THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

by

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INTRODUCTION

Friday, April 14, 1865. People jam Ford's Theater in Washington D. C. to watch the final performance of "Our American Cousin" starring Laura Keen. The bright lights on stage cast shadows onto the seats, masking many of the people's faces. There is a twinge of excitement in the air, an aura of anticipation that goes beyond the performances of the actors. Scheduled to attend the play are President Abraham Lincoln and General U.S. Grant and everyone awaits the entrance of the men most responsible for ending the Civil War on April 9.

The play starts at 8 p.m. without Lincoln or Grant in attendance. At 8:30, the orchestra suddenly breaks into "Hail to the Chief" and the play stops. Lincoln, his wife Mary, Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancée, Clara Harris, enter the theater and proceed to the Presidential Box just above the right side of the stage. General Grant decided a few hours earlier to go to his Burlington, New Jersey, home to visit his children and can not attend. The audience and actors break into an applause and sustain it until the presidential party reaches the box. The play then resumes.

The audience focuses its attention on the play and the President seems forgotten. Lincoln has only one guard protecting him-- John Parker, a member of the Metropolitan Police Force. Three times in the last three years he has been charged with conduct unbecoming an officer. Yet, he
has been chosen to protect Lincoln this night. His orders: stand at the box entrance and permit no unauthorized person to enter. But Parker decides to disregard his orders. Shortly after the presidential party settles in, Parker leaves his post and moves near the orchestra so as to see the play. During the first intermission, Parker, along with Lincoln's coachman Francis Burns and footman Charles Forbes, leaves the theater and goes to the Star Saloon across the street for a drink. When he returns, he goes back to his orchestra seat. Lincoln, unaware of all this, still believes Parker is at his post.

Also in the theater is a pale, dark-haired young man, described by theater owner Harry Ford as "the handsomest man in America." He divides his time between the play and the Star Saloon. He has observed the actions of Parker and knows that Lincoln is without protection. He returns to the saloon for another drink.

During the third act, the man re-enters the theater and proceeds to the Presidential Box, stopping along the way to give Parker a visitor card. He opens a passage way door, enters and closes the door. He takes a wooden pole that had been concealed in the passage way earlier in the day and wedges it across the door, blocking outside entrance. He then proceeds to the box door and looks through a small peep hole. He observes Lincoln sitting in an arm chair closest to the door. Mrs. Lincoln and Miss Harris sit on a couch beside him and Major Rathbone occupies a chair furthest from the door. The man steps back and waits.
Behind the stage, stagehand Edward Spangler paces nervously. He has been instructed to turn off the lights at the appropriate time but cannot due to the presence of orchestra leader William Withers. Frustrated, he leaves to watch the play from the side of the stage.

In the play, Madame Mountchessington (played by Mrs. D. Kelly) leaves the stage, saying as she goes: "You don't understand the manners of good society. That alone can excuse the impertinence of which you are guilty."1

The stage is now empty except for Asa Trenchard (played by Harry Hawk) who replies: "Well, I guess I know enough to turn your wrong side out, you darned old Sock-dolaging man trap."2 It is now 10:10 p.m.

The audience laughs at the line. In the Presidential Box, the man has softly opened the door and aimed a six inch Derringer pistol at the back of Lincoln's head. When he hears the laughter, the man pulls the trigger from a distance of two feet. A large ball crashes through the left side of Lincoln's skull and travels toward the neck, causing irreparable damage to his brain. John Wilkes Booth has just shot Abraham Lincoln. Within 13 hours, Lincoln will be dead.

1Dr. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln Lore, Aug. 11, 1939
2Ibid.
CHAPTER I: EARLY PLOTS, PREDICTIONS, DREAMS

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln put the finishing touches to a tragedy that had torn the country apart for four years. The Civil War had ended four days previously and Lincoln was preparing to try to heal the many wounds the conflict had created. But John Wilkes Booth saw to it that Lincoln never got a chance to put his plans into motion.

The idea that there were men willing to assassinate Lincoln was quite familiar to the President and his staff, most notable Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. There had been reports of plots to kill Lincoln almost from the day he was elected and most had turned out to be rumors. But not all.

Animosity had grown against Lincoln from the day his name first entered the presidential race. After his election, bets were made on the streets of Washington that he would not live long enough to be inaugurated. He also began receiving threatening letters which numbered over 80 by the time of his death.¹

The first serious plot against Lincoln occurred in February, 1861, while he was traveling from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington for his inauguration. His train passed through many cities in the Northeast on the way. While in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Committee of Arrangement learned from Detective Allan Pinkerton of a plot in Baltimore to

assassinate him. An Italian refugee, Cipriano Fernandina, was the leader of a plot that had two alternatives: either blow up the train just outside of Baltimore or slip men onto the train to kill him while it was stopped at the depot. Lincoln was convinced to take a secret route while the rest of the presidential party followed the original schedule and thus escaped the plot. However, this secret arrival became the target for abuse by both the press and Lincoln's opponents. New York Times reporter Joseph Howard stated Lincoln came into Washington wearing a military cloak and a Scottish cap and several cartoonists mocked this wardrobe. Howard later admitted he got the story from "the mysterious depths of my journalistic imagination." Lincoln's opponents sarcastically referred to this secret route as "the flight of Abraham."

Other plots against Lincoln sprang up once he was in office. In 1863, Federal agents learned of reports that Virginia plantation owners were raising a fund to offer as a reward for Lincoln's assassination. However, nothing came of this report.

As the Civil War progressed, many southerners came to blame Lincoln for their misery. Hatred toward him spread and may have reached a peak with this article published in the Selma Dispatch on Dec. 1, 1864, by

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3 Dr. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln Lore, Jan 18, 1934
4 Ibid.
5 Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, p.35
Colonel G.W. Gayle:

MILLION DOLLARS WANTED TO HAVE PEACE BY FIRST OF MARCH

If the citizens of the Southern Confederacy will furnish me with the cash, or good securities, for the sum of $1 million, I will cause the lives of Abraham Lincoln, William Seward and Andrew Johnson to be taken by the first of March next. This will give us peace and satisfy the world that cruel tyrants can not live in a land of "liberty." If this is not accomplished, nothing will be claimed beyond the sum of $500,000 in advance, which is supposed to be necessary to reach and slaughter the three villains. I will give, myself, $1,000 toward this patriotic purpose. Everyone wishing to contribute will address money to Box X.

Another newspaper story, in the New York Tribune of March 8, 1864, reported rumors in Richmond of a plot to kidnap or kill Lincoln. According to the story, a secret organization of 500 to 1,000 men had formed to attempt the plot. But like many of the rumors that surfaced during the war, it never materialized into fact.

Twice during Lincoln's first term, actual attempts were made to take his life. In 1863 Lincoln was approaching his Washington retreat, the Old Soldiers' Home, when he heard a gunshot and soon thereafter saw a horseman riding furiously away. In 1864 again as he was nearing the Old Soldiers' Home, a bullet was fired through his stovepipe hat. Lincoln was uninjured both times and his assailants were never found.

Still another plot was uncovered by Federal agents in 1864. The Confederate War Department was said to have a plan to abduct or kill the President. One-hundred and fifty men were to assemble in Washington, seize Lincoln and take him by carriage to Indian Point, Virginia. From there he

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6 The Selma Dispatch (Alabama), Dec. 1, 1864
7 The New York Tribune, March 8, 1864
was to be taken to Richmond. Once again, the plot never materialized. 9

Also circulating around Washington were rumors of attempts to poison the President. Stories about poison being put in Lincoln's food or drink were heard as well as rumors about giving him the wrong medication. One story even mentioned a woman wearing poisonous lipstick was going to try to kiss Lincoln. Again, no documented attempt to poison the President has come up. 10

As the end of the war drew near, the death threats against Lincoln became more intense. Rumors of plots to kill him became so numerous that Lincoln grew bored with them. The idea that Lincoln would not survive his presidency became so strong that even astrologers got into the act. Dr. L.D. Broughton in the November, 1864, edition of Broughton's Monthly Planet Reader and Astrological Journal wrote that the position of Mars and Saturn indicated that Lincoln was surrounded by secret enemies and false friends and it would be almost impossible for him to survive April, 1865. Broughton stated further that:

In April, 1865... some noted General or person is high office dies or is removed the 17th or 18th day... But I might state here that shortly after the election is over, Mr. Lincoln will have a number of evil aspects affecting his Nativity... let him especially be on his guard against attempts to take his life, by such as fire arms... 11

In light of what happened on April 14, it is eerie to think that an astrologer could come so close to the truth. But this was not the only instance where the supernatural seems to have made its presence

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9 The Assassination and History of the Conspiracy, p. 59
10 Dr. Warren, Lincoln Lore, July 12, 1937
11 Broughton's Monthly Planet Reader & Astrological Journal, November, 1864
felt in the assassination. Lincoln, himself, had dreams on at least
two different occasions that foretold his death.

