in the Oklahoma World's Fair building, to a point where a button will be placed. About every fifteen minutes during the fair, or when a large crowd gathers to look at Booth; President Joe Meibergen of the World's Fair Commission will step out with his right foot over the button, making the following remarks, which he has already committed to memory: "Ladies and Gentlemen: You are now gazing on the remains of J. Wilkes Booth, the lawless outlaw who unlawfully assassinated Abraham Lincoln. A man who has died twice, once in Virginia in 1865 and once in Enid, Oklahoma the best town on earth, in January, 1903. My fellow countrymen the death of Booth is still in doubt, while he sits upright before you in a large glass jar, apparently dead, yet he seems to be alive. Watch me -- by a simple motion of my right arm Mr. Booth will wink and throw his eye to right or left as I may throw my arm."

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<sup>7</sup>Enid Daily Wave, June 8, 1903.

<sup>8</sup>St. Louis, Missouri, 1904.

Joe touches the button to suit the direction he wishes to make the eyes turn and the astonished crowds leave the Oklahoma building still in doubt as to the death of J. Wilkes Booth.

It is a great scheme. The Wave had no business to give it away, but the people have a right to know what is going on.<sup>9</sup>

In September, 1903, the Daily Wave reprinted an article from the New York Sun, entitled "Booth Vs. George, Up Again." This account contained the statement of Laura Ida Booth who claimed that George was her father and was none other than John Wilkes Booth. "The John Wilkes Booth who married Laura Ida Booth's mother deserted her soon after his daughter's birth, and has never been heard from since. Her mother who has since died, told her that she was the daughter of Lincoln's assassin."<sup>10</sup> It seemed that Laura Ida Booth was under the impression that George had left an estate of several hundred thousand dollars. She had actually hired a lawyer to look after her inheritance interests. The hope for a large share of the estate probably prompted her to make this statement.

After 1903 the legend gradually faded from the newspapers. In 1907, however, Bates published his Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, Assassin of Abraham Lincoln. This brought about the reprinting of much of the material that had been written at the time of George's death. The Daily Oklahoman opened its account of the Enid suicide in this manner:

During the past four years a dried-up mummy, laid upon a shelf in an undertaking establishment at Enid, has been one of the main curiosities in the entire southwest, simply from the fact that just prior to death the man, whose body is still preserved, claimed to be John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln. Not a day has passed since the death, but from one to a score of persons have called at the morgue to see the mummy, the owner of the undertaking establishment, who embalmed the body, is kept busy relating the story of the dead man to the many visitors from other states who make the trip to Enid purposely

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<sup>9</sup>Enid Daily Wave, August 17, 1903.

<sup>10</sup>Enid Daily Wave, September 19, 1903.

to see for themselves. Many, who knew Booth in his life time and who have seen him both on and off the stage, have called and none has ever denied the resemblance between the mummy and the actor.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of the material published at this time, W. P. Campbell, Custodian of the Oklahoma Historical Society, published an article in Historia for October, 1919. This article was an account of the George suicide and included much of the material in the Bates book. It also included the story of three meetings between Campbell and a stranger, whom Campbell considered to be Booth. With a few additions the same story was republished in Historia for July, 1922 because "so many requests for extra copies [of the October, 1919 issue] coming from every quarter of the known world had exhausted the edition." Later in 1922 Campbell published his entire findings in his book entitled Oklahoma, the Mecca for Men of Mystery -- John Wilkes Booth Escape and Wanderings Until the Final Ending of the Trail by Suicide at Enid, Oklahoma, January 12, 1903.

The first half of Campbell's book was devoted to the story and proof presented by Bates in his book. The concluding half was the story of three meetings that Campbell claimed to have had with Booth. Two of these meetings were in the 1880's and the other just prior to the death of George in 1903. Campbell felt certain that George and Booth were the same individual.

The Campbell volume is full of grammatical errors, proofreading errors and glaring improbabilities. Campbell, like Bates, claimed to have given little attention to the first two meetings between Booth-George and himself. Nor did Campbell have any reason at that time to consider the stranger with whom he visited to be Booth. Yet he remembered minute details for his account initially published in 1919.

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<sup>11</sup>The Daily Oklahoman, March 17, 1907.



