

# *Lincoln Love*

Winter 2001



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### *Lincoln Lore*

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*The Lincoln Museum*

The mission of The Lincoln Museum  
is to interpret and preserve the history and  
legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research,  
conservation, exhibit, and education.

#### Editor:

Gerald J. Prokopowicz, Ph.D.  
Historian/Director of Public Programs

#### Contributors:

Joan L. Flinspach, President  
Carolyn Texley, Director of Collections/Archivist

For subscription information, contact The Lincoln Museum

200 E. Berry Street, P. O. Box 7838  
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801-7838  
(219) 455-3864 Fax: (219) 455-6922  
email: [TheLincolnMuseum@LNC.com](mailto:TheLincolnMuseum@LNC.com)

<http://www.TheLincolnMuseum.org>

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Currier & Ives, "The Assassination of President Lincoln at Ford's Theatre Washington, D.C. April 14th 1865." Color lithograph, 1865. All the illustrations in this issue of *Lincoln Lore* are from the exhibit *Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. (TLM # 3140).

### *Now He Belongs To The Ages:*

# THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

- At The Lincoln Museum, April 21, 2001 – January 27, 2002
- At the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, opening June 2002

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(On the cover: The Lincoln Penny without Lincoln is the graphic symbol of The Lincoln Museum's new special exhibit *Now He Belongs to the Ages: the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*.)

*John Rhodehamel is the Norris Foundation Curator of American Historical Manuscripts at the Huntington Library. With Carolyn Texley, Director of Collections at The Lincoln Museum, he served as co-curator of the exhibit Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He is the co-editor, with Louise Taper, of "Right or Wrong, God Judge Me": The Writings of John Wilkes Booth, the first scholarly compilation of Booth's writings.*

# Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

*By John Rhodehamel*

On April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln became the first American president to fall to an assassin's bullet. No one who heard the terrible news ever forgot the shock of that moment. Word of the shooting flew by word-of-mouth through Washington, until sleepless crowds thronged the streets trying to learn more of the tragedy. It flashed across a web of telegraph wires from city to city. Before long newspapers throughout the country were churning out extra editions, bringing the first sketchy details of the event to readers hungry for information. Within hours, official "wanted" posters appeared, offering huge rewards for the capture of the guilty. Those who were at Ford's Theatre supplemented the journalistic accounts by recording their personal impressions in letters to friends and relatives.

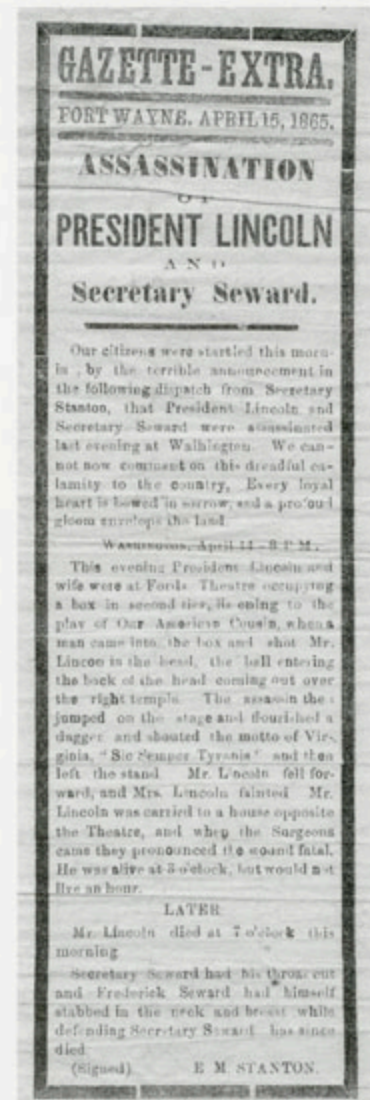
Throughout the North, people struggled to cope with the unexpected tragedy. In their grief, they forgot how bitterly many of them had opposed Lincoln's controversial policies, especially his Emancipation Proclamation. Today, most Americans remember Abraham Lincoln as one of the nation's greatest heroes; few are aware that in his lifetime, Lincoln was one of the nation's most controversial, and most bitterly hated, presidents.