In Harper's Magazine of July, 1865, Noah Brooks (Lincoln's secretary)
wrote (using Lincoln's words):

It was just after my election in 1860... I was well tired out and
went home to rest, throwing myself down on a lounge. Opposite where I
lay was a bureau with a swing glass upon it and looking into that glass,
I saw myself reflected... but my face had two separate images... one of
the faces was a little paler than the other... I was to be elected to a
second term and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I
should not see life through that term.12

Still another account of a death dream was retold by Ward Hill Lamon,
U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia and an old friend of Lincoln:

I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a deathlike stillness
about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were
weeping... Before me was a catafalque on which rested a corpse wrapped
in funeral vestments. "Who is dead in the White House?" I demanded of one
of the guards. "The President," was the answer. "He was killed by an assassin."13

Lincoln was president during one of the most, if not the most,
difficult times in our nation's history. Killing was becoming commonplace
and the ground was saturated with human blood. Death had touched many
people, especially in the South, and for some Lincoln represented the
cause of the misery. Hatred grew and in this irrational era, the idea
of killing the President may have seemed practical and even romantic.

Throughout Lincoln's presidency, he constantly had to face the
specter of death, in grim war statistics or even in his own mail. It is
no wonder he began to dream about his death and develop a fatalistic
outlook on life. On the morning of April 14, 1865, he told his bodyguard,

12Harper's Magazine, July, 1865
13Dr. Warren, Lincoln Lore, April 6, 1931
William Cook:

"Cook, do you know, I believe there are men who want to take my life and I have no doubt they will do it."

"Why do you think so Mr. President?"

"Other men have been assassinated... But if it is to be done, it is impossible to prevent it."14

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CHAPTER II

THE SEEDS OF CONSPIRACY

John Wilkes Booth, at first appearance, seemed an unlikely candidate for a presidential assassin. He was born on a farm just outside of Baltimore in 1838. His family, who took their roots from England, had become renowned for their acting ability. Booth's father, Junius Brutus, had the reputation of being the greatest actor of his time. His brother, Edwin Forrest, acquired a reputation greater than their father's. Booth, himself, won great acclaim as an actor and earned as much as $20,000 a year. His athletic prowess and drive on stage made him a favorite throughout the country.1

Booth's first personal involvement with the hatred and emotion that was soon to sweep the country into war occurred in December, 1859. Booth was a member of the Militia Company of Richmond Volunteers and on December 2 assisted at the execution of John Brown at Charles Town, Virginia. Brown had taken hostages and controlled the fire engine house of the Harper's Ferry Arsenal on Oct. 19 and had held it for two days before surrendering.2

Booth did not show an inclination for the military and began acting in 1860. He performed in many Shakespearean plays and after a slow start became renowned for his energetic leaps and fights upon the stage. Most actors played the parts, such as the fight scene in "Richard the Third", with control but Booth portrayed them with such intensity that

1Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 36-42
2Ibid., p. 39
in one play he threw an actor off the stage during a fight scene. Such behavior may not have found favor among fellow actors but they delighted audiences and Booth soon found himself in high demand.⁢

Booth played in many Southern cities during 1861-62 where he developed strong southern sympathies. In 1863, he returned to Washington to play in "Richard the Third", "The Marble Heart", "Hamlet" and "Romeo and Juliet." Lincoln attended "The Marble Heart" in November, 1863, at Ford's Theater.⁴ The paths of these two men would not again cross until April 14, 1865.

While Booth received great acclaim and admiration from audiences, critics were not always of the same opinion. The Washington Daily Chronicle of November 18, 1863, had this to say of his "Richard" performance:

He (Booth) certainly deserves the merit of giving us the very worst Richard now upon the stage. In plainer words, his Richard is as bad as it is possible for an actor to make him. ⁵

The Daily Chronicle was very pro-Lincoln and Dr. Louis Warren, editor of Lincoln Lore, has suggested that this negative review may have turned Booth's mind toward kidnapping Lincoln in a theater. ⁶

"The Marble Heart" was not the first time Lincoln and Booth had come into contact with each other. On February 12, 1861, Booth got the first glimpse of the man he would murder. He was appearing as Pescara in "The Apostate" in Albany, New York, when Lincoln passed through on his way to his inauguration.⁷ It was the first prelude to another meeting that would occur on April 14.

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³Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, p. 22-23
⁴Dr. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln Lore, June 9, 1948
⁵The Washington Daily Chronicle, November 18, 1863
⁶Dr. Warren, Lincoln Lore, November 22, 1936
⁷Ibid.
Booth reached a turning point in his life in 1863 when he decided to join the Confederate cause by becoming a rebel spy. He joined the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret, pro-rebel society that existed in the North. Another member of the society was John Surratt, a man who would figure strongly in Booth's future plans. Psychologist Dr. Donald Hastings suggested that part of the reason Booth decided to join the Confederates was because his acting career was in jeopardy. Toward the end of 1863, Booth developed bronchitis and laryngitis and began to lose his voice. While he eventually recovered, his voice had lost its richness and without a strong voice, a stage actor could not work. However, he still continued to perform until the last part of 1864, when plans for the abduction of Lincoln took up too much of his time.

After 1863, Booth became more and more obsessed with the southern struggle. He began to speak up in favor of the South wherever he was. He would not tolerate any opinions that did not agree with his own strongly held beliefs. When his brother-in-law, John Clarke, made a remark criticizing Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, Booth attacked and almost strangled him. The South's cause had become his cause and he would do anything to see that it did not fail.

There is evidence that Booth's decision to kill Lincoln may have resulted from an incident that occurred to his old college room-mate, Captain John Yates Beall. The St. Louis Globe Democrat on Oct. 11, 1894,

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9Roscoe, *The Web of Conspiracy*, p. 40
reported that Beall was a Confederate officer who had been arrested and sentenced to hang as a spy. Booth personally went before Lincoln and on his hands and knees begged him to pardon Beall. Lincoln was reported to have cried and agreed to Booth's request. But advisers later persuaded him to carry out the execution as ordered. This infuriated Booth and he became "like an insane man and swore revenge." The source for this story was Dr. George Foote, a Confederate surgeon who was in an adjoining cell to Beall at Ft. Columbus Prison just before Beall was executed. Foote concluded that:

The war nor its results had anything to do with the assassination of President Lincoln. Had Beall been pardoned or simply imprisoned, Mr. Lincoln would not have been killed. 10

However, there are holes in this story. According to Otto Eisenschiml, there is no evidence that Booth and Lincoln even knew each other. 11 Booth, in his diary written during his escape from Washington, never mentioned Beall's name. It is likely that Foote made up the story to get his name in the newspaper. In that regard, he was successful.

Booth was, by 1864, willing to do anything to aid the Southern cause. He came to believe that Lincoln was the source of the South's problems and only the President's elimination could save the Confederacy. Booth used the last eight months of his life to put this belief into effect.

10 The St. Louis Globe Democrat, Oct. 11, 1894
11 Otto Eisenschiml, Why was Lincoln Murdered?, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1937, p. 375
CHAPTER III: BOOTH--THE PLOT BEGINS TO FORM

As the summer of 1864 drew to a close, the view from the North began to look brighter. Grant had earlier in the year become General of the Armies and under his leadership the North had begun to squeeze the life out of the Confederacy. Southern losses mounted and it became obvious that the end of the war was in sight.

Grant instituted a harsh series of measures designed to force the South to her knees. One was the instruction of General William Sherman to live off the Southern farmer and bring the war to the rural areas. Another was an order forbidding prisoner exchange. It was this order that helped persuade Booth to kidnap Lincoln for a prisoner exchange.¹

Newspapers began publishing stories of the extreme cruelty and punishment that prisoners of war received. The stories became worse the more they circulated and they inflamed public opinion in both the North and the South. But there was no way to release the prisoners until the war was over.²

The South was also suffering tremendous casualties and did not have the manpower reserve the North possessed. The only potential source available was war prisoners but Grant's order made that impossible. Thus, a way had to be found to get those prisoners out. John Wilkes Booth thought he had the way.

