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THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Conspiracy

THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
The Conspiracy

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This paper is presented to the Mathematics Department of Eastern Illinois State College in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science in Education. It was written originally as a term paper for Professor Coleman in Social Science 550 during the summer of 1955.

by

Patricia Ann Tucker, B. S. in Ed.

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EASTERN ILLINOIS STATE COLLEGE

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Approved by:

A. Coleman

Date:

26 June 1957

# THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

## The Conspiracy

### Statement of purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the conspiracy which first advocated the abduction and then, for its chief action, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and to give a brief character sketch of the individuals involved in the conspiracy.

### Outline

#### I. Plan for abduction

##### A. Origination of idea

##### 1. Booth as leader

a. Description of physical appearance

b. Attended St. Timothy's Hall

c. Influence of Know-Nothing party

##### 2. Meeting held in Baltimore

a. In late August or early September, 1864

b. At Barnum's City Hotel

##### 3. Details of main plan

a. To seize Lincoln and carry him to Richmond

b. Exchange of prisoners offered

##### B. Different plans formulated

1. Seizure in theater

2. Seizure on one of Lincoln's trips

3. Preparation of hiding place in city

4. Exploration of routes to the South

## II. Preparation for abduction by Booth

### A. Trip to Canada

1. Bought bill of exchange at bank
2. No evidence Confederacy involved

### B. First visit to George and Charles Co., Md. in October, 1864.

1. Pretence of buying land
2. Location of course for trip to Richmond
3. Furnishing of boat by Atzerodt

### C. Second visit to Charles Co., November, 1864

1. Met Dr. Mudd
2. Inquisitive on North-South relations

### D. Final Arrangements

1. On December 23 met John Surratt
2. Gets room at Mrs. Surratt's home on Jan. 1
3. Sees Chester in New York
4. Entrance of David Herold into band
5. Paine added to group in February

## III. Attempt at Abduction

### A. First attempt scheduled for January, 1865

### B. Main attempt to be in March, 1865

1. Lincoln to attend play at Soldiers' Home
2. Did not attend
3. Probably Chase went instead

### C. Conspirators disband

## IV. Plans for assassination

### A. Origination of idea

1. Lee surrendered on April 9
2. Shortly thereafter Booth desires to kill Lincoln

- B. Several ideas concerning Booth's reasons
  - 1. John Y. Beall
  - 2. Booth's statement from diary
  - 3. Believed acting career ended
  - 4. Desire to insure remembrance
- V. Preparations for assassination
  - A. Booth in New York on April 7
  - B. Booth's activities on April 11
    - 1. Visits Mrs. Surratt
      - a. Some facts concerning her life
      - b. Mrs. Surratt goes to Surrattsville
    - 2. Hears Lincoln speak
  - C. Activities of Booth on April 13
    - 1. Visits Grover's Theatre
    - 2. Visits Billiard Parlor on E Street
  - D. Activities of Booth on April 14
    - 1. Seen at Grover's Theatre
    - 2. Visited Ford's Theatre
    - 3. Hired mare at livery stable
    - 4. Met Thomas B. Florence on street
    - 5. Calls at Mrs. Surratt's
    - 6. Visited Ford's Theatre again
    - 7. Went to saloon near theater
    - 8. Seen in front of Grover's
    - 9. Gives Matthews a statement
    - 10. Fixes box at Ford's
      - a. Preparations
      - b. Preparations were unnecessary
      - c. Spangler suspected

11. Meeting at Herndon House
12. Browning finds note at Kirkwood House
- C. Part of plan completed
  1. Grant leaves city
    - a. Wished to join children
    - b. Mrs. Grant's reasons
      - (1.) Scenes caused by Mrs. Lincoln
      - (2.) Had been overlooked by Mrs. Lincoln
  2. Atzerodt runs
    - a. Rents room at Kirkwood House
    - b. Known for cowardice
    - c. Leaves without making an attempt
  3. Payne wounds Seward
    - a. Takes medicine to Seward
    - b. Wounds five at the house
    - c. Escapes from house
  4. Booth kills Lincoln
    - a. President arrives
    - b. Booth appears
    - c. Gets help from Spangler and Peanut John
    - d. Sneaks his way to the box
    - e. Shoots Lincoln

## THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

### The Conspiracy

In April, 1863 John Wilkes Booth played his first engagement in Washington City at Grover's Theatre.<sup>1</sup> This city was to be the theater of John Wilkes Booth's final attempt to achieve everlasting remembrance in the pages of history.<sup>2</sup> John was of medium height, well-proportioned, and had classic features, wavy jet-black hair, large, expressive eyes and other personal characteristics which helped him toward success in his profession. According to John T. Ford of the Ford's Theater, "Doubtless he would have made the greatest actor of his time had he lived."<sup>3</sup>

"John Wilkes Booth was born on May 10th, 1838, three miles east of Belair, county-town of Harford County, Maryland."<sup>4</sup> He was the next to the youngest member of the family of a famous English tragedian, Junius Brutus Booth. John attended an Episcopalian military academy, St. Timothy's Hall, at Catonsville. Here most of the cadets were from the South,

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<sup>1</sup> George S. Bryan, The Great American Myth (New York, 1940), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Bishop, The Day Lincoln Was Shot (New York, 1955), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 16.



with all of Booth's intimate associates being Southerners.<sup>5</sup>

His associations at St. Timothy's Hall had quickened his youthful prejudice for the South's 'peculiar system' and he was becoming increasingly fanatical about Southern 'rights.'<sup>6</sup>

During this period of his life, public meetings were being held by the Know-Nothing party, and John Booth was present at one at which Henry Winter Davis, later a personal opponent of Lincoln, was the speaker. "Under such leadership, there can be no doubt that young John Booth, with his prepossessions and his small experience of the great world, was deeply influenced by the tenets and rites of the Know-Nothings."<sup>7</sup> He fancied himself as a true Southerner, taking every Confederate reverse as a personal loss.