As the shock passed, Northerners sought answers for the crime. A few saw Lincoln's murder as the act of a madman, but more recognized it as the last tragic act of the Civil War, a war that Lincoln's election had ignited four years earlier. Slavery, Lincoln had stated in his Second Inaugural Address, "was, somehow, the cause of the war"; slavery and racial hatred also lay behind the assassination.

John Wilkes Booth believed that slavery was "one of the greatest blessings... that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation." To him, Lincoln was an evil tyrant who had crushed American liberty and betrayed the white race by proclaiming emancipation and arming black soldiers. On April 11, 1865, Booth heard the president speaking from a White House balcony; when Lincoln endorsed the idea of voting rights for African-Americans, Booth turned to a companion and said, "That is the last speech he will ever make."

Three days later Booth fulfilled his awful prophecy when he shot Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre.

Newspapers like the *Fort Wayne Gazette* rushed to print handbills bearing the awful news. (TLM #4559)



## The Last Speech

"All the buildings were illuminated. The night was misty and the exhibition a splendid one. The reflection of the illuminated dome of the Capitol on the moist air was remarked as being especially fine; it was seen many miles away. Arlington House, across the river, the old home of Lee, was brilliantly lighted, and rockets and colored lights blazed on the lawn, where ex-slaves by the thousand sang 'The Year of Jubilee.' The notable feature of the evening, of course, was the President's speech, delivered to an immense throng of people, who, with bands, banners, and loud huzzahs, poured into the semicircular avenue in front of the Executive Mansion. After repeated calls, loud and enthusiastic, the President appeared at the window, which was the signal for a great outburst. There was something terrible in the enthusiasm with which the beloved Chief Magistrate was received. Cheers upon cheers, wave after wave of applause, rolled up, the President standing quietly until it was all over."

—From a contemporary newspaper.



Currier & Ives, "The Fall of Richmond, Va. on the Night of April 2nd, 1865." Color lithograph, 1865. News of the capture of Richmond touched off a week of celebration in Washington, D.C. (Huntington Library)

## Washington Celebrates

Lincoln's fateful last speech was given in response to the approaching end of the Civil War. From 1861 to 1865, a host of Union armies under a series of Union commanders had sought to capture Richmond, Virginia, the capital city of the Confederacy. The rebels had beaten them all back. Now, at long last, Grant's Army of the Potomac had seized the prize, driving into exile the expiring government of the Confederate States of America. Just behind the fleeing bureaucrats, Robert E. Lee's army (one of the last major rebel forces) was retreating west in disarray. On the morning of April 4th a massive 800-gun artillery salute proclaimed the news the Union had hoped for through four bloody years — Richmond had fallen!

The roar of the cannon was the signal to start a reckless week-long binge of celebration, not only in Washington, but throughout the North. Fireworks, gunfire, bonfires, illuminations, music, widespread public drunkenness, speeches, and parades continued night and day. Night after night, a crazy pageant of joy had swept through the streets of the capital.

Then, at daybreak on April 10, another window-shattering blast jolted Washington awake. Everyone knew what the noise meant. As Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles noted in his diary: "At day-dawn a salute of several guns was fired. The first discharge proclaimed, as well as words could have done, the capture of Lee and his army.... The tidings were spread over the country during the night, and the nation seems delirious with joy. Guns are firing, bells ringing, flags flying, men laughing, children cheering; all, all are jubilant. This surrender of the great Rebel captain and the most formidable and reliable army of the Secessionists virtually terminates the Rebellion." The wild street party got its second wind.

The joy of peace was so great because the war had been so terrible. As Lincoln himself had said at his recent inauguration, no one living in 1861 could have dreamed that an American civil war could become such a sweeping calamity or that the war would last for so long a time. Both North and South had "looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astonishing." No one could

have imagined so much killing, so much death. At least 630,000 Americans had died in the war. This amounted to a full two percent of the 1860 population of about 32,000,000 — the equivalent of 6,000,000 dead in present-day America. The war was a tragedy that remains unequalled in the American experience.

April 11, 1865, brought a cool spring evening to Washington, D.C. Mist hung in the air when the president stepped onto a White House balcony, greeted by an ecstatic crowd. Only when the cheering died away did Lincoln speak. "We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart," he began. "The evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, and the surrender of the principal insurgent army, give hope of a righteous and speedy peace whose joyous expression can not be restrained."