¹Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, Sept. 16, 1932
²Ibid.
Booth's thoughts had been directed against Lincoln for sometime. On August 13, Booth visited the McHenry House in Meadeville, Pennsylvania. Sometime during his visit, Booth found time to write on a windowpane the following inscription:

Abe Lincoln departed this life, Aug. 13, 1864, by the effects of poison. 3

Obviously Booth, nine months before the assassination, had ideas about killing Lincoln. But by September, Booth had decided it would be more favorable to the South if Lincoln were kidnapped and exchanged for prisoners. He needed help and so he decided to contact a couple of old acquaintances: Samuel Arnold, 28 years old and Michael O'Laughlin, age 28. 4

Arnold and O'Laughlin were both ex-Confederate soldiers, knew how to handle firearms and were not afraid of danger. Arnold was an old classmate of Booth but had not seen him for years before Booth contacted him. His version of the first meeting of the plot was given in his 1867 statement:

About the first of September, 1864, John Wilkes Booth sent word he would like to see me at the Barnum Hotel in Baltimore. I had not seen Booth since 1952 at which time we were fellow students of St. Timothy Hall, Cantonsville, Maryland.... O'Laughlin was ushered into the room.... Booth spoke of the abduction or kidnapping of the President, saying if such could be accomplished and the President taken to Richmond and held as hostage, he thought it would bring about an exchange of prisoners.... We consented to join him. 5

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3 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 43
4 Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, December 12, 1933
5 Samuel Arnold Confession, Baltimore American, January 19, 1869
The plot was to be referred to as "the oil business" after an investment by Booth in the Holmden Farm at Pithole, Pennsylvania. Oil was found on the property in late October but Booth had already sold out and missed his opportunity.\(^6\)

In October, Booth went to Montreal to talk with Confederate officials George Sanders and Jacob Thompson. Sanders was a Confederate agent operating in Canada and Thompson was a Confederate congressman. Booth was still a Confederate spy and might have been transporting messages to Sanders and Thompson, who were in Canada to direct military sabotage efforts against the North and further anti-North feelings.\(^7\) Exactly what went went on between Booth and the two officials has never been determined.

During this time, there were several reports that Booth may have had more on his mind than kidnapping Lincoln. The Cleveland Leader of April 17, 1865 reported Booth to have said to a prominent citizen in October:

The man who kills Abraham Lincoln would occupy a higher niche of fame than George Washington. \(^8\)

The Chicago Journal of the same date reported Booth to have said at McVicker's Theater in November:

What a glorious opportunity there is for a man to immortalize himself by killing Lincoln. \(^9\)

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\(^6\) Letter from James Vearey to Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Library, Fort Wayne
\(^7\) Montreal Gazette Limited, July 14, 1973
\(^8\) The Cleveland Leader, April 17, 1865
\(^9\) The Chicago Journal, April 17, 1865
But despite these ideas swirling through his mind, Booth continued with his abduction plans. He returned to Virginia to learn the roads south of Washington and to find sympathizers. In November, he met Dr. Samuel Mudd at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Charles County, saying he was in the area looking for land to buy. A friendship formed between the two men that would eventually cost Mudd several years in prison.

Also in November, Booth wrote a letter to Pennsylvania U.S. Marshall William Millard but decided not to send it. Instead he told his brother-in-law, John Clarke to:

Use this as you think best. But as some may wish to know when, who and why and as I know not how to direct I give it.... Right or wrong, God judge me, not man... all hope for peace is dead.... This country was formed for the white man and not the black. And looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint as held by the noble framers of our Constitution, I, for one, have considered it one of the greatest blessings for themselves and for us that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation.... Yet heaven knows that no one would be more willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition.... I once loved the Union but the horrors of war have destroyed this admiration and my love is now to the South only.... Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make for her a prisoner of this man to whom she owes so much misery. 12

This letter stated Booth's reasons for supporting the South and his decision to use the President to aid its cause. From his point of view, slavery was not wrong, it was actually a blessing for the blacks and the country, and he was justified in deciding to use Lincoln to

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10 Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, pp. 43-45
help the Southern cause. With this justification, he was now ready to finalize his plans. But a few more preparations were needed.
CHAPTER IV

BOOTH: THE CHARACTERS ARE ASSEMBLED

Now the plot changes locations. Up until this time, there had been no center of operations for Booth to make plans. But in December, 1864, all that changed. Booth persuaded John Surratt to join.

Surratt was an ardent Southern supporter who spoke his beliefs without hesitation. He lived with his 47 year old widowed mother, Mary Surratt, at their country home in Surrattsville, Maryland. Mrs. Surratt was also a Southern supporter, a woman who had become resentful of the North from the treatment she received at the hands of Union troops. Her husband had died in 1862 and she had to run the house alone. Union soldiers passed by the property several times, taking chickens and livestock with them. This created animosity and she began to use her house, which earlier had been converted into a boarding house, into a haven for Southern spies and messengers. She is believed to have joined the Confederate underground and was associated with the Confederate spy, Spencer Howell.¹

John Surratt became a Confederate spy in 1864 and began to deliver messages from Richmond to sources in Washington. Also in that year the Surratts moved from Surrattsville to a house on No. 541 H Street, Washington. The new Surratt home again became a boarding house while the old property was leased to John Loyd, a local man who turned it into a tavern.

¹Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, P. 38
On November 1, 1864, the Surratts acquired a new boarder, Louis Weichmann, a 23-year old War Department clerk.\(^2\)

Weichmann first met John Surratt in 1859 when the two were students at St. Charles Borromeo College in Maryland. Once Weichmann moved in, the two reasserted their old friendship and were often seen in each others company. Weichmann had an excellent memory, a skill he put to good use in recording many of the actions concerning the Surratts.

According to Weichmann, the two men were walking down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington on December 23 when they ran into Dr. Samuel Mudd. Accompanying him was a dark-haired young man introduced as Mr. Boone. The four went to the National Hotel where Boone had a room. There Boone and Surratt had a discussion where Surratt was told of Boone's true identity and informed of the abduction plot. This was a private conversation and Weichmann was only able to hear pieces of it. Surratt apparently liked what he heard and the Surratt home soon became the center of operations for the plot.\(^3\)

Sometime during this period Booth approached fellow actor Samuel Knapp Chester and asked him to join the conspiracy, saying:

We have parties on the other side who will cooperate with us. There are between 50 and 100 people in this.\(^4\)

However, Chester refused to join the plot but did agree not to mention anything to the authorities.

\(^2\)Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 19-28
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 66-71
In early January, 1865, Lewis Thornton Powell, alias Lewis Paine, appeared in Baltimore. Paine was 23 years old and an ex-Confederate soldier who had fought at Gettysburg. He was without money and had not had a good meal in weeks. He was in trouble with the law for beating a black servant and was becoming increasingly frustrated. It was at this time that Paine's fortune took a sharp turn—he met John Wilkes Booth. Booth saw this strong, not too bright ex-soldier and knew he had someone he could use. He presented his plan and Paine bought it and joined. He had bought more than a plan; in five months his decision would buy him a trip to the gallows.

Booth was nearing completion of a gang who, he thought, could successfully carry out the abduction. Surratt knew the local geography and roads in southern Maryland, while Paine, Arnold and O'Loughlin were ex-soldiers who had experience under fire. But he needed a couple more men and so he picked up Dave Herold, a 23-year old local man who also knew the area well and George Atzerodt (also known as Mr. Port Tobacco), a 30-year old boatman who knew the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers. With these seven men Booth felt he had the ability successfully to abduct the President.

Booth's plan consisted of two alternatives: 1) Booth and Paine would attack and manacle Lincoln in the President's Box at Ford's Theater, knock out the lights and lower him to Samuel Arnold on the stage who

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5Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 82-84
6Ibid., pp. 74-77
would carry him to a rear exit. From there Lincoln would be transported to Richmond; or 2) Seize Lincoln on his way to the Old Soldiers' Home and again carry him to Richmond. In order to prepare for either alternative, Booth purchased horses, a carriage, revolvers, Spencer carbines and a flat-bottom batteau (boat).\(^7\)

Booth now had the men and material to carry out his plan. The South was losing the war and something needed to be done. Booth began looking for an opportunity to launch his project. Yet, he would have to overcome some obstacles first.