The first of the three meetings supposedly took place in Topeka, Kansas, in the middle eighties. When Campbell was passing the Crawford restaurant of that city he noticed a man leaning back in a chair in front of the restaurant. "He had on a neat-fitting suit of black, coat of Prince Albert pattern, and the hat of stetson order, though with a rim somewhat broader than the usual. His hair was jet black, of silky texture, and inclined to curl."<sup>12</sup> Campbell, having decided that the fellow was probably an actor, struck up a conversation. As the conversation came to an end the stranger remarked that he was going to walk down to the new theater, which he pronounced with a very accented long 'A.'<sup>13</sup> As the man walked off, he said:

'I presume we shall meet again -- possibly. . . .'

'I like to meet people,' replied Campbell, 'and never meet anyone without a hope of meeting again. Excuse my proverbial Yankee curiosity in asking your name, and may say, your line?'

'I have not been bold enough to ask your name nor your profession.'

'Campbell,' was the immediate interpose, 'and yours?'

'Let me see,' with a trifle meditative pause, then looking his questioner straight in the eye, 'How does Thomas, or Johnson strike you, with a traveling suit for instance?'

With this the stranger lightly pressed the writer's shoulder, and in a manner that bordered on seeming regret at parting, turned away and leisurely passed inside the restaurant twirling his cane. While there was so much peculiar about the incident, the exact date cannot now be recalled.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>William P. Campbell, Oklahoma, the Mecca for Men of Mystery--John Wilkes Booth, Escape and Wandering Until Final Ending of the Trail by Suicide at Enid, Oklahoma, January 12, 1903 (Oklahoma City: W. P. Campbell, 1922), 35. Hereafter cited as Campbell, Oklahoma, the Mecca for Men of Mystery.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 36.

Several years after this episode, Campbell was riding on a Rock Island train somewhere between Pond Creek and Kingfisher, Oklahoma when a man from another car entered and sat down beside him. There was something about the man that impressed Campbell and gave him the feeling that he had seen him before. This dapper fellow, in gray clothes of business cut and a Scottish plaid cap, had black curving eyebrows, mustache and hair, which recalled to Campbell the incident at Topeka. While they were riding along, a young man entered and sat opposite them. He carried a bundle of show programs. Campbell's seatmate immediately became interested in the bills.

The young man asked him 'Do you belong to the professh?' . . .

The seatmate peered over the edge of the program with a staring frown. 'The pro-FESH!' as if it was the term that piqued. 'No!' and the seatmate hid his ire behind the spread program a moment. Then as if to amend for inadvertent breech, he asked, 'Where do you perform?' The last word after a pause as if trying to coin some word commensurate with 'profesh.'

'Oooo --- let me see,' said the young man, scratching below and behind his right ear. 'We show all over --- everywhere!' 'Oh!' and the young man referred to his memorandum. 'At the El Reno theatre.'

'So! and they have a the-ā-tre at that village,' with a humorous twinkle.<sup>15</sup>

At this point Kingfisher station was reached and Campbell got off the train. The characteristics of the man on the train in addition to his pronunciation of the word "theatre" recalled very vividly to his mind the Topeka incident.

The third meeting between the stranger and Campbell came on January 6, 1903 at the Waukomis Hornet office in the village of Waukomis, Oklahoma. The man, appearing in the same type clothing in which Campbell first saw him, was standing in the door of the office twirling his mustache. As he entered he inquired:

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

'Have I, the pleasure of addressing Mr. Campbell?'

'That's my name,' returned the writer [Campbell] as he reciprocated the gentle grasp of hands.

The newcomer referred hurriedly to a memorandum, then: 'W. P. Campbell?'

'W. P. — that is the name I go by at least' . . .

'Did you ever know anyone to use a name not really his own?'

'I may have known many without knowing it,' was the reply. . . .<sup>16</sup>

The stranger had talked to Campbell only a short while before he indicated that the purpose of his visit was to hire Campbell to write the story of his life: "A story that will startle — that will make the very world set up and take notice."<sup>17</sup> Campbell at once began to try to persuade the man that he could write his own life story much better. As they talked Campbell took casual notes merely out of respect to his visitor. As they talked they decided to take a walk. Upon their return, Campbell began rubbing and shaking his right leg to stimulate circulation.

'Rheumatic?' inquired the stranger.

'No, merely an uneasy feeling caused by a rupture sustained during the rebellion.'

'Oh, I see. I notice it is the right limb,' returned the stranger as he raised his left foot and lifted the pants leg an inch or so as if to indicate that he, too, wore a scar.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the late hour the stranger remarked that he would need to return to Enid. He asked Campbell to visit him there to hear the rest of his story.