With this type of background, it is not difficult to understand his arranging a meeting with two of his Maryland schoolmates, Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin, who were also Confederate sympathizers. Samuel Arnold had been a Confederate soldier, and while in the army had become ill and was sent home. After recuperating from that long illness he stayed in Baltimore with his people instead of returning to the service. He tried to find work of a clerical nature, but being unsuccessful in finding a position of this type, he did

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<sup>5</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

part time work for his brother who was a farmer near Hookstown.<sup>8</sup> O'Laughlin, "a small quiet, rather delicate-looking young man, with thick black hair, heavy black moustache, a small black imperial, and nervous black eyes that often looked sad,"<sup>9</sup> had also been in the Confederate army. He had taken the oath of allegiance in June, 1863, and since that time he had been working in the feed and produce business in Baltimore and Washington with his brother, William.<sup>10</sup> The meeting of these three men which took place in late August or early in September of 1864 was held at Barnum's City Hotel in Baltimore. Here they discussed the war and the number of Southern prisoners being held in the prison camps of the North. At this time "John unfolded a stupendous scheme."<sup>11</sup>

"The basic idea was to seize the President, convey him to Richmond, and thus to force a general exchange of prisoners. Exchange of Confederate prisoners had been discontinued by the North and the man-power of the South had thus been considerably reduced."<sup>12</sup> There have been many different plans formulated concerning the method of capture to be followed. According to Arnold, Booth desired to abduct Lincoln from the midst of a theatrical audience and was to seize the President

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<sup>8</sup> Clara E. Laughlin, The Death of Lincoln (New York, 1909), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 117.

himself. Arnold was to help lower Lincoln to the stage from his box and carry him to a waiting conveyance.<sup>13</sup>

Another plan was based on the fact that the President often went about Washington with only one guard, and occasionally unattended. This would make it easy for a few men to seize him on one of these trips, perhaps on one of his visits to the Soldiers' Home. There was a third plan considered which provided a place to imprison the President until it would be safe to move him to Richmond. The hiding place was "an old house on Seventeenth Street near the confluence of the Tyber and Potomac rivers. This house, built in 1820, had a cellar, reached by a trapdoor, which was once used for a slave prison."<sup>14</sup>

According to Bishop's The Day Lincoln Was Shot, Booth explored the exits from Washington in the late autumn. There were four ways out of the city which could be taken to reach the Southern states. The route chosen was one that "lay across the Navy Yard Bridge at the foot of Eleventh Street."<sup>15</sup>

In October, 1864, John Booth was in Canada. His being in Montreal was established by the fact that "on the twenty-seventh he bought at the Ontario Bank of Montreal a bill of exchange on Messrs. Glyn. Mills and Co., London, England, for sixty-one pounds twelve shillings and ten pence sterling. This left him a balance of four hundred and fifty-five dollars in the

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<sup>13</sup> Otto Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? (Boston, 1937), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Bishop, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

bank, where he kept a small account. He told the teller of the Ontario Bank when he bought the bill of exchange, that he was going to run the blockade. He never ran it, the bill of exchange was found on him when he died, just six months later."<sup>16</sup> He knew many of the prominent Southerners who were known as the "Canada Cabinet" of the Confederacy, but there is no evidence that any member of this group had anything to do with a plot against Lincoln.<sup>17</sup>

In October, 1864, Booth visited Prince George and Charles counties, Maryland supposedly for the purpose of buying lands and purchasing a riding horse. He had a letter of introduction from "P. C. Martin, a Baltimore liquor dealer"<sup>18</sup> to Dr. William Queen, a prominent resident in the upper part of Charles County. Since many of the residents in that neighborhood were Southern sympathizers, he mentioned the abduction plan. At that time it was considered a legitimate undertaking in time of war by many respectable gentlemen. During this trip, Booth chose a road over which it was proposed to conduct Lincoln after he was captured. The route chosen was one between Richmond and Washington which was being used by spies and contrabandists. "It ran a roundabout course through Southern Maryland, across the Potomac in the vicinity of Port Tobacco Creek, or Pope's Creek, and thence to Richmond, crossing the Rappahannock at

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<sup>16</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 104.

Port Conway and Port Royal."<sup>19</sup> This seemed to be a route over which the abducted President could be carried without detection.