\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 76-78
CHAPTER V

BOOTH: EARLY FAILURES

The activity in the Surratt house grew more intense as John Surratt, Booth and the rest of the conspirators began having almost daily secret meetings. Their activities became very unusual and aroused the suspicion of the observant Weichmann. Weichmann claimed he was never involved in the plot and was just an innocent boarder. However, John Surratt in his Rockville Lecture of December 6, 1870, claimed that was not correct:

I proclaim it here and before the world that Louis J. Weichmann was a party to abduct President Lincoln. He had been told all about it and was constantly importuning me to let him become an active member. I refused for the simple reason he could neither ride a horse or shoot a pistol. 1

Weichmann's testimony incriminated Surratt and he may have made the above statement as an act of vengeance. Still it is difficult to prove the extent of Weichmann's involvement in the conspiracy. Living for almost five months next to the conspirators, his opportunity for stumbling onto the plot was great. Many felt after the assassination that Weichman was a rejected conspirator who took revenge by exposing the gang at the trial. It is documented that on February 20, 1865, Weichmann decided to report the activities in the Surratt house to a Captain Gleason of the Office of Commission General of Prisoners who promised to relay the message to

1John Surratt, The Rockville Lecture, December 6, 1870. Hereafter cited as Surratt, The Rockville Lecture
his superiors. Yet despite this warning the War Department did nothing and Weichmann returned to the Surratts and continued monitoring the activities there.\(^2\)

The conspirators first attempt to abduct Lincoln was planned for January 18 when Lincoln was scheduled to attend the play, "Jack Cade" at Ford's Theater. A storm hit Washington that night, however, and Lincoln decided not to attend, thus spoiling the attempt.\(^3\)

The conspirators were still searching for an opportunity to carry out their plans when Lincoln's second inauguration came up on March 4. Lincoln and Vice President Andrew Johnson were scheduled to give speeches before the large inauguration crowd. A photograph uncovered by historian Frederick Hill Meserve of the second inauguration shows Booth, Surratt, Herold, Atzerodt, Spangler and Paine in attendance.\(^4\)

A disturbance occurred just as Lincoln and Johnson made their way to the platform to give their speeches. A stranger broke from the crowd and tried to reach the platform but was stopped by several police officers. These officers carried the stranger into the basement where he was locked up until the ceremony was over. He was then released without any questions. The stranger was later thought to be Booth but Theodore Roscoe rejects this idea since the Meserve photograph shows Booth in the crowd while

\(^2\)Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, p. 46
\(^3\)Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, pp. 88-91
\(^4\)Dr. R. Gerald McMurty, Lincoln Lore, June, 1970
Lincoln was speaking. Since the stranger was locked in the basement throughout the proceedings, he could not possibly have been Booth. However, the photograph is not clear and the man identified as Booth may be someone else.⁵

Booth admitted to Samuel Knapp Chester a few days later that he was at the inauguration and that there was more on his mind than watching the ceremonies:

What an elegant chance I had to kill the President on inauguration day if I wished. ⁶

On March 7 an event occurred at Ford's Theater that was to have importance on April 14. The door to the Presidential Box was kicked open during a tour of the theater and the lock was broken. No report or repairs were made, meaning anyone could open the door.⁷ On April 14, someone did.

Events began to move faster as the month of March progressed. On March 13, Booth wired O'Laughlin a telegram:

Don't fear to neglect your business; you had better come at once.  
J. Booth ⁸

Booth had purchased additional bowie knives and revolvers and stored them at the Surratt house. On March 15 Paine and Surratt were examining them in an upstairs bedroom when Weichmann walked in. They quickly put them away and refused to talk about them.⁹

⁵Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, pp. 89-92
⁶Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 94
⁷Bishop, The Day Lincoln Was Shot, p. 79
⁸Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, p. 93
⁹Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 97-104
Later that night, Surratt and Paine took two girls staying at the house, 13 year old Anna Fitzpatrick and Appollonia Dean, to Ford's Theater to attend a play. They sat in the Presidential Box and watched the play until Booth arrived. The three men went outside and talked for an hour before Surratt and Paine went back to the box.\(^{10}\)

On March 16 Mary Surratt became very nervous and upset. She told Weichmann that:

> Mr. Weichmann, do you know that if anything were to happen to John through his acquaintance with Booth I would kill him. \(^{11}\)

On that same day Booth discovered that Lincoln would be visiting wounded soldiers at the 7th Street Hospital and would be traveling there by carriage. All seven conspirators gathered at the Surratt house and at 2 p.m. left on horseback to try to seize the carriage and abduct Lincoln. However, when they approached the carriage, they found Lincoln was not on it, for he had decided to send a representative instead.\(^{12}\)

This was the second time that Lincoln's failure to appear had cost the conspirators a chance of abducting him. They began to get nervous and held a meeting at the Surratt house. John Surratt in his "Rockville Lecture" described the meeting:

> I was confident the government had wind of our project and the best thing we could do was throw up the whole project. Everyone agreed with my opinion except Booth... who said "Well gentlemen, if worst comes to worst, I shall know what to do." The four of us arose, one saying: "If I understand you to intimate anything more that the capture of Mr. Lincoln, I for one will say goodbye." \(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 106

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 111

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 112

\(^{13}\)Surratt, The Rockville Lecture
The others agreed with this position and Booth was forced to back down. But the unity had been split. Arnold quit the group and left Washington for Fort Monroe where he stayed until his arrest. Those remaining were beginning to worry and Booth needed something to hold them together. He discovered that Lincoln was schedule to attend the play, "Still Waters Run Deep", at the Old Soldiers' Home on March 20. They would again try to stop his carriage and abduct him. But Lincoln unknowingly foiled the plan by deciding to review the 140th Indiana Battle Regiment instead.14

This failure may have led Booth to decide to forget about the abduction scheme and instead kill the President. According to Paine's police statement made after his April 18 arrest, Booth took him to the White House and suggested he kill Lincoln. For several nights Paine hid in the shrubbery in front of the White House conservatory and waited for Lincoln's customary return from the War Office. Paine lost his nerve and reported his failure to a disappointed Booth.15

Events unfolded quickly once April began. Richmond fell on April 3 and the end of the war was imminent. If Booth was to be successful at all in his drive to aid the southern cause, he had to act soon.

On April 6 a letter from an unknown conspirator was sent to Booth at the National Hotel:

14Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, pp. 52-57
15Ibid., pp. 59-60
Friend Wilkes: I saw French, Brady and the others about the oil speculation. The subscription amounts to $2,000,000 and I add $1,000 myself which is all I can stand. Now, when you sink your well, go deep and don't fail; everything depends on you and your helpers... I can keep you safe from all hardship for a year. 16

On April 11, two days after Lee's surrender, Lincoln made a speech in which he expressed regret that the franchise had not been given to Negroes in Louisiana. Booth attended this speech in Washington and upon hearing the franchise remark is reported to have uttered:

"That means nigger citizenship. Now, by God, I'll put him through!" 17

After hearing this speech, Booth sold his horse and carriage, perhaps suggesting that he had given up on the abduction scheme. 18

Also on April 11, Mary Surratt and Weichmann went to Surrattsville to collect a $479 debt owed her. On the way, she stopped off to see John Loyd. Loyd, during the trial, testified:

When she first broached the subject about the articles at my place, I did not know what she had reference to. Then she came out plainer and asked me about the "shooting irons." (Booth had stored weapons at Loyd's tavern) She told me to get them ready, that they would be wanted soon. 19

Booth knew that time was growing short; he had to make a move.

With the military power of the South beaten, only a miracle could save the Confederacy. Booth made his preparations and waited for an opportunity to create his own idea of a miracle, knowing that this would probably be his last chance. He knew he had to make it good.

16 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 131-132
17 Dr. R. Gerald McMurty, Lincoln Lore, August, 1973
18 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 134
19 Ibid., pp. 133-134
CHAPTER VI

BOOTH: APRIL 14

During the first part of April Paine had secretly moved into the Herndon House, not leaving the house until after dark. Atzerodt and Herold were also staying in Washington as Booth began making final preparations. Rumors of plots against Lincoln intensified and the conspirators began to grow nervous. Atzerodt wrote Booth a note, saying:

You know full well that the Government suspicions something is going on here; therefore, the undertaking is becoming more complicated. Why not, for the present, desist. 1

But Booth ignored the advice. He had invested too much time in this project to stop. He would strike at the next opportunity. On April 14, that opportunity arrived.

On that Friday morning, Booth went to Ford's Theater to collect his mail. While he was reading it, Harry Ford, the owner of the theater, approached him and mentioned that President Lincoln and General Grant would be attending "Our American Cousin" that night. 2 Booth took the news calmly and soon left the theater.

While he was walking down Pennsylvania Avenue, Booth met John Coyle, a friend and the editor of the National Intelligencer. The following conversation is reported to have occurred:

"Suppose Lincoln was killed, what would be the result?" Coyle replied: "Johnson would succeed."

1Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, p. 49
2Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 135-137
Then he said: "But if he was killed?"
"Then Seward," answered Coyle and Booth continued:
"But suppose he was killed, then what?"
"Then anarchy or whatever the Constitution provides but what nonsense,
they don't make Brutuses anymore." Booth said: "No, no they don't." 3

Booth then left Coyle and began verifying Ford's statement. He saw Mrs. Grant and decided to follow her into a restaurant. Mrs. Grant mentioned in her memoirs being disturbed by a messenger earlier in the morning who wanted to know if she and her husband were going to the theater. Later at lunch she wrote:

...These four men came in and sat opposite us. They all four came in together. I thought I recognized in one of them the messenger of the morning and one, a dark, pale man... seemed very intent on what we were saying. 4

Sometime after lunch, Booth bought a horse and rode him to the Kirkwood House, the residence of Vice President Johnson. He asked to see him but when told Johnson was not in, he left the following message:

Don't wish to disturb you, are you at home?