As he left he said:

'You are a man; you have enjoyed the best in life, yet tasted of its bitterest dregs, no — not the bitterest — only perhaps that

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 39.

slight potion all men taste. A man -- I may trust you with -- but there has been no secret -- as yet revealed. Remember Saturday; and once again -- good -- no: au revoir.<sup>19</sup>

About a week later James Duffey, a police official in El Reno, brought a picture to Campbell and asked if he had ever seen the man in the picture before. "I surely have," replied Campbell.<sup>20</sup> The picture was of the man who had called on Campbell to write his life story. He had committed suicide in Enid under the name of George.

Campbell presented no proof that the man he had met was Booth, nor was there evidence to prove the person was the same individual at each of the three meetings. Although Campbell agreed with Bates concerning the identity of the corpse, he disagreed with him unintentionally when he mentioned the possibility of a scar on the left leg of the man he had met. Bates had insisted several times in his book that the scar was on the right leg. Campbell also disagreed with Bates on the date of the suicide; Campbell gave the date in the title of his book as January 12, 1903 and Bates had said it was January 14, 1903. Campbell presented the statement that the government was aware of the fact that the man killed in the Garrett barn was not Booth because "of the several hundred thousand dollars reward not one cent of it was ever claimed and much less paid."<sup>21</sup> There is absolutely no basis for this statement as there is a complete record of the investigation of the claims for the rewards and a complete statement of the reward money paid by the government.<sup>22</sup> The Campbell book, like the Bates volume, helped to fire the imagination of the public. And like the Bates account, the Campbell story was basic to the growth of the Enid Booth legend.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>22</sup>Senate Executive Document Number 90, 1st Session, 39th Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 1-21.

Harper's Magazine in 1924 commissioned a reporter, William G. Shepherd, to write the complete story of George-St. Helen. After writing the traditional legend as told in the newspapers, Shepherd visited Memphis, Tennessee where he interviewed Bates (who had the mummy in his garage). Bates told Shepherd the story that St. Helen had told him. Shepherd felt that the Bates story was not entirely incredible and that the government had caused the legend to arise because of its inadequate identification of the Booth body. Shepherd did not doubt the sincerity of Bates. But he did not accept the story because of a difference in the handwriting of Booth and George. Shepherd considered his story complete and entitled it "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape."<sup>23</sup> It served, however, only as a stepping stone in the continuance of the Enid legend.

For several years after the publication of the Shepherd article there occasionally appeared the reprinting of the legend with somewhat unique amendments. In 1925 The Daily Oklahoman carried the traditional story with the following addition:

Blanche Debar Booth, saw her uncle, John Wilkes Booth, many years after he assassinated President Lincoln . . . 'He came to me in St. Louis,' she said. 'I thought he was an imposter even though he recalled many incidents of our common childhood together. But now I am convinced. . . . I should like to see the body at Memphis, Tennessee. I believe it's the body of John Wilkes Booth.'<sup>24</sup>

Early 1926 found an article in the Literary Digest in which "M. W. Payne, of Fayetteville, Tennessee, . . . claims to be the stepson of Booth and declares that Booth died at Enid. . . ."<sup>25</sup> Other than the traditional

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<sup>23</sup>Shepherd, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," Harper's Magazine, CXLIX, 702-704, 716-718.

<sup>24</sup>The Daily Oklahoman, February 24, 1925.

<sup>25</sup>"How Wilkes Booth's Friend Described His Crime," Literary Digest, LXXXVIII (March 6, 1926), 40.

story, this article stated that the body of George had been "exhumed eleven times for examination."<sup>26</sup> This was erroneous as the body was never buried; it was given to Bates, who eventually sold it. Contrary to the Bates story, Payne said "that Booth declared the man killed in Virginia was his cousin, mistaken for him."<sup>27</sup> The Literary Digest carried the story again in December, 1926.<sup>28</sup>

For several years the legend again faded from print. But in 1931 a dramatic article by George Rainey, postmaster at Enid, appeared in The Daily Oklahoman. This article took up about half of an entire page, six columns wide. At the beginning of it were drawings of (1) Lincoln's death; (2) the Garrett barn with Booth leaving; (3) St. Helen confessing to Bates during his illness; (4) George confessing to Mrs. Harper; (5) the death of George; and (6) a picture of Rainey doing research for his article. Rainey, after relating the legend, presented his proof that George was not Booth. His evidence consisted of research on the genealogy of George. He had discovered a granddaughter of George in Mississippi who informed him that "David E. George became involved in trouble, disgraced the family and fled, deserting his wife, her grandmother."<sup>29</sup> On the basis of this information he felt conclusively that George was actually George and not Booth.