The underground route on the Maryland side ended at Port Tobacco Creek, and this was where Booth met George A. Atzerodt.<sup>20</sup> He was a German-American, who was sullen, shifty-eyed and had been carrying "spies, smugglers and couriers across to the Confederate shore of Virginia."<sup>21</sup> Booth offered Atzerodt gold, and the German provided a boat capable of carrying at least fifteen. The boat was "a large flat-bottomed bateau, painted lead-color in order that it might the more easily escape detention"<sup>22</sup> in its trip across to Virginia.

In November, 1864, during Booth's second visit to Charles County, he met Dr. Samuel A. Mudd at St. Mary's Catholic Church, near Bryantown. John Booth was introduced to Dr. Mudd by a son-in-law of Dr. Queen, John C. Thompson. Booth said he wished to purchase a riding horse and inquired whether Dr. Mudd knew of one for sale. Dr. Mudd replied that a neighbor of his, George Gardiner, had one, and he offered to take Booth to see about making a purchase. John had supper at the Mudd Home, and after conversing until bedtime, he stayed there that night. John said he wished a good driving-horse since he wanted to go about the country in a buggy and look at land. Since, Gardiner

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<sup>19</sup> Victor Louis Mason, "Four Lincoln Conspiracies," *The Century Magazine*, (v. 51; April, 1896), p. 893.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Millard, "America's Greatest Unsolved Murder," True, (February, 1953), p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Mason, op. cit., p. 894.

had no horse for sale suitable for driving, John purchased a saddle horse.<sup>23</sup> While at the Mudd home Booth asked many questions concerning the political sentiments of the people and the contraband trade that existed between the North and the South. His chief interest was the country and roads of the section.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Mudd's next meeting with Booth was an accidental meeting in front of one of the hotels on Pennsylvania Avenue on the evening of December 23, 1864. At this time Booth pressed Dr. Mudd into introducing him to John Harrison Surratt. Surratt's family had moved from Charles County to Washington, and Dr. Mudd told Booth that he did not know where the Surratts lived in Washington.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Mudd testified on August 28, 1865, as follows:

Booth, on that occasion, desired me to give him an introduction to Surratt, from whom he said he wished to obtain a knowledge of the country around Washington, in order to be able to select a good locality for a country residence. He had the number, street, and name of John Surratt written on a card, saying to comply with his request would not detain me over five minutes. (At the time I was not aware that Surratt was a resident to Washington.) I declined at first, stating I was with a relative and friend from the country and was expecting some friends over from Baltimore, who intended going down with me to spend Christmas, and was by appointment expected to be at the Pennsylvania House by a certain hour-- eight o'clock. We started down one street, and then up another, and had not gone far when we met Surratt and Weichmann.

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<sup>23</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Mason, op. cit., p. 894.

<sup>25</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

Introductions took place, and we turned back in the direction of the hotel. Arriving there, Booth insisted on our going to his room and taking something to drink with him, which I declined for reasons above mentioned; but finding that Weichmann and Surratt, were disposed to accept, I yielded, remarking I could not remain many minutes. After arriving in the room, I took the first opportunity presented to apologize to Surratt for having introduced to him Booth--a man I knew so little concerning.<sup>26</sup>

John Surratt was the hardest of the conspirators to handle, but he was the closest to an ideal conspirator that Booth found. "John was young, handsome, alert, devoted to the Confederacy and familiar with the backroads through the Virginia wilderness. But John Surratt was no idol-worshiper."<sup>27</sup> John Wilkes Booth came to the Surratt household early in January, 1865. John Surratt had been working for the Adams Express Company since the twenty-ninth of December, and on January 14, Surratt gave up his job there and devoted his time to the abduction of the President.<sup>28</sup>

About this time, probably in January, Booth made his attempt to persuade S. K. Chester, an actor who had been a member of the Baltimore Museum's stock company in 1855-1856, to join with him in the conspiracy. Booth called at the home of his friend on Grove Street in New York. "Since their previous meeting (in November), Booth had written several

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<sup>26</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., pp. 215-216.

<sup>27</sup> Millard, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 32.

letters telling of the profits to be made through deals in farm lands in Lower Maryland and urging Chester to invest."<sup>29</sup> Chester asked Booth if the abduction plot was part of the deal he had been writing about and after receiving an affirmative answer, Chester refused to become a member of the group. This did not stop Booth; he kept on writing to Chester and at one time sent \$50 telling Chester to come to Washington.<sup>30</sup>

After the attempt to gain Chester's support in his plan failed, David Herold was added to the list of conspirators. He had been a druggist's helper, but he was seeking employment when Booth found him. Booth chose Davey Herold since he had the "blind, unquestioning loyalty and worship his ego craved. If he needed a logical reason for taking Herold into his plot, it was because the boy loved to hunt and knew the back trails and rabbit-runs of the country below Washington as no casual traveler could."<sup>31</sup>

In the second week of February, John Wilkes Booth saw Lewis Thornton Powell in Baltimore lounging on a street corner. Booth bought Powell a suit of clothes, and that was all it took to add a new conspirator.<sup>32</sup> Powell was the son of the Reverend George C. Powell, a Baptist minister from Florida. At the outbreak of the war, when Powell was sixteen

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<sup>29</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Millard, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Bishop, op. cit., p. 78.