J. Wilkes Booth 5

Later in the afternoon Booth met actor John Mathews on Pennsylvania Avenue. Mathews, in the National Intelligencer of July 17, 1867, reported the following conversation:

Booth exclaimed: "Great God! I have no longer a country..."
At that moment, I observed Grant in an open carriage, carrying his baggage. I called this to Booth's attention and he looked towards it, grasped my hand tightly and galloped after the carriage. 6

General Grant, in a statement made after the assassination, made the following observations on what happened next:

3 Ibid., p. 138
4 The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant, the Lincoln Library, Fort Wayne
5 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 137
6 The National Intelligencer, July 17, 1867
As we were driving along Pennsylvania Avenue, a horseman rode rapidly past us at a gallop and wheeling his horse, rode back and peered into our carriage... I learned afterwards that it was Booth... A few weeks later I received an anonymous letter stating that the writer had been sent to assassinate me and he rode in my train as far as Harve de Grace and as my car was locked, he failed to get in. 7

Mrs. Grant also wrote about Booth's ride around their carriage:

Afterwards, as General Grant and I rode to the depot, this same dark, pale man rode past us at a sweeping gallop on a dark horse. He rode 20 yards ahead of us, wheeled and returned and as he passed us he thrust his face quite near the General's... 8

Booth's next actions over the next hour become hazy. Several reports had him going into Ford's Theater and boring a hole in the Presidential Box door and then hiding a wooden brace for the door in the passageway. Weichmann, on the other hand, suggests that John Surratt did it. This contradicted Surratt's contention that he was not in Washington on April 14.9 However, whichever version is correct, it is known that someone prepared the Box for an unannounced visitor.

Late in the afternoon Booth visited John Mathews, gave him a letter addressed to John Coyle and asked him to give it to Coyle. However, Mathews decided to keep it himself and after the assassination, opened and read it. After reading the contents, he burned the letter and did not mention anything about it until the John Surratt trial in 1867. Then, in the National Intelligencer of July, 1867, Mathews gave the following version of the letter:

7"Statement of General U.S. Grant," 1865, Lincoln Library collection, Fort Wayne
8"The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant"
9Weichmann, A True History of the Conspiracy, p. 152
For a long time, I have devoted my energies, my time and money to the accomplishment of a certain end. I have been baffled and disappointed. The moment has at last arrived when I must change my plans. The world may censure me for what I am about to do; but posterity, I am sure, will justify me.

Men who love their country better than gold or life, John Wilkes Booth—Paine, Atzerodt and Herold. 10

Booth had always been known for his ability to consume liquor.

Friends reported that he began to drink very heavily shortly before the assassination. John Deery, the American billiard champion and owner of a Washington billiard saloon, was a close friend of Booth. In the New York Sunday Telegraph of November 23, 1909, he said that:

For about 10 days before the assassination, he (Booth) visited my place every day, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes in the evening... During that last week, he sometimes drank at my bar as much as a quart of brandy in less than two hours... 11

The plot was weighing heavy on Booth's mind; it was beginning to affect his personality. His increased drinking and his need to write a justification show that perhaps he knew what he was about to do was wrong. But this did not deter him; he instructed Paine to kill Secretary of State William Seward and Atzerodt to kill Andrew Johnson. This was to be a night for all posterity to remember.

10 The National Intelligencer, July 17, 1867
11 The New York Sunday Telegraph, Nov. 23, 1909
CHAPTER VII
LINCOLN: APRIL 14

Abraham Lincoln had a typically busy day on April 14. He awoke at 7 a.m. and did some paper work in his office until 8 a.m. After breakfast he met with Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax, Judge Cornelius Cole and W.A. Howard, a Grand Rapids, Michigan lawyer. At 10 a.m., he saw John Creswell and John Gribbel, who sought clemency for some Confederate prisoners. Lincoln visited the War Department at 10:30 a.m. and then met General Grant and his Cabinet at 11 a.m.1

During his visit to the War Department, Lincoln met Secretary of War Edwin Stanton who tried to persuade him not to go to the theater. But Lincoln, or more specifically Mrs. Lincoln, had already made a commitment to attend and Lincoln was not about to anger her by breaking it. He wanted to take Stanton's chief aide, Major Thomas Eckert, as an escort to the theater, saying:

I have seen Eckert break five noders, one after the other, over his arm and I am of the thinking he would be the kind of man to go with me this evening. May I take him? 2

Stanton surprised Lincoln by refusing. Eckert was needed at the office to finish some work. Lincoln felt Eckert was the man for the job; he went to him and personally asked him to come with him to the play.

1Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, April 13, 1931
2From the "Memoirs of David Homer Bates", taken from Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, pp. 32-33
Eckert refused, saying he had work to do. Thus, Lincoln had to look elsewhere for an escort. However, it has been documented that both Stanton and Eckert left the office around 5 p.m. and went home for the evening, the work pressing enough to deny a presidential request, abandoned. ³

Despite this refusal, Lincoln was in a good mood. The war was over and plans were being made for the return of the South into the Union. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton described Lincoln on his last day:

He was more cheerful and happy than I had ever seen him, he rejoiced at the near prospect of a firm and durable peace at home and abroad, manifested in a marked degree the kindness and humanity of his disposition that so eminently distinguished him. ⁴

After a light lunch at 1:30 p.m., Lincoln worked in his office for an hour and a half before going for a drive with his wife and son. When he returned, he relaxed with some Illinois friends before having dinner. At 6:30, he made one final trip to the War Department. ⁵

Lincoln returned to the White House and prepared to go to the theater. He again met with Colfax before departing just after 8 p.m. In place of Eckert Lincoln had decided on Major Henry Rathbone. His guard for the evening was John Parker, a Metropolitan police officer who had been specified for assignment to guard duty by Mrs. Lincoln on April 3. ⁶ In a few hours, Lincoln would come face to face with a specter that had haunted him for four years—death.

³Ibid., pp. 32-34
⁵Dr. Warren, Lincoln Lore, April 13, 1931
⁶Ibid.
CHAPTER VIII
ASSASSINATION

The Presidential party reached the theater at 8:30 p.m. and proceeded to the Presidential Box. The events that occurred in the box were detailed by Major Rathbone in his April 17, 1865, affidavit:

The box... occupied by the President and Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris and the deponent and by no other persons... The President seated himself in this chair (nearest the door)... Mrs. Lincoln was seated in a chair between the President and a pillar... at the opposite end of the box were two chairs. In one of these, Miss Harris was seated and next to Miss Harris, the deponent was seated... The distance between the President and the deponent was about seven or eight feet and the distance between the President and the door was about four or five feet. The door, according to this recollection, was not closed during the evening.

When the second scene of the third act was being performed and while this deponent was intently watching the proceedings upon the stage with his back towards the door, he heard the discharge of a pistol behind him and looking around saw through the smoke a man between the door and the President. 1

Rathbone sprang at the intruder but was stabbed in the left arm and shoulder before being shoved out of the way. Booth ran to the front of the box and leaped to the stage. As he did his spurs caught on the American flag decorating the front of the box and he landed heavily on his left leg. Springing up, he ran towards the rear of the theater, slashing orchestra leader William Withers along the way. He ran out the rear door, jumped onto his horse and rode into the night. 2

1 "Affidavit of Major Henry Rathbone", April 17, 1865, Lincoln Library
2 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 159-162
There were many witnesses to the assassination and Booth's escape, both in the audience and on the stage. Actor Harry Hawk, the only person on stage when Booth fired his shot, described the event as follows:

I heard the shot fired, I turned and saw him (Booth) jump from the box and drop to the stage; he slipped when he gained the stage but got up on his feet in a moment, brandished a large knife saying: "The South shall be free!", turned his face in the direction I stood and I recognized him as John Wilkes Booth. He ran towards me and I, seeing the knife, thought I was the one he was after, ran off the stage and up a flight of stairs. 3

Actor E.A. Emerson, who was Lord Dundreay in the play, had a similar version:

Suddenly a shot rang out, apparently from the audience... I walked out to the center of the stage and while standing there I was amazed to see Booth leap from the upper box. He caught his spur in a flag... and fell heavily, but this did not prevent him from rushing down to the footlights, brandishing a large bowie knife and crying "Sic semper tyrannis." 4

A member of the audience, Daniel Veader, gave this account of the murder and its aftermath:

The scene had shifted and the curtain was up when, without warning a pistol rang out. Naturally the audience thought that the next act had commenced and looked toward the stage. But oddly, I had been gazing directly at Lincoln and had seen a man rush into the box and then the President fell backward... There was but a second in which to notice an extraordinarily handsome man who faced the audience and uttered these famous words-- "Sic semper tyrannis." 5

A more vivid account was given by Mrs. Nelson Todd in 1932. It should be noted that she was 92 at the time and 67 years had passed since she witnessed the assassination from the audience, plenty of time for her imagination to play tricks with the facts:

3."Harry Hawk's police statement", April 21, 1865. Lincoln Library Collection
4."Letter by E.A. Emerson", April 21, 1865. Lincoln Library Collection
5."Letter by Daniel Veader", April 19, 1865. Lincoln Library Collection, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Few people knew how badly Booth was hurt in the fall. I have read accounts and seen pictures of him hobbling off the stage and so make his escape. This is as fake as the story he shouted "Sic semper tyrannis." Here is what really did happen and I think I am the only person that knows how Booth made his escape...