In the same year there appeared in Time the story of the examination of the mummy in Chicago by Health Commissioner Herman Bundeson, Dr. Edward Miloslovich, and Dr. Orlando Scott.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>"When Did John Wilkes Booth Die?" Literary Digest, LXXXVIII (December 25, 1926), 40-42.

<sup>29</sup>The Daily Oklahoman, July 12, 1931.

They thumped it, felt it, x-rayed it. Then they gravely nodded their heads and all but announced that the mummy was none other than that of John Wilkes Booth . . . The doctors found: The mummy had a broken leg . . . Its right thumb was distorted . . . Across one eyebrow ran a scar. In the mummy's stomach lay a ring marked 'B'.<sup>30</sup>

Proponents of the George-Booth story looked eagerly on the examination as supporting evidence. But Otto Eisenschiml, an authority on the death of Lincoln and its surrounding mysteries, presented this statement of Mr. Leonarde Keeler and Dr. C. W. Muehlberger, of the Northwestern University Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory, who were present at the examination:

At the time of the examination, the back of the neck of the shriveled and dry brown body showed no gross evidence of scar when examined by the naked eye. . . or in ultra-violet light.<sup>31</sup>

Once again there were conflicting proofs to add to the legend.

As a result of the article in Time, M. A. Dunlap of Ponca City, Oklahoma, wrote a letter to the mayor of Baltimore asking about the Booth body. He "had just received a letter stating that Edwin Booth, famous actor and brother of the assassin, secured permission from the government to disinter the body and then bury it in the family plot."<sup>32</sup> Dunlap therefore reasoned that the mummy examined in Chicago could not have possibly been Booth. While this was but a small and insignificant article, it helped to keep the Enid legend before the public.

In 1938 the Saturday Evening Post published an article entitled, "John Wilkes Booth on Tour," by Alva Johnston. This account told of the Enid legend and continued it through the travels of the mummy. After the George body had been shown at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, it had

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<sup>30</sup>Time, XVIII (December 28, 1931), 10.

<sup>31</sup>Eisenschiml, In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death, 79-81.

<sup>32</sup>Blackwell Morning Tribune, Blackwell, Oklahoma, March 5, 1932.

been turned over without cost to Bates who hired it out from time to time. In 1920 William Evans, a traveling showman, hired the body at the rate of \$1000.00 for every twenty weeks. While enroute to California, Evans and the mummy were in a train wreck and the mummy was stolen. After considerable searching the body was recovered and returned to Bates. Upon Bates' death, Mrs. Bates searched for a buyer and finally sold it to Evans for \$1000.00.<sup>33</sup> In 1928 J. N. Wilkerson, a Kansas City lawyer, joined with Evans and barnstormed the Southwest. They had little luck financially displaying the body and were run out of many towns.<sup>34</sup> As a result, Wilkerson devoted his efforts to trying to prove that George was Booth. His research won him recognition by a number of Lincoln experts. As a result of Wilkerson's studies, Dr. Otto L. Schimdt, then President of the Illinois State Historical Society and the Chicago Historical Society, wrote a modified testimonial in favor of the mummy, saying the subject was of great interest and well worth further investigation.<sup>35</sup> At the writing of the Johnston article, the mummy was in the hands of Joseph B. Harkin who had paid \$5000.00 for it.

As a result of this Saturday Evening Post article, Life carried a full page picture of the mummy in July, 1938. Accompanying the picture was a brief story of the legend and of the bad luck that had come to all of the owners of the mummy. Bates, Evans, Wilkerson and Harkin had all suffered heartbreak, ridicule and financial ruin as a result of owning the mummy.<sup>36</sup> In 1944 Harper's Magazine once again carried the story of the

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<sup>33</sup>Alva Johnston, "John Wilkes Booth on Tour," Saturday Evening Post, XCX (February 19, 1938), 34-35.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>36</sup>Life, V (July 11, 1938), 4-5.



legend but stressed the traditional Booth story.<sup>37</sup> The historian, Stewart H. Holbrook in 1949 mentioned George as one of the "Phonies of the Old West"<sup>38</sup> but did not elaborate except to say that George had claimed to be Booth.

Most of the articles that have been written concerning the suicide of George have been insignificant and most of them have been reprints of material written at the time of his death. They have, however, kept the legend alive and before the public.

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<sup>37</sup>D. Clark, "The Last Booth's Body," Harper's Magazine, XXXXVIII (February, 1944), 218.

<sup>38</sup>Stewart H. Holbrook, "Phonies of the Old West," American Mercury, LXVIII (February, 1944), 230-235.

## CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the identification of the Booth corpse in 1865 was inadequate. Perhaps war-time secrecy made it necessary to keep the identification private. Perhaps the possibility of making Booth a martyr made it necessary to keep the burial place a secret. Perhaps if pictures of the corpse had been taken the identification would have been more difficult. But there were two errors that could have been avoided. First, even though the identification needed to be private, some of Booth's family could have been present. Second, the bungled identification could have been rectified with the exhumation of the body in 1869.

In view of the secrecy and mystery surrounding the identification and burial of the body, legends were inevitable. The public felt that the government identification was false because the procedure and findings had not been made public and because the body had disappeared from the Montauk without an official statement as to its disposition. As the story of the chase of Booth came to be told, the fact came to the public's attention that Booth had known in advance of the coming of the Federal troops and had time to escape. There was never any question that Booth and Herold left the Garrett farm and hid in the woods. This question, however, remained unanswered ---- was it Booth who returned with Herold to the farm that night? It is this loophole that has continued to provide credibility to the Enid Booth legend.

If Booth then did not return to the farm, who did? Undeniably the man resembled Booth. He was crippled. And he carried the diary and other

important papers of Booth. The Enid legend provided an answer to each of these queries except as to why the man in the barn was crippled. The "Ruddy" mentioned in the legend is never referred to as being even slightly crippled.

Many people felt that George could have been Booth. However, some doubted that George was St. Helen. The only proof that George and St. Helen were the same was in the identification made by Bates. Bates instantly recognized George as St. Helen despite the fact that he had not seen him for thirty-five years and that the corpse was quite bloated with poison. Both Penniman and Ryan, undertakers in Enid who witnessed the identification, expressed doubt as to the validity of Bates' identification. Ryan expressed his doubt immediately and Penniman afterwards when Bates asked him to "do all [he] could to make the body look like the picture [tintype of St Helen] and so we combed the hair and mustache accordingly."<sup>1</sup>

Bates, in his effort to prove that George was Booth, did considerable damage to the legend when he wrote his book. While the book created more interest in the legend, it also was full of obvious errors and false testimony. Because the Bates book was so completely inadequate, it caused much doubt to be placed on the truth of the other stories told at Enid.

In an effort to prove or disprove the legend, a comparison of the handwriting of George and Booth was made. The experts differed so widely in their opinions that nothing definite could be determined. The boot left at the home of Dr. Mudd was found to fit the foot of the mummy. This, however, was not important, for the amount of shrinkage of the boot and the foot could not be determined. Most of the identifying marks of Booth

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan, The Great American Myth, 351.

have been found on the mummy; even a ring with the initial "B" was found in its stomach. However, affirmative proof of the legend is to no avail. Until it can be proved conclusively that the man who died at Garrett's farm was not Booth, the Enid Booth legend will continue.

A coincidence not generally included in the Enid Booth legend was that George, claiming to be Booth as late as 1903, and Corbett, claiming to have killed Booth in 1865, died within a few years of each other in the small town of Enid, Territory of Oklahoma, where neither had relatives nor close friends!<sup>2</sup>

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Although none of the bequests in these wills were valid, they show something of the character of George. They were also valuable in providing leads as to George's friends.

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A complete record of the testimony at the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson is given here. Much of this testimony concerns the possibility of Johnson's having been a part of the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln. This was a most important source.

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Although M. A. Dunlap's reasoning in his article, "John Wilkes Booth, Assassin of President Lincoln Did Not Visit Texas or Oklahoma," is fallacious, this account was a step in establishing the trend of the recurring Enid legend.

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Scattered issues of this newspaper from 1903 to 1931 were useful in tracing the reappearance of the Enid legend.

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The New York Times was an important source in locating the beginnings of the legends. It carried complete accounts of the chase of Booth. When an official statement of the burial was not issued by the government, it published statements of various people who differed in opinions as to where the burial took place. It also published the story of the removal of the Booth body to Baltimore.

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This article is devoted to men who died in the trans-Mississippi West after purporting to be someone famous. Holbrook refers to George as one of these. This is typical of the accounts perpetuating the Enid Booth legend.

"How Wilkes Booth's Friend Described His Crime," Literary Digest, LXXXVIII (March 6, 1926), 40-41.

This is an article concerning M. W. Payne, who claimed to be a stepson of Booth. This account confirms the theory that Booth was killed at Enid, but disagrees otherwise with the Enid legend.

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The content and form have been checked and approved by the author and thesis adviser. The Graduate School Office assumes no responsibility for errors either in form or content. The copies are sent to the bindery just as they are approved by the author and faculty adviser.

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