years old he and his two brothers enlisted in the Confederate army.<sup>33</sup>

Powell changed his name to Lewis Paine, and he was known by this name until he died. There are two spellings of his name which are used interchangeably, Paine and Payne. He was big, strong, stupid, and had "thick jet black hair, a clean, handsome face, and the muscles of a circus strong man."<sup>34</sup> In early years, Paine had seen Booth perform on the stage in the South and had gone backstage to meet the star. The courtly manners of Booth and his graciousness were remembered by Paine for many years. Paine boasted that during the war, he never wounded a Union soldier since he claimed he either killed or missed. His value for human life is shown by the fact that he displayed the skull of a Union soldier which he used for an ash tray. "Paine fought again at Gettysburg, was wounded and taken prisoner."<sup>35</sup> He was assigned as a male nurse in a Union hospital, but he escaped from there and moved North to Baltimore where Booth found him.<sup>36</sup>

According to Chester's testimony in the conspiracy trial the first attempt to capture Lincoln was scheduled for January, 1865. It has been announced that the President would attend Ford's Theatre to see a play about the Kentish revolution,

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33 Bishop, op. cit., p. 77.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

"Jack Cade", starring Edwin Forrest.<sup>37</sup> It was to be Chester's job to shut off the gas in the playhouse extinguishing every light in the theater.<sup>38</sup> Since Chester refused to join in the abduction plans, this action then was to fall to Surratt. After shutting off the gas valve, located under the stage of Ford's Theater, he was to come up onstage and wait for Booth. Booth was to have been in Boxes 7 and 8 forcing the President to be bound and gagged. Then, Lincoln was to be lowered to the stage and rushed to the alley where a conveyance would be waiting. "On the far side of the Navy Yard Bridge, they would pick up the first of Herold's team relays, and head for Port Tobacco, twenty-nine miles away."<sup>39</sup>

To strengthen Chester's statement, further indications that there was such a plan comes from a man by the name of Eddie Martin. Martin claimed that he had paid Atzerodt to cross the Potomac and was anxious to cross by the first boat. He did not think that Atzerodt was going to give him the opportunity of an early crossing, even though he was nearly certain a boat was to leave soon. Atzerodt explained, according to Martin, that he was waiting for a large party scheduled to cross and that this party had relays of horses on the road between Port Tobacco and Washington.<sup>40</sup> Nothing came of this plan, with no attempt at abduction being made.

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37 Bishop, op. cit., p. 70.

38 Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 50.

39 Bishop, op. cit., p. 75.

40 Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 51.

During the week of March 18th, J. W. Walleck and E. L. Davenport, leessees of the Washington Theatre, arranged to give an afternoon performance of Tom Taylor's "Still Waters Run Deep" at the Soldiers' Home. Since Booth was familiar with the gossip of the local theatrical people, he learned that Lincoln intended to be present. A special meeting of the conspirators was called. According to Arnold, the meeting was held on March 15th at Gautier's saloon-restaurant which was located on Pennsylvania Avenue.<sup>41</sup> It was Booth's plan to lie in wait for the President's carriage as it was returning from the Home, overpower the driver and then drive the captured "toward the Potomac at Nanjemoy Creek; there on the waiting boat secured by Atzerodt, he was to be ferried across to Virginia and hurried to Richmond."<sup>42</sup> Since John Surratt was a confederate runner who had taken dispatches to boats on the Potomac, it was planned that he would pilot Lincoln's carriage across the Eastern Branch, through Prince George's and Charles Counties over roads which he had traveled so often as a runner. "He had already left with John M. Lloyd at the Surrattsville house, two carbines, ammunition, a monkey wrench, and twenty feet of rope."<sup>43</sup>

On the day of the performance, Booth, Surratt, Paine, Arnold, O'Laughlin, Atzerodt, and Herold, "all ardent Confederate sympathizers, armed to the teeth and mounted on horseback,

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<sup>41</sup> Bryan, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Wilson, John Wilkes Booth (Boston, 1929), p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

rode out in the direction of the Soldiers' Home with the fell purpose of capturing the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln."<sup>44</sup> The plot failed because Lincoln did not go out on the Seventh Street Road as expected, but it was believed by the conspirators that the passenger in Lincoln's carriage was Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase. At this point, disappointed and disgusted, the conspirators disbanded with Surratt going to Richmond.<sup>45</sup> Arnold returned to Baltimore and applied for a clerkship in the store of a sutler, John W. Warton, outside Fortress Monroe. O'Laughlin also went to Baltimore and while living with his brother-in-law, P. H. Maulsby, worked for his brother, as he had before he became associated with Booth.<sup>46</sup> Paine, Herold and Atzerodt stayed in Washington and waited for further developments concerning the completion of Booth's plans.<sup>47</sup>

After the conspirators disbanded, for several weeks no further plans were made concerning the abduction of Lincoln. Then Lee surrendered at Appomattox on April 9th.<sup>48</sup> After this, Booth could see that the South now had nothing to gain by his abducting the President. Now he wanted to kill Lincoln, not to aid the South, but as a matter of revenge to satisfy his own personal feelings. He knew that "the killing must be

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<sup>44</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>45</sup> Mason, op. cit., p. 897.