Booth broke his leg in a terrible way so that the bone actually protruded through his trousers and smeared the stage with blood. Naturally, he couldn't move. Laura Keen leaned over and patted his head. Then, I saw a rope swing over, evidently thrown by some confederates, lasso him and whisk him into the wings. 6

Lincoln was not the only victim on the night of April 14. Secretary of State William Seward was at home, nursing a broken jaw he had received a few days earlier. At 10:10 p.m., Paine came to the Seward mansion and requested to see Seward, saying he was sent by Dr. Verde, Seward's physician, to deliver some medicine. He was met by Assistant Secretary of State Frederick Seward who questioned his story. Paine hit him over the head with a gun and then stabbed him. With Seward out of the way, Paine broke into the Secretary's bedroom and found him lying in bed, a steel mask upon his face to hold the bones in his jaw in place. Paine slashed at him, cutting his right cheek, the right side of his throat and under his left ear. Seward, bleeding profusely, rolled to the floor to avoid the knife. At this moment, George Robinson, Seward's assistant, came into the room and attacked Paine. Paine beat him off, and, thinking Seward was dead, tried to escape. On the way out, he wounded several others including State Department official Emerick Hansell. He made it to his horse unharmed and rode away. 7

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7Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, pp. 159-162
The third conspirator was Atzerodt, who was assigned to kill Andrew Johnson. But Atzerodt lost his nerve and never even attempted to see Johnson. It was Theodore Roscoe's contention that Booth did not count on Atzerodt to be successful; he only wanted to use the boatman as a diversion to keep attention off himself. 8

Booth was recognized as the man who ran across the stage at Ford's Theater. At 7:30 a.m. on April 15, Stanton sent a telegram to General John Dix for dissemination to the press:

Investigation strongly indicates John Wilkes Booth as the assassin of the President. Whether it was the same or a different person that attempted to murder Mr. Seward remains in doubt. 9

Stanton also sent out this official order at the same time:

Arrest J. Wilkes Booth, the murderer of the President where ever he may be found and send him here in irons. 10

Booth, along with David Herold, fled south through Maryland, hoping to reach Virginia. During this escape he recorded his thoughts in a diary. This diary was found on his body after he was shot at John Garrett's farm:

April 14-- Until today nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But, our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done. But its failure was owing to others who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly and not as the papers say... I can never repent it, though we hated to kill. Our country owed all our troubles to him and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment. 11

8 Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, P. 107
10 "Official order for arrest", from Secretary Stanton to Major General Dix, New York, April 15. Lincoln Library Collection, Fort Wayne, Indiana
9 "Official memo sent by Secretary Edwin Stanton to Major General Dix", New York, April 15, 7:30 a.m." Lincoln Library Collection, Fort Wayne
11 "The Diary of John Wilkes Booth", copy, Lincoln Library Collection, Fort Wayne
Friday 21—After being hunted like a dog through swamps and woods... I am here in despair. And why? For doing what Brutus was honored for— for what made Tell a hero. And yet I, for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew, am looked on as a common cut-throat... I struck for my country and that alone... I can not see my wrong, except in serving a degenerate people... The little, the very little I left behind to clear my name the Government will not allow to be printed... Tonight I will once more try the river with the intention to cross, though I am almost of a mind to return to Washington and in a measure clear my name, which I feel I can do... This action was not a wrong, unless God deems it so and it's with Him to damn or bless me. 12

Booth was to be damned by men from all over the world. After being shot, Lincoln was carried across the street to the home of William Peterson, a German tailor. He was placed in a bedroom where he held on until 7:22 a.m., April 15. At that time he died, leaving Stanton to exclaim:

"Now he belongs to the ages." 13

12 Ibid.
13 Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, p. 244
CHAPTER IX

WAS THERE A LARGER CONSPIRACY?

In the years since the assassination of Abraham Lincoln there have been theories set forth that Booth was not the only one behind the conspiracy. There were others, perhaps even Cabinet officials, who wanted Lincoln out of the way. These officials used Booth, it has been alleged, as a pawn to eliminate the President. So far, no conclusive evidence has been found to prove or disprove these theories.

The Civil War ended on April 9. Lincoln's death could not possibly have helped the Confederate cause since the Confederacy no longer existed. Lincoln favored a plan to bring the South back into the Union as painlessly as possible. He did not want to punish the South, unlike many of the Radical Republicans and was probably the best man the South could hope for. Yet Booth killed him. And the idea that the conspiracy involved more people than those tried has existed ever since.

The first mention of a larger conspiracy was put forth almost as soon as Lincoln died. Stanton and the War Department felt there were Confederate leaders behind the assassination and offered rewards for their arrest. Confederate President Jefferson Davis had a $100,000 reward on his head, while Jacob Thompson, Clement Clay and George Sanders each had $25,000 rewards.¹

¹The Assassination and History of the Conspiracy, p. 154
During the conspiracy trial in 1865 the government produced a key witness, Sandford Conover, a clerk in the Richmond War Department, who testified he had observed Davis's conspiracy operations. Conover said that Thompson told him about the plot on April 7 and the Confederacy supported a plot to kill the President, Vice President, Secretary of War, Secretary of State, General Grant and Judge Salmon P. Chase, thus leaving the government without able leadership. Thompson had given Booth a commission to murder Lincoln and had developed plans to destroy New York's Croton Dam and introduce yellow fever in Northern cities.\(^2\)

However, Conover later admitted perjuring himself and getting others to lie with the blessing of Judge Joseph Holt, one of the trial's presiding justices. The evidence was thrown out and any connection between the Confederate government and the conspiracy dissolved. Theodore Roscoe felt that the Radical Republicans wanted to prove a Confederate link in order to implicate Andrew Johnson.\(^3\)

Andrew Johnson has been mentioned as a possible co-conspirator. Many of the Radical Republicans charged that Johnson wanted Lincoln out of the way so that he could become president. Congressman Benjamin Loan of Mississippi stated in 1865:

An assassin's bullet wielded and directed by Rebel hands made Andrew Johnson president... the price he was to pay for his promotion was treachery... and rebellion.\(^4\)

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 155-157  
\(^3\)Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, p. 464  
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 466
No evidence has ever been produced linking Johnson with the conspiracy. Many of the charges came up during the Radical Republicans' efforts to remove him from office, efforts that led to his impeachment trial in 1867.

Otto Eisenschiml in his book, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, felt that there was a conspiracy beyond Booth and that it centered on one man: Edwin Stanton, a man Eisenschiml described as being "brusque, insolent and cruel... one man who profited greatly by Lincoln's death." Eisenschiml questioned why Stanton, who had a reputation for being merciless, did nothing to John Parker, Lincoln's guard that fateful night. Parker was not court-martialed, dismissed or even reprimanded for his negligence. He was permitted to fade into oblivion, without even newspapers questioning him. Mrs. Lincoln believed Parker was involved in the conspiracy and told that to his face. But her belief may have been based on the guilt she felt since it was under her orders that he was hired.

Eisenschiml also questioned Stanton's refusal to allow Major Eckert to escort Lincoln. Some scholars feel Stanton did this to dissuade Lincoln from going to the theater and not to deny him adequate protection as Eisenschiml suggests. Eisenschiml also found it strange that Stanton ordered all roads from Washington blocked except the road to Port Tobacco, the road the killers were most likely to take.