Yet on that happy night, Abraham Lincoln did not launch into the kind of star-spangled victory speech the crowd was expecting. He had worked all day on his address. The result was a bit long, thoughtful and subdued in tone. His subject was reconstruction, specifically the

progress of the new reconstruction government in Louisiana. His arguments were involved, and perhaps a little hard to follow, particularly for the impatient carnival crowd gathered on the White House grounds. As the president continued on, some of the audience began to wander off, looking for better fun or more liquor.

But not everyone was unimpressed by what Lincoln had to say. Below in the darkness stood John Wilkes Booth and two companions, Lewis Thornton Powell and David Herold. Booth listened carefully as the president addressed the issue of voting rights in Louisiana's new government. "It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man," Lincoln said. "I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers." Booth was outraged. "That means nigger citizenship!" he snarled aloud. "Now, by God! I'll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make!"

## John Wilkes Booth

Myths and contradictions have always accompanied the darkly beautiful person of John Wilkes Booth, but much is also known with certainty of him and his crime. He was born May 10, 1838, on a farm outside Baltimore, the fifth of six surviving children of Mary Ann Holmes and Junius Brutus Booth. Though eccentric and unpredictable, Junius Booth was acknowledged for three decades as the preeminent tragic actor on the American stage.

Naturally, his sons became actors too. Edwin and Junius Jr. made names for themselves on the stage, and their younger brother John Wilkes was eager to follow. His career began in 1857, when he hired on as an eight-dollar-a-week supporting player in the stock company of a popular Philadelphia theater. He played stock parts there for a year before joining the company of the Richmond Theatre in 1858. Booth came of age as an actor in Richmond, Virginia, and it was living there that confirmed his determination to be "of the South." He wanted, his sister Asia wrote, "to be loved of the Southern people above all things. He would work to make himself essentially a Southern actor."



"President Lincoln Riding Through Richmond, April 4," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 22, 1865. (TLM #2328)

He grew in stature as an actor and as a dashing, much-admired figure. In the streets and drawing rooms of the city that would soon be the capital of the Confederate States of America, Booth grew as well in his passionate, even fanatical, love for the South and its institutions. During his days as an apprentice actor in Richmond, Booth had an adventure that deeply impressed him. In December 1859 he witnessed the execution of the abolitionist revolutionary John Brown. Donning the uniform of the city's elite militia regiment, the Richmond Grays, Booth stood in the ranks of armed men arrayed around the scaffold to guard against any last-minute attempt to free the condemned man. Although he later declared himself proud of the small part he had played in this battle against the forces determined to destroy slavery, Booth never forgot John Brown's courage or the old man's bold gamble at changing history with a single violent act.

Booth played stock in Richmond for two years. By the fall of 1860 he was ready



An unknown descendant of Abraham Lincoln added this *carte de visite* image of John Wilkes Booth to the Lincoln family's photograph album, now in The Lincoln Museum collection. (TLM #4036)

to make his first tour as a star. Success came quickly, as Booth played to packed houses across the country. Within a short time, the young actor could boast of earning more than twenty thousand dollars a year, then an altogether spectacular sum.

During his tour through Georgia and Alabama in the secession winter of 1860-61, just after Abraham Lincoln's election, he must have breathed the fiery atmosphere of hatred that pervaded the lower South. But in John Wilkes Booth, the fire-

eaters would have been preaching to the converted. Booth already believed, as he was to write six months before he killed Lincoln, "that the abolitionists, *were the only traitors* in the land."

Growing up in Baltimore and on his family's Maryland farm, Booth had been born into a world in which slavery was a part of the accepted order of things. Booth described American slavery as "one of the greatest blessings... that God ever bestowed on a favored nation." As a boy, he had come to regard African Americans with an affectionate condescension and to believe that their ancestral captivity was the happiest condition to which they could aspire. With many white Americans of his time Booth shared the conviction that blacks were an inferior people, incapable of living alongside whites as free men and women. "This country was formed for the *white* not for the black man," Booth insisted.