<sup>46</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 897.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

done spectacularly, in a theater and while a performance was going on."<sup>49</sup>

There have been several theories offered as to why Booth wanted to kill Lincoln. One such theory entertains the idea that Lincoln promised Booth that he would save the life of a personal friend of his, John Y. Beall, and then Lincoln did nothing to aid Beall. It is now known that Booth had never met Beall, and the whole story was a complete fabrication. Booth in his diary wrote, "I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone."<sup>50</sup>

"A tenuous assumption is that Booth, knowing his voice was gone and his acting career was over, killed Lincoln merely to win fame, inasmuch as fame upon the stage was unattainable. Booth, as we have seen, had won fame upon the stage."<sup>51</sup>

It is possible that the key to the whole situation might be buried in the remembrances of the friends of his youth. According to some of his childhood friends, "there was but one thing about him, one strain in him, that his mates remembered as seeming different and peculiar. When they would discuss cherished ambitions--how they dreamed of outshining Reverdy Johnson, perhaps, or Webster, or some other distinguished American--John seemed to them to accent notoriety."<sup>52</sup> It did not matter what the deed was to be or how improbable it

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49 Eisenschiml, op. cit., pp. 377-378.

50 Bryan, op. cit., p. 373.

51 Ibid., p. 389.

52 Ibid., p. 81.

sounded, "he thought of doing something that by its sheer impact must enforce recognition and insure remembrance."<sup>53</sup>

Whatever the reason for Booth's actions, we find that after his decision to assassinate, he began to plan the event wholeheartedly. Booth was in New York on Friday, April 7, at the "House of Lords" and was seen then by Samuel Chester for the last time. At this time, John told Chester that he "had had 'an excellent chance to kill the President if I had wished'"<sup>54</sup> on his inauguration day. This statement by Booth seems to signify that he had not planned to kill Lincoln from the very beginning, but that the idea of assassination was thought of only a short time before the actual deed. Booth returned to Washington on April the eight, and on Monday night he called at Mrs. Surratt's boarding house.<sup>55</sup>

"Mary Eugenia Jenkins Surratt was born about 1817, near Waterloo, on Calvert's manor, in Prince George's County, Maryland. Her father died when she was quite young."<sup>56</sup> She attended a Catholic school in Alexandria, and after returning to her mother's home, she married John H. Surratt. They lived on a farm in Maryland where he established a tavern. A post office was opened there with Surratt being appointed postmaster. Surrattsville, as the place was called, did not afford

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53 Bryan, op. cit., p. 81.

54 Laughlin, op. cit., p. 59.

55 Ibid., p. 60.

56 Moore, op. cit., p. 4.

a living for the family after Surratt died, and Mrs. Surratt moved to Washington and established a boarding-house there in order to support her family. She rented the tavern and the rest of the farm to John M. Lloyd.<sup>57</sup> "One of her earliest and steadiest boarders was a former theological student named Louis J. Wiechmann. He was a college mate of John Harrison Surratt, Jr."<sup>58</sup>

On the Tuesday previous to the assassination, that is, April 11, Mrs. Surratt desired to go to Surrattsville to see a Mr. Northey about some money he owed her.<sup>59</sup> Northey had purchased seventy-five acres of land from Mrs. Surratt's husband some years previously, and he still owed part of the money.<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Surratt asked Weichmann to drive her there if he could be excused from his work at the War Department. On Mrs. Surratt's suggestion, he went to Booth at the National Hotel to ask for his horse and buggy. Booth had sold his, but he did give Weichmann ten dollars for the hire of one.<sup>61</sup> Weichmann drove Mrs. Surratt to her destination and "after Mr. Northey had been seen and arrangements made with him they started cityward and reached home about six o'clock."<sup>62</sup> According to Weichmann's testimony, "Mrs. Surratt was never

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<sup>57</sup> Moore, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

<sup>58</sup> Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>59</sup> Harris, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>60</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

told that Booth had given Weichmann ten dollars to hire the buggy for her first visit to Surrattsville."<sup>63</sup>

On the evening of April 11, Lincoln said a few words to a group gathered on the White House grounds to salute him. It is believed that Booth and Payne were members of this group. As they were leaving "Booth muttered to Payne (according to Major Eckert, then assistant Secretary of War, who interviewed the imprisoned Payne) 'This is the last speech he will ever make.'"<sup>64</sup>

On the afternoon of April 13, Booth visited Grover's Theatre, and inquired whether President Lincoln would be invited to the presentation of the play to be held there on the following evening.<sup>65</sup> The anniversary of the fall of Sumter was to be celebrated on Friday, April 14, and Acting Manager C. D. Hess told Booth that Lincoln was to be invited. After finding out that the President was expected to attend Grover's Theatre Friday evening, Booth went to the billiard parlor on E Street. About 7 o'clock he asked John Deery to go to the box-office of Grover's Theatre and get him a box for Friday night. According to Leonard Grover, owner of the theater, Deery said he did as he was requested, and "if Mr. Lincoln had visited my theater that night, Wilkes Booth would have had the adjoining box."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>65</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Grover, "Lincoln's Interest in the Theater," Century, (v. 77; April, 1908), p. 949.