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5 Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, p. 396
6 Ibid., pp. 12-21
7 Ibid., pp. 91-97
Eisenstein concluded that while there was a possibility that Stanton and the Radical Republicans, wanting to punish the South, decided Lincoln and his plans were to dangerous to be permitted to be carried out, there was a lack of material evidence. Thus, no conclusive link between them and the conspiracy could be established.8

Theodore Roscoe in The Web of Conspiracy, felt that Lincoln was betrayed by his own friends and advisers, activities that were concealed by the censorship of the War Department. All records of the assassination were stored in secret files in the War Department and not released until the 1930s.9

Roscoe questioned Lincoln's lack of protection during a time when rumors of plots to kill him were swirling around Washington. The War Department had information of several plots against Lincoln, including Weichmann's warning in February, yet failed to stop his assassination. Roscoe felt Parker was never questioned due to his involvement with Mrs. Lincoln. Some believed that she had Southern sympathies and perhaps it was better not to pursue it.10

Roscoe wrote that Lincoln's "elective franchise" speech on April 11 revealed Lincoln's intention not to punish the South. This angered such Radical Republicans as Thaddeus Stevens, Benjamin Wade, Wendell

8Ibid., pp. 360-371, 427-436
9Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy, p. 95
10Ibid., p. 59
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\(^8\)Ibid., pp. 360-371, 427-436  
\(^9\)Roscoe, *The Web of Conspiracy*, p. 95  
\(^10\)Ibid., p. 59
Phillips and Benjamin Butler as well as Stanton and may have stirred this group to act.\textsuperscript{11}

The Washington Post on June 29, 1975, published a feature story that the all-inclusive draft of charges against the conspirators, the speed of the trial, the fact that it was a military tribunal instead of a civilian trial and the forced silence of the prisoners suggested that Stanton might be a conspirator. His motive was to eliminate the cabinet to set up a military junta.\textsuperscript{12}

Another attempt to implicate Stanton and others in the conspiracy was introduced by Sunn Classic Pictures in 1977 with the movie, The Lincoln Conspiracy. The movie stated there were several groups who wanted Lincoln dead, including Stanton and the Radical Republicans, Confederate leaders and a group of Canadian bankers who opposed Lincoln's greenback money program. The film used the 18 missing pages of Booth's diary, supposedly found in 1977 by Massachusetts appraiser Joseph Lynch upon which to base many of these claims.\textsuperscript{13}

When Colonel Everton Conger, leader of the expedition to track down Booth, found the diary on Booth's body, he gave it intact to Stanton who locked it in a vault. When he was forced to produce the diary in 1867 during John Surratt's trial, 18 pages were missing. Lynch claimed to have found those pages but they have not yet been authenticated.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 95
\textsuperscript{12}The Washington Post, June 29, 1975
\textsuperscript{13}The Civil War Times (Illustrated), Vol. XVI, August, 1977
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
The "missing" pages implicate Senator John Conners of California, financier Jay Cook, Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin, political boss Thurlow Weed, Michigan Senator Zacharia Chandler, Confederate Secret Service Chief Jacob Thompson, U.S. Secret Service Chief LaFayette Baker and Colonel Conger in conspiracy with Booth to kill Lincoln. The pages, at least those in Lynch's possession, end as follows:

By the almighty God, I swear that I shall lay the body of this tyrant (Lincoln) dead upon the altar of Mars (a reference to Stanton). And if by this act, I am slain, they too shall be cast into Hell for I have given information to a friend (John Mathews) who will have the nation know who the traitors are.

Mathews burned the letter and we know only the version he related in 1867. It is impossible to determine if the letter did reveal a larger conspiracy.

Finally, in the authenticated portion of Booth's diary, he mentions leaving something to clear his name but feels the government will not allow it to be printed. He also expressed confidence that he could go to Washington "and in a measure clear my name, which I feel I can do." Booth's death made it impossible for him to explain this passage.

Not everyone believed that there was a larger conspiracy. Louis Weichmann wrote that it was Booth's conspiracy entirely, that Booth felt he was a "Confederate doing his duty on his own responsibility."

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15 Mark E. Neely, Jr., Lincoln Lore, September, 1977
16 Ibid.
17 "The Diary of John Wilkes Booth", copy, Lincoln Library Collection, Fort Wayne, Indiana
18 Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 10
John Surratt in his "Rockville Lecture," denied there were others involved in the conspiracy:

But we never acquainted them (the Confederate government) with the plan and they never had anything in the wide world to do with it. In fact, we were jealous of our undertaking and wanted no outside help. 19

Samuel Arnold in his confession called Booth the "originator of the scheme" and denied that there was outside help. 20

Was there a larger conspiracy behind Booth that involved high government officials? The possibility is intriguing but there is insufficient evidence to support it. Many of Stanton's actions, such as not following up on Parker, if not part of a conspiracy were at least negligence of duty. Stanton had also been one of the strongest voices of caution, constantly beseeching the President to be on his guard.

The Radical Republicans, while opposing many of Lincoln's plans, were not men who would jeopardize their lives by aiding the murder of the President, especially since there were still options open to them. Perhaps if the 18 missing pages of Booth's diary, supposedly found by Lynch, are proved authentic the final truth will be known. Until that time, the question of a larger conspiracy must go unanswered.

19 Surratt, "The Rockville Lecture"
20 "Arnold Confession", Baltimore Sun, January 19, 1869
CHAPTER X

THE AFTERMATH: A TIME OF GRIEF AND CONFUSION

Upon Lincoln's death, the entire country fell into a period of mourning. For the first time since the Civil War commenced, the country agreed on something--the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was a tragedy. In death, accolades were sounded where only criticism was heard before. This quote came from The Assassination and History of the Conspiracy, the first book published on the assassination:

The mighty pilot, who guided our nation's bark through the perilous storm in safety, is cold in his grave and the genius of liberty will ever mourn the irreparable loss. Let us profit by his great example and strive to imitate his virtues. 1

Many in the South felt a great sense of sorrow at the tragedy and felt no hesitation in expressing it. The New Orleans Daily Picayune of April 20 had this to say of the murder of Lincoln:

It was as if a black pall had descended upon the city... Without regard to any other feelings or considerations, save those of common humanity, there was one universal expression of unfeigned sorrow mingled with a very natural feeling of indignation... The grief with which the nation is now afflicted is one that lies too deep for expression, as yet, by pen or by voice. 2

Dr. Louis Warren described the mood of the country as follows:

There has never been in all the history of the country such a day of weeping as that day before Easter... Public buildings and private dwellings were soon shrouded in black. Public sentiment was quick to express itself and many personal assaults were made on those who failed to show the proper signs of grief over the death of the President. 3

1The Assassination and History of the Conspiracy, p. XIX
2The New Orleans Daily Picayune, April 20, 1865
3Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, Feb. 13, 1939
This public sentiment turned from grief to outrage and the mood in many cities became ugly. Emotion ran high and violence and a loss of reason became common. An example of this mood is illustrated in a letter from a 19 year old State Department clerk, Albert Daggett, to his mother in New York:

... The news has just reached me that one traitor— at least— in this city has met his deserts. He dared to say, in company, that he was glad that President Lincoln had been assassinated. The words had hardly left his mouth before the bullet from the pistol of a Union soldier went smashing through his brain. The same fate awaits others if treason does not hold its infamous tongue. My seven shooter is in my pocket and I shall not fail to use it should I hear any such remark.

The country was in an evil mood and tolerance for other's opinions was fast becoming extinct. Above the cries for vengeance, voices could be heard imploring for justice and reason to prevail. These voices asked for patience, to stay away from blind emotion. The Boston Globe expressed a confidence in the American people and their desire for peace in an April 18 editorial:

The connection of the assassin of President Lincoln with the organized rebellion is a question of deep interest and it will be hard to convince the American people that it was not direct and definite.... But the question can not be settled yet. Vengeance is far from the popular heart but the desire for justice grows dearer and dearer. But even that will be administered, as becomes a great people, deliberately and solemnly and out of love rather than hatred to all concerned in these momentus times. 5

During the days following the assassination, the public was eager for information and the newspapers tried to satisfy this demand. In

4"Letter from Albert Daggett to mother", April 23, 1865, Lincoln Library
5The Boston Globe, April 18, 1865
their desire to print the fastest possible news, they sometimes spread confusion rather than accuracy. Examples of this follow:

The Saint Paul Press (April 16): Dispatches just received from Washington say that Secretary Seward died at 9:30 this morning. 6

Indiana State Sentinel (April 17): It is reported that Booth was captured this morning. The story is that his horse threw him so severely that he was obliged to seek relief in a house on the Seventh Street road in Washington. 7

One mystery that occurred during this period was that several newspapers, including The Whig Press in Middletown, New York, and papers in Manchester, New Hampshire, and St. Joseph, Minnesota, published stories on April 14 that Lincoln had been assassinated, hours before he actually was. It has never been determined where these papers received their information. 8

Thus, the mood of the country after the assassination was one of mourning and confusion. This resulted in several cases of violence, most in Washington D.C. For the first time in American history the President had been assassinated, an event that supposedly should not happen in a democracy. Still an assassination had occurred and the country had to accept it and search for justice.