### "You Are In Danger!"

While Booth was making his inaugural tour of the South in late 1860, Abraham Lincoln was preparing for his own inauguration, scheduled for March 4, 1861. Whether the presidential inauguration would take place according to plan was far from certain, however. From the moment his election was announced, Abraham Lincoln's life was in jeopardy. The slave states were filled with people who loathed Lincoln and his party of "Black Republicans" and race-mixing "amalgamationists." With wild hyperbole one Southern newspaper swore that the Potomac River would be "crimsoned in human gore, and Pennsylvania Avenue... paved ten fathoms deep in mangled bodies" before the South would "submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln."

As Lincoln traveled from Springfield toward Washington, word came of a plot to kill him as the inaugural party passed through Baltimore, John Wilkes Booth's hometown. The schedule called for Lincoln to change trains there, riding in an open carriage from one station to another. Rather than risk making himself an easy target in a city aflame with rebel sentiment, Lincoln agreed to pass through the city at night, wearing a cap instead of



Adalbert J. Volck, *Passage through Baltimore*. Warned of an assassination plot, Lincoln changed trains and wore a cap instead of his trademark stovepipe hat when he passed through Baltimore in 1861. He was humiliated when cartoonists exaggerated the incident, and resolved to prove that he did not fear assassination by refusing to take precautions, with ultimately fatal results. (TLM #2590)

his trademark stovepipe hat. Although he arrived in Washington safely, he was humiliated when cartoonists exaggerated the incident, portraying him as a coward. He resolved to prove that he did not fear assassination by refusing to take any further precautions.

Lincoln was fatalistic about his safety. "I long ago made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it," he wrote in 1863. When so many other men were risking their lives in battle for their country, Lincoln made a point of risking his own. He visited the troops often, came under enemy fire at Fort Stevens in 1864, and walked the streets of Richmond just hours after it was abandoned by the Confederate army. Although he eventually agreed to an escort of armed guards on some of his outings, Lincoln believed that nothing could protect him from a determined assassin, a man willing to trade his own life for that of the president.

## The Plot

If desperate times breed desperate measures, then by 1864 it was increasingly likely that some Southern partisan would attempt to strike at Lincoln. The Confederacy's military situation was growing dire, as Grant's army relentlessly pushed toward Richmond, seemingly heedless of casualties. The North could draw on huge reserves of manpower to make up its losses; the South could not. Earlier in the war, both sides had exchanged prisoners of war, a process that helped the rebels keep their armies up to strength, but the exchange agreement broke down when the Confederates refused to exchange captured African American soldiers, treating them as escaped slaves instead. It occurred to some in the South that if Abraham Lincoln could somehow be taken prisoner, the North would surely agree to exchange any number of captive rebels in order to get back the commander-in-chief.

One such plan to kidnap the president was led by a Confederate agent named John Wilkes Booth. By the fall of 1864, Booth had abandoned acting. He gathered a team to seize Lincoln in Washington, carry him south through lower Maryland and across the Potomac

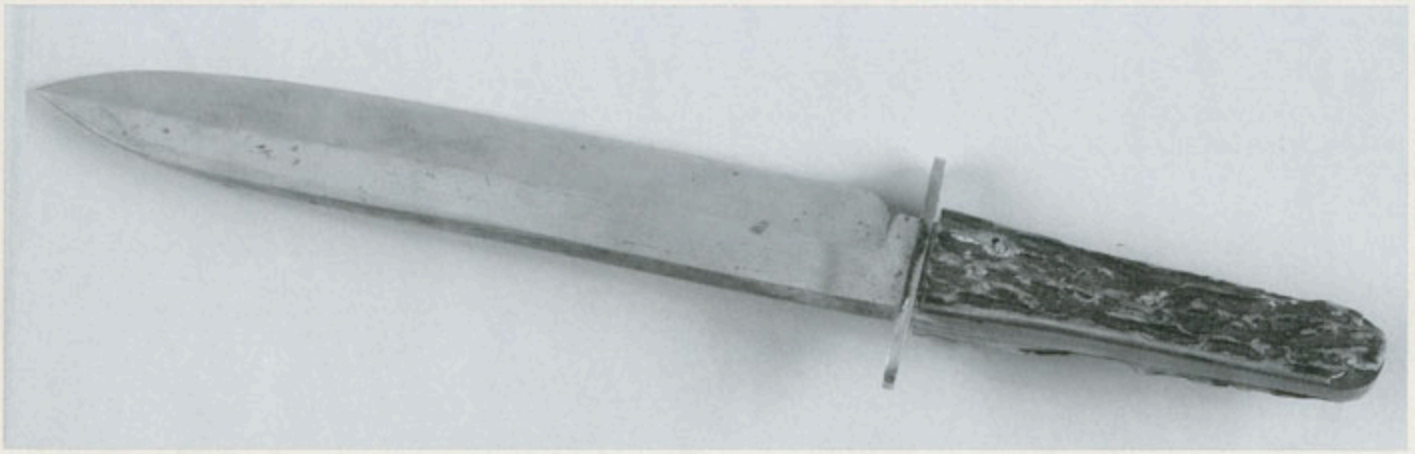
40  
 Copy  
 Washington D.C.  
 Dec 10 - 1864  
 11 o'clock A.M.  
 Hon A Lincoln  
 Sir:  
 I regret - That you do not - appreciate what I have repeatedly said to you in regard to the proper police arrangements connected with your household and your own <sup>personal</sup> safety -  
 (You are in danger)  
 and I flatter myself that you will at least believe that I am honest. If you have been impressed differently <sup>however</sup> please, and the Country the justice to at once dispose of all suspected officers - or accept my resignation of the Marshal - Ship which is hereby tendered - I will give you further reasons than those hereinafter named which have