It is not known where Booth was on the evening of the 13th. He had not been seen at the National Hotel after Thursday noon, and after he had made the two stops mentioned in the preceding paragraph, there is no trace of him until about noon on Friday.<sup>67</sup> At that time he was seen at Grover's Theatre by Helen P. Moss, a sister-in-law of C. D. Hess. "It has been surmised that John at this time learned that the Lincolns would be unable to attend the evening's performance of 'Aladdin.'"<sup>68</sup>

The box at Grover's Theatre would be used by Tad Lincoln to entertain a party of his friends.<sup>69</sup> While the Cabinet meeting was in session a messenger from the White House was sent to Ford's Theatre with word that the Lincolns, accompanied by General and Mrs. Grant, would be occupying the state box that night. The play to be presented was Tom Taylor's "Our American Cousin." Laura Keane first produced the play in New York in 1858. It had been presented four times during her engagement at the Washington Theatre from February 1st to 27th, 1864, and it was said that Lincoln had seen one of these performances.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, in keeping with the festive air, Lincoln planned to attend the play on this evening.

During the day, Booth went to Ford's Theatre to get his mail. "Years later Harry Ford admitted that he then told

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<sup>67</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>69</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>70</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 150.

Booth that the President and General Grant would be at the theater; and to tease John, he added that Davis and Lee would also be there in another box--and in irons."<sup>71</sup>

He left the theater and was seen at the corner of Tenth and E by James R. Ford, business manager of the theater. He walked to the livery stable of James W. Pumphrey which was located on C Street at the rear of the National Hotel. There he rented a saddle horse and asked that it be ready at about four o'clock. He then walked "down Pennsylvania Avenue to Willard's,"<sup>72</sup> a hotel located between Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets.

It was rumored that Booth met Thomas B. Florence, the editor of the "Constitutional Union" at some time that day on Pennsylvania Avenue. Booth is supposed to have told him that he might be going to Canada since several Canadian managers were offering him engagements. "If such a meeting took place, it must have been as John was going to Willard's, or between that time and about half-past two, when he made a brief call at Mrs. Surratt's."<sup>73</sup>

On April 12, 1865, Mrs. Surratt received a letter from George H. Calvert, Jr. The body of the letter is as follows:

During a late visit to the lower portion of the county, I ascertained of the willingness of Mr. Northey to settle with you, and desire to call your attention to the fact, in urging the settlement of the claim of my late father's

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71 Bryan, op. cit., p. 152.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 153.

estate. However unpleasant, I must insist upon closing up this matter, as it is imperative, in an early settlement of the estate, which is necessary.

You will, therefore, please inform me at your earliest convenience, as to how and when you will be able to pay the balance remaining due on the land purchased by your late husband.<sup>74</sup>

Because of this letter, she asked Weichmann at about two o'clock to drive her to Surrattsville again, and he was very agreeable. Booth arrived at the boarding-house just as they were ready to leave, and Mrs. Surratt agreed to take a small package of Booth's with her.<sup>75</sup> While in Surrattsville she wrote a letter to John Northey and gave it to Mr. B. F. Gwynn who was to deliver it to Northey.

The note said:

I have this day received a letter from Mr. Calvert, intimating that either you or your friend have represented to him that I am not willing to settle with you for the land.

You know that I am ready, and have been waiting for the last two years and now, if you do not come within the next ten days, I will settle with Mr. Calvert, and bring suit against you immediately.

Mr. Calvert will give you a deed on receiving payment.<sup>76</sup>

These letters were presented to show that Mrs. Surratt had legitimate reasons of her own for going to Surrattsville that day. Those who wished to prove her guilty of being an

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<sup>74</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>75</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 323.

active conspirator gave the real reason for her trip as being to carry "field-glasses for Booth, and to tell the drunken Lloyd to have the carbines ready."<sup>77</sup>

Whatever Mrs. Surratt's position, innocent or guilty, she did take part in the conspiracy. Whether her actions were intentional or not, "three circumstances constituted the part played by Mrs. Surratt in the conspiracy: her acquaintance with Booth, the messages to Lloyd on the eleventh and the fourteenth of April, and her declaration that she did not recognize Payne on the night of April 17."<sup>78</sup>

A short time after leaving Mrs. Surratt's boarding-house, John went to Ford's theater. Members of its staff were busily preparing for the evening's entertainment. Henry Ford and Raybold, the upholsterer, were decorating the "state box" with flags. Edman Spangler, William Ferguson, and Maddox, a property man, were all working in the theater. Booth accompanied the latter two men to the Star, an adjoining saloon operated by Peter Taltavull. After drinking a glass of ale there, he went to James Pumphrey's livery stable to try out the "mare--a small, trim animal with black mane and tail"<sup>79</sup> which he had rented earlier.

At this time Booth said he was going to Grover's and he was seen with Maddox in front of the theater by James P. Ferguson

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<sup>77</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 323.