6 The Saint Paul Press, April 16, 1865
7 Indiana State Sentinel, April 17, 1865
8 Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, Feb. 20, 1939
CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE

The assassination quickly brought on a massive manhunt for Booth and the rest of the conspirators. The nation wanted those responsible for the crime captured and punished. On May 9, 1865, the trial of the surviving conspirators was held in the Arsenal Building in Washington. Attorney General James Sied decided that the conspirators would be tried before a military tribunal since:

The victim wasn't an ordinary citizen but was Commander in Chief of the Armies of the Union. The crime was most extraordinary, the times equally so. Every substantial consideration of justice and fairness and common sense demanded that the military arm of the government should try the case and deal with them according to the facts. 1

And so the trial began. The following officers were appointed to the Commission to hear the evidence and reach a verdict: Major General David Hunter, U.S. Volunteers; Major General Lewis Wallace, U.S. Volunteers (Wallace later authored the book, Ben Hur); Brevet Major General August Kautz, U.S. Volunteers; Brigadier General Albion P. Howe, U.S. Volunteers; Brigadier General Robert Foster, U.S. Volunteers; Brevet Brigadier General James Ekin, U.S. Volunteers; Brigadier General T.M. Harris, U.S. Volunteers; Brevet Colonel C.H. Tompkins, U.S. Army; Lieutenant Colonel David Clendenin, Eighth Illinois Cavalry; Brigadier General Joseph Holt, Judge Advocate and Recorder. 2 The following is a brief synopsis of what happened to those involved with the assassination:

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1From the North American Review, September, 1888. Taken from Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 236
2Weichmann, A True History of the Assassination, p. 235
John Wilkes Booth: Booth fled into Maryland with David Herold after the assassination, finally stopping at the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd to have his broken leg set. He stayed the night and then moved on, reaching the John Garrett farm on April 24 and remaining there until April 26. On that day, federal troops found him and ordered him to surrender. Booth, along with Herold, was hiding in a barn and refused to come out. Herold later surrendered but Booth still refused and so the barn was set afire. Boston Corbett supposedly went to the back of the barn and saw Booth ready to open fire and so he fatally shot him. Booth lived an hour before dying and his body was secretly taken to Washington and hidden. In 1869 it was given to his family for permanent burial.

(A story circulated at the turn of the century that Booth was not in the barn but escaped earlier. He moved west and changed his name twice, once to John St. Helen and again to David George. He committed suicide in 1903 in Enid, Oklahoma. His body was mummified and toured around the country as a circus attraction. The mummy was last seen sometime in the 1950s.)

John Surratt: Surratt claimed to be outside of Washington on April 14 and after the assassination fled to Montreal, Canada. On April 22 he boarded a ship bound for Europe, traveling through Ireland, England and France before reaching Italy. He joined the Papal Zouaves in Rome in 1866 but he was discovered and escaped to Egypt before finally being captured. He was put on trial in June, 1867 but the jury could not reach a verdict and so he was released.

³Dr. Louis Warren, Lincoln Lore, Feb. 13, 1935
Mary Surratt: She was arrested on April 19 and charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln. She pleaded not guilty but the Commission found her guilty and sentenced her to death. A last minute petition to commute her sentence to life imprisonment due to her age and sex was denied as was a Writ of Habeas Corpus. She was executed by hanging on July 8, the first woman in American history to be executed. There has been a great deal of controversy over whether she deserved the death penalty.

David Herold: Herold fled with Booth to the Garrett farm but he decided to surrender to authorities. He was charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln and pleaded not guilty. The Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to death. He was executed by hanging on July 8, 1865.

Lewis Paine: After leaving the Seward mansion, Paine hid in a cemetery for four days before deciding to return to the Surratt house on April 20. He arrived there shortly after the police did and was promptly arrested. He was charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln and pleaded not guilty. The Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to death. He was executed by hanging on July 8, 1865.

George Atzerodt: Atzerodt was arrested on April 20 in Maryland and charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln. He pleaded not guilty but the Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to death. He was executed by hanging on July 8, 1865.

Edward Spangler: Spangler was arrested on April 20 and charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln. He pleaded not guilty but the Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to six years hard labor. He was imprisoned at Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas, Florida, was released in 1869 and died shortly after of tuberculosis.
Dr. Samuel Mudd: Mudd set Booth's leg during his escape from authorities and was arrested at his home on April 20. He was charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln and pleaded not guilty. The Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to a life of hard labor. He was imprisoned at Ft. Jefferson in Dry Tortugas, Florida. He helped control a yellow fever epidemic and was pardoned in 1869.

Samuel Arnold: Arnold was arrested on April 17 and revealed the conspiracy to the authorities. He was charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln and pleaded not guilty. The Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to hard labor for life. He was imprisoned at Ft. Jefferson in Dry Tortugas, Florida. He was released in 1869.

Michael O'Laughlin: He was arrested on April 17 and charged with conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln. He pleaded not guilty but the Commission found him guilty and sentenced him to hard labor for life. He was imprisoned at Ft. Jefferson in Dry Tortugas, Florida. He died of yellow fever in 1868.

Louis Weichmann: Weichmann was part of the Montreal search party for John Surratt and became the chief witness at the trial. He lost his job as clerk and moved to Anderson, Indiana in 1886 and founded a business college.

Mary Lincoln: Mrs. Lincoln suffered extreme emotional anguish after the assassination and was committed to an insane asylum in 1875. She was released in 1876 and died in 1882.

Clara Harris: She married Major Henry Rathbone and went with him to Germany in 1877. She was killed by her husband in 1883.
Major Henry Rathbone: He married Clara Harris and became the American Consul General to Germany in 1877. He became insane and killed his wife in 1883 and then lived out the rest of his life in an insane asylum.

Edwin Stanton: Stanton was forced out of office by Andrew Johnson but was appointed to the United States Supreme Court just before his death in 1869.

William Seward: Seward survived his wounds and died in 1872 of natural causes.
CONCLUSION

Abraham Lincoln became president during one of the most trying times in our nation's history. He probably had more enemies and more arises than any other president. Emotions ran high in an era where the heart, rather than the mind, held sway. Disagreements occurred and were often resolved by a gun rather than by discussion. Lincoln's assassination as a violent end to a violent chapter in our history.

Lincoln accumulated many enemies during his term in office. Many of these enemies were extremely vocal and left no doubt what they would do to him if he were available. These threats made their mark on the president, already a pessimistic man, giving him a fatalistic outlook on life. He believed that if he was fated to be assassinated, nothing could prevent it. Thus, the early threats and plots may have made Lincoln less cautious and more susceptible to an assassination attempt.

Booth was an emotional man, his career based on his ability to project emotion into his characters to make them believable. He carried many of these emotions out in the open, especially his admiration for the South. As the years passed his love for the Confederacy grew until he would risk anything, including his own life, for a chance at saving the South. This love and what it was forcing him to do caused him to think even more heavily than ever. Something had to give and on April 14, Booth killed Lincoln. His action, lasting all of five seconds, did
more than murder a human being. It destroyed countless lives and affected the course of history. Seldom has there been a more costly five seconds.

Part of Booth's emotional drive came from a rivalry with his brother. Edwin won more acclaim and was regarded as the best of the Booth brothers. It has been suggested that Booth decided to kill Lincoln in a theater to make a name for himself for all time, to experience a moment on stage unsurpassed by any other actor— including his brother.

Much has been made of the fact that no one knows when Booth decided to kill Lincoln. Was he planning for just that purpose in September or did it strike him hours before with the letter to Coyle? Many Mary Surratt supporters argue that he never decided until the Coyle letter, leaving Mrs. Surratt innocent of conspiracy to murder. He was obviously thinking about it for some time. But the precise moment when he decided to kill Lincoln is impossible to determine for certain. This writer is of the opinion that by April 1, the decision had been made.

The trial of the conspirators reflected the mood of much of the country: the guilty must be found and punished quickly and harshly. A Military Commission could be counted on more easily to return a guilty verdict than a civilian court. The judgement may not have been fair but it was what the government wanted— quick justice.

Thus, the Lincoln assassination ended a violent period in our history. This was the first time in American history a president had been murdered, an act that many believed could not happen in a democracy.
The horror of this act reverberated throughout the country and led to the belief that there would never be another presidential assassination in America. But that belief proved false as three times in the next 95 years a president went down to an assassin's bullet. James Garfield was shot and killed in 1881 as was William McKinley in 1901 and John Kennedy in 1963. Perhaps the horror of these murders has finally made enough of an impact to see that the country will never again have to go through a period of mourning such as happened in April, 1865. At least, let us hope so.
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