Ward Hill Lamon, autograph letter to Abraham Lincoln, December 10, 1864. (Huntington Library)

## A Bodyguard's Warning

Ward Hill Lamon was a lawyer friend of Lincoln's from Illinois who accompanied him on the inaugural journey. He took a special interest in Lincoln's safety, and acted as Lincoln's unofficial bodyguard, on occasion sleeping armed on the floor of the White House outside Lincoln's door. Lincoln appointed Lamon Marshal of the District of Columbia, and it was as both a friend and a law enforcement officer that Lamon expressed his fears to Lincoln on December 10, 1864:

"You are in Danger.... To-night, as you have done on several previous occasions, you went unattended to the theatre. When I say unattended, I mean that you went alone with Charles Sumner and a foreign minister, neither of whom could defend himself against an assault from any able-bodied woman in this city.... Your life is sought after, and will be taken unless you and your friends are cautious for you have many enemies within our lines."



An important, newly-discovered artifact of the Lincoln assassination is on display at The Lincoln Museum for the first time. This fearsome, twelve-inch long "Rio Grand Camp Knife," was used in the bloody assassination attempt on Seward. The knife is nearly identical to the one Booth wielded when he shot Lincoln, which is on permanent exhibition at Ford's Theatre National Historic Site. (Huntington Library)

## Powell's Knife

The bowie knife used by John Wilkes Booth's henchman Lewis Thornton Powell to attack Secretary of State William Seward on April 14, 1865, was part of a small arsenal of weapons that Booth bought in New York in January of that year and shipped to Washington. At that time, the assassin and his conspirators were planning to capture, not kill, President Lincoln. Booth acquired six revolvers, at least five big knives, and a pair of fancy repeating carbines. The heavy trunk he sent to Washington was also loaded with other gear, including handcuffs, binoculars, and canned food.

Although overshadowed by the murder of President Lincoln, the simultaneous attack on the secretary of state was an important element in Booth's plot to incapacitate the U.S. government by killing its leaders. While Booth was carrying out his part of the plan at Ford's Theatre, George Atzerodt was supposed to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson at his hotel, but he lost his nerve and instead spent the evening getting drunk.

Lewis Powell, who was assigned to kill Seward, was more determined. Powell was a large, dangerous man who had killed before. Wounded and captured at Gettysburg while serving in Lee's army, he had been released after swearing his loyalty to the Union. On the night of April 14, armed with pistol and knife, the powerful ex-soldier set out for the home of Secretary Seward, who had broken his jaw and arm in

a carriage accident and was painfully convalescing in a third floor bedroom of his house on Lafayette Square. It should have been easy for Powell to dispatch the invalid.

But Powell had not reckoned on Private George Foster Robinson. Robinson was a soldier from Maine who had been badly wounded in the leg in fighting near Richmond in 1864. After spending months in military hospitals, Robinson volunteered to serve as a medical attendant. The War Department ordered Robinson and another soldier to stay with Seward around the clock, and it was Robinson who was serving his twelve-hour shift when Powell broke into the house a little after ten o'clock.

Preferring to kill quietly, Powell used his heavy six-shooter as a bludgeon. When Frederick Seward rushed to defend his father, Powell fractured his skull in two places. (The younger Seward lingered in a coma for days, his life despaired of, before coming around.) Private Robinson was the next to confront the would-be-assassin. Powell stabbed Robinson and knocked him to the floor. Then he attacked Secretary Seward, inflicting a gruesome wound to the sick man's face. But before Powell could deliver a fatal blow, the bleeding Robinson rose from the floor and grappled with the attacker again. Robinson was stabbed and clubbed repeatedly, but he was finally able to drive Powell away, saving the life of the secretary of state.

Robinson was a hero, but in the aftermath of Lincoln's death, not many noticed. Congress voted him a gold medal and a five thousand dollar reward, and he became an

army paymaster and remained on the government payroll until the day he died, but there was one other thing Robinson wanted. In 1866, he wrote to War Secretary Edwin Stanton, asking for the bowie knife that Powell had used that bloody night. A grateful William Seward endorsed Robinson's request.

His wish was granted. On July 10, 1866, the knife arrived with a letter from Joseph Holt, Judge Advocate General, U.S. Army, officially presenting the weapon to Robinson on the instructions of Secretary of War Stanton. "Your conduct on the occasion mentioned," Holt wrote, "is now a matter of history, and none will hereafter doubt but that by your self-possession and courage in grappling with the assassin, you contributed largely to save the life of the Secretary of State, at the extreme hazard of your own — a most meritorious public service, nobly rendered, and of which the weapon now committed to your keeping will be an enduring memento."

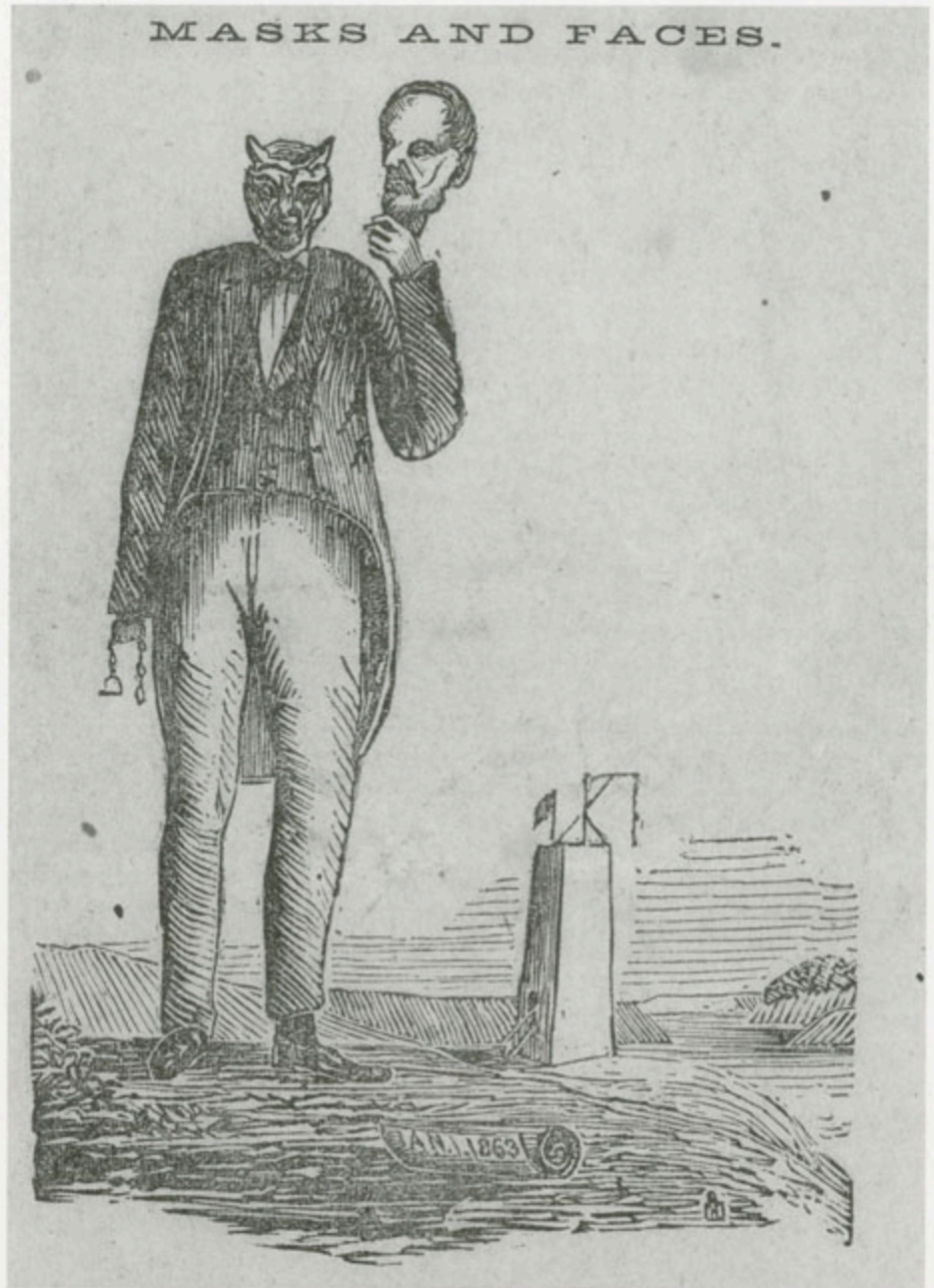
George Foster Robinson died in Los Angeles about one hundred years ago. In 1961 his elderly daughter-in-law donated a small collection of Robinson's papers, and the bowie knife, to the Huntington Library. Meticulous librarians catalogued the manuscripts, but apparently took no notice of the deadly weapon — which was not, after all, of a documentary nature. Lewis Powell's knife was rediscovered in the Huntington's collections a few years ago, largely through the research of Mike Shotwell, a specialist in Civil War weaponry.



into Virginia. During the hot months, Lincoln traveled by carriage or on horseback to the Soldiers' Home, a summer residence a few miles from the White House. The plan was to fall on the unguarded carriage with a small party of mounted men, some seizing Lincoln and securing him inside, while others took the reins and, turning the horses' heads south, drive swiftly over the Anacostia river and on into Maryland. With relays of fresh horses, they would race to the little town of Port Tobacco on the Potomac's Maryland shore. There a small boat would be waiting. A few hours of darkness would suffice to cross the big river. The route through a rural section of Maryland populated by Confederate sympathizers was one used by Southern spies and couriers throughout the war. If all went according to plan, Abraham Lincoln would be a prisoner in Confederate Virginia within a day of his capture in Washington.

Everything was in place by January 1865. All that was lacking was a chance of getting at Lincoln. By mid-March, the moment seemed to be at hand. Lincoln was planning to attend a special presentation of a play at the Soldiers' Home. Booth called a meeting of his conspirators: the hulking Confederate veteran Lewis Powell (who also went by the name "Paine"); George Atzerodt, who was experienced at ferrying rebel spies across the Potomac; little Davey Herold, who knew the Maryland backcountry well; Michael O'Laughlin and Sam Arnold, two boyhood friends of Booth who had both fought for the South; and John Surratt, who carried messages through Union territory for the Confederate secret service. On March 17 the conspirators lay in wait for Lincoln — but he never arrived. Other events prevented him from going to the play, and Booth's cronies went home demoralized.

Two weeks later, the stunning Northern victories of April 1865 reshaped the political landscape. The news that Richmond was taken fell like a hammer blow on John Wilkes Booth. With no place to take a captive Lincoln, Booth's kidnaping plan was ruined. His pain was surely intensified by the celebrations in the streets of Washington, a city delirious with the joy of Southern defeat. Seeing a group of Confederate officers who had recently surrendered, Booth cried in



"Masks and Faces. King Abraham before and after issuing the Emancipation Proclamation," *The Southern Illustrated News*, Nov. 2, 1862. Southern whites had long believed that any attempt to tamper with slavery could only result in a merciless war between the races; to them, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was thus an act of pure evil. (Reproduced from the collections of the Huntington Library)

despair, "Great God! I have no longer a country!" Furious, ashamed, and desperate, Booth was drinking hard, putting away brandy by the quart. The soldiers of the Confederate armies accepted defeat a good deal more willingly than did Booth, who insisted that Lee should never have surrendered.

Still the actor refused to believe that the South was really defeated. Perhaps it

was not too late. "For six months we had worked to capture," Booth wrote. "But our cause being almost lost, something decisive & great must be done." When he read in the papers that the president and General Grant would be attending a play at Ford's Theatre on April 14, he saw his opportunity. To those conspirators who had stayed with him after the March 17 fiasco, Booth assigned missions: Atzerodt was to kill Vice-President Andrew

# MEN OF COLOR TO ARMS! TO ARMS! NOW OR NEVER

This is our golden moment! The Government of the United States calls for every Able-bodied Colored Man to enter the Army for the

## Three Years' Service!

And join in Fighting the Battles of Liberty and the Union. A new era is open to us. For generations we have suffered under the horrors of slavery, outrage and wrong; our manhood has been denied, our citizenship blotted out, our souls scorched and burned, our spirits cowed and crushed, and the hopes of our race involved in doubt and darkness. But now our relations to the white race are changed. Now, therefore, is our most precious moment. Let us rush to arms!

## FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED

Within the walls of our North. We must now awake, arise, or be forever fallen. If we value liberty, if we wish to be free in this land, if we love our country, if we have our families, our children, our home, we must strike now while the country calls; we must rise up in the dignity of our manhood, and show by our own right arms that we are worthy to be freemen. Our enemies have made the country believe that we are craven cowards, without soul, without manhood, without the spirit of soldiers. Shall we die with this stigma resting upon our graves! Shall we leave this inheritance of shame to our children? No! a thousand times NO! We WILL Rise! The alternative is upon us. Let us rather die glorious than live in slavery. We are in life without liberty! We say that we have moments now in the time to prove it. A nation of people that cannot fight may be gained, but cannot be respected. If we would be regarded men, if we would forever silence the tongue of Calumny, of Prejudice and Hate, let us Rise Now and Fly to Arms! We have seen what Valor and Heroism our Brothers displayed at Fort Mifflin and Milliken's Bend, though they are just from the galling, poisoning grasp of Slavery, they have started the World by the most exalted heroism. If they have proved themselves heroes, cannot WE PROVE OURSELVES MEN!

## ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES

Have then a Million White Men have left Comfortable Homes and joined the Armies of the Union to save their Country. Cannot we have ours, and still the Honor of the Union, to save our Liberties, vindicate our manhood, and deserve well of our Country. MEN OF COLOR! the Englishman, the Irishman, the Frenchman, the German, the American, have been called to meet their claim to freedom and a manly character, by an appeal to the sword. The day that has seen us reduced from a man to a slave, in all history, never like this. We have seen that our last opportunity has come. If we are not better in the scale of humanity than Englishmen, Irishmen, White Americans and other Races, we can show it now. Men of Color, Brothers and Fathers, we appeal to you, by all your concerns for yourselves and your liberties, by all your regard for God and humanity, by all your desire for Citizenship and Equality before the law, by all your love for the Country, to step in no backward, timid or hesitating, but shall those you have relying for the Army. Come Forward, and at once Enroll your Names for the Three Years' Service. No! no, and you are headstrong and forever Freemen!

- |                        |                     |                     |                       |                   |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| E. B. Bennett,         | Rev. J. Underdon,   | P. J. Armstrong,    | Rev. J. C. Gibbs,     | Edjah J. Davis,   |
| William B. Forten,     | John W. Price,      | J. W. Simpson,      | Daniel George,        | John P. Barr,     |
| Frederick Douglass,    | Augustus Dorsey,    | Rev. J. H. Truist,  | Robert H. Adger,      | Robert Jones,     |
| Wm. Whipper,           | Rev. Stephen Smith, | S. Morgan Smith,    | Henry H. Cropper,     | O. V. Catto,      |
| B. B. Turner,          | N. W. Hopew,        | William E. Gipson,  | Rev. J. B. Hayes,     | Thos. J. Dorsey,  |
| Jan. McCrummell,       | Dr. J. B. Wilson,   | Rev. J