<sup>78</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>79</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 154.

who kept a saloon on the northern side of Ford's. They were standing beside the mare which Booth had rented from Pumphrey, and in a short time Booth mounted and rode toward Pennsylvania Avenue. "He rode along the avenue in the direction of the Treasury building and at the triangular inclosure between Thirteenth and Fourteenth he saw John Matthews"<sup>81</sup> out for a walk. At this time he had already written a letter explaining how he had long tried to capture the President<sup>82</sup> and giving his reasons for wanting to commit the murder.<sup>83</sup> He signed the letter, "Men who love their country better than gold or life, J. W. Booth--Payne,--Atzerodt,--Herold."<sup>84</sup> He gave the letter to Matthews and asked him to give it to the publisher of the National Intelligencer. Matthews after hearing about the assassination, being afraid that he might be considered an accessory burned the letter without showing it to anyone.<sup>85</sup>

Booth had access to Ford's Theater, and it is probable that he was the person who prepared the box at the theater. The work was probably done between five and six, with a sharp instrument being used to cut a rough mortise in the wall

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<sup>81</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Paul M. Angle, The Lincoln Reader (New Brunswick: 1947), p. 526. Excerpt from John G. Nicolay, Short Life, pp. 536-540.

<sup>84</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Angle, op. cit., p. 526.

plaster. "A pine bar about three and one-half feet long was provided, apparently intended to brace the outer door"<sup>86</sup> when one end was placed in the mortise. This bar was to be used to guard against interference from others in the house. In case the door was locked so that Booth could not gain access to the box, a small hole was cut in the door. This could be used either to observe the occupants of the box or as a place to shoot through.<sup>87</sup>

This was an unnecessary preparation since the lock on box 8 had been broken on March 7th by Mr. Raybold. Some theater-goers had arrived late and found their seats occupied. They were shown to this box, and since the keys were taken away by the usher after the first act, he broke the lock to gain entrance to the box for these people.<sup>88</sup> At that time Edman Spangler was suspected of cutting the hole in the door and of making the other preparations. This view was not accepted by most since the job looked more like the work of an amateur than of a professional carpenter. It was established to the satisfaction of most people that Booth was the amateur who had prepared the box, since a gimlet was found in his trunk at the National Hotel.<sup>89</sup>

About seven o'clock John Booth left the National Hotel and went to the Herndon House where at eight o'clock the

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<sup>86</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> Angle, op. cit., p. 527.

<sup>88</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

remaining members of the conspiracy met. Payne had been rooming there since March 27th so it is probable that the meeting took place in his room.<sup>90</sup> "The conspiracy contemplated not only the murder of Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Seward, but that of Vice-President Johnson and Lieutenant-general Grant."<sup>91</sup> It has been established that Booth, Payne, and Atzerodt attended this meeting, and most authors state the belief that Davy Herold also was present. Payne was to kill Seward, Johnson was to be murdered by Atzerodt, and Booth, himself would assassinate Abraham Lincoln. It is thought that if Davy Herold were present his job was to kill Grant, and then after the General left the city, his only duty was to act as guide for Payne.<sup>92</sup> These men were still in Herndon House discussing their plans at the time the President's party entered the theatre, less than a block away.<sup>93</sup>

The material piece of evidence which seems to indicate that the death of Andrew Johnson was a part of the conspiracy is a card on which was written:

Don't wish to disturb you  
Are you at home?

J Wilkes Booth

This card was found in Johnson's box at the hotel office

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<sup>90</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> J. G. Holland, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Boston: 1866), p. 540.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas, op. cit., p. 519.

of the Kirkwood House by William A. Browning, private secretary to the Vice-President. It was a little after five, and Browning, at that time, attached no importance to the card.<sup>94</sup>

Grant was the first of the intended victims who escaped the plans of Booth and his group. Grant stated that he had accepted Lincoln's invitation to attend the theater conditionally, and if he were able to finish his work early he intended to join his children in Burlington, New Jersey.<sup>95</sup> Early in the afternoon, it became apparent to General Grant that he could get away from his duties in Washington on Friday, and as he and Mrs. Grant were impatient to begin their trip, they excused themselves to Mrs. Lincoln and prepared to take the six o'clock train for Philadelphia.<sup>96</sup>

There has been much speculation concerning the reason the Grants did not desire to attend the theater. It has been stated that, "the evening train which the Grants took from Washington at six P. M. was not due in Burlington until early in the morning. All that they stood to gain by suffering the discomforts of a night ride in an ordinary coach, and making two transfers at very inconvenient hours, was that they would see their children in the forenoon. By traveling on the morning train they could have taken in the performance, and still have arrived at Burlington in the early afternoon."<sup>97</sup>

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94 Bryan, op. cit., p. 156.

95 Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 56.

96 Laughlin, op. cit., p. 73.

97 Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 56.



According to Badeau, Grant's secretary, on March 26th and 27th, during visits to the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James, Mrs. Lincoln caused some highly unpleasant scenes.<sup>98</sup> "An excursion was arranged to the front lines of the army, and both ladies were part of the company, riding together in an ambulance. All other ladies had been ordered to the rear, with the exception of Mrs. Griffin, the wife of one of the generals, who was on horseback and had joined Lincoln and a group of his staff. When Mrs. Lincoln heard of this, she flew into a rage."<sup>99</sup> Mrs. Grant desired to suppress the news of this incident and was fairly successful in doing so, but Mrs. Lincoln became very jealous again. This time her rage was against the wife of General Ord. "In the presence of a crowd of officers, Mrs. Lincoln insulted the poor woman, calling her vile names, and accusing her of trying to flirt with the President. When Mrs. Grant sought to interfere, the First Lady of the Land snapped at her the accusation of having aspirations to the White House herself, which brutal attack Mrs. Grant parried neatly by saying she was quite satisfied with her present position, a better one by far than she had ever hoped to attain."<sup>100</sup>

Mrs. Grant was also somewhat angry at the fact that Mrs. Lincoln had only the day before invited the General to drive

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98 Bryan, op. cit., p. 159.

99 Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 58.

100 Ibid.

about the city and view the lights, but she had altogether omitted Mrs. Grant. Probably in view of all these facts, Mrs. Grant did not desire to face the ordeal of a box party with Mrs. Lincoln.<sup>101</sup>

The next part of the conspirator's plan which was never carried out began when early in the morning on April 14, "a shambling little man, whose head seemed wedged between his shoulders, rented a room at the Kirkwood House on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Twelfth Street. With an unpracticed hand he wrote his name on the register: B. A. Atzerodt."<sup>102</sup>

It is though that Atzerodt rented this room with the intention of using it in an attempt to murder Vice President Johnson. His reputation for cowardice was well known in his home town of Port Tobacco, and it was soon to be proved a fact in Washington.<sup>103</sup> Atzerodt went to the Kirkwood House where the Vice President was staying, but he did not go near his intended victim. After about five minutes at the Kirkwood, he rode away.<sup>104</sup> Thus, two of the intended victims of the conspirators, Grant and Johnson, have escaped an attack.

Lewis Payne, in order to fulfill his assignment, went to the Seward house and was let in by William Bell, a colored boy. Payne had a package in his hand which he claimed was medicine

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<sup>101</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>102</sup> Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 16.

sent by Dr. Verdi for Seward. He went upstairs to see the patient, and the story of the attack is told by Edwin M. Stanton in a letter to Charles Adams, the Minister of the United States to Her Britannic Majesty. The letter is dated April 15, 1865--11:40 A. M., and part of the body of the letter is as follows:

He here encountered Mr. Frederick Seward, struck him over the head, inflicting several wounds, and fracturing the skull in two places, inflicting, it is feared, mortal wounds. He then rushed into the room where Mr. Seward was in bed, attended by a young daughter and a male nurse. The male attendant was stabbed through the lungs, and it is believed will die. The assassin then struck Mr. Seward with a knife or dagger twice in the face, inflicting terrible wounds. By this time Major Seward, the eldest son of the Secretary, and another attendant reached the room, and rushed to the rescue of the Secretary. They were also wounded in the conflict, and the assassin escaped. No artery or important blood vessel was severed by any of the wounds inflicted upon him, but he was for a long time insensible from the loss of blood. Some hopes of his possible recovery are entertained.<sup>105</sup>

During the few minutes Payne was upstairs, Bell had gone to give an alarm, and "was just returning to the house when he saw Payne rush down the steps, spring onto a horse, and ride north to I Street, west to Fifteen-and-a-half Street, and thence at a gallop into Vermont Avenue."<sup>106</sup> Payne left five people wounded at the Seward house, the Secretary of State, his two sons, Frederick and Augustus, and two nurses, Sergeant George F. Robinson and Emrick W. Hansell.

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<sup>105</sup> Eisenschiml, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> Laughlin, op. cit., p. 107.

Of these men, the Secretary was the least seriously hurt since Payne's knife struck the steel frame which bound a fractured jaw and glanced off without inflicting a mortal wound.<sup>107</sup>

Booth, having saved the most important task for himself, appeared at the stage-door that evening between 9:30 and 10. At the door he saw J. L. Debonay who was taking the part of the gardener in the play. Booth asked him to tell Spangler to come to the door to hold his horse. Spangler went to the stage door and said he could not accomodate Booth because "Mr. Gifford, the stage-carpenter, was out in front and had left the responsibility of the next change on Spangler."<sup>108</sup> Spangler told Debonay to call Peanut John to come and hold Booth's horse. Peanuts did not wish to take the chance of getting into trouble since he was suppose to guard a door, but Spangler told him that if there was anything wrong about it to lay the blame on him. Peanuts had a bench in the alley, and as he sat there he held the bridle-rein of Booth's horse.<sup>109</sup>

Booth, after leaving his horse with Peanuts, went to a neighboring saloon, took a drink of brandy, and then returned to the theater. He entered the building, went down a little hallway leading to the President's box, entered the box, "Closed the door noiselessly and secured it with the wooden bar he had previously made ready, without disturbing any of the

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107 Laughlin, op. cit., pp. 107-108.

108 Ibid., p. 92.

109 Ibid.

occupants of the box, between whom and himself yet remained the partition and the door through which he had made the hole."<sup>110</sup>

Looking through this hole, he saw that Lincoln and his party were engrossed in the play, and he decided to enter the box. "Holding a pistol in one hand and a knife in the other, he opened the box door, put the pistol to the President's head, and fired."<sup>111</sup> The shot inflicted a mortal wound; a strange end to a man who had said on this very day, "Enough lives have been sacrificed; we must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union."<sup>112</sup>

At 7:22 A. M. on April 15, Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, died. Stanton told the world what had passed on that morning, but he also indicated the greatness of the man who had just died, with the words, "Now he belongs to the ages."<sup>113</sup>

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110 Angle, op. cit., pl 527.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p. 520.

113 Lord Charnwood, Abraham Lincoln (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc.), 1917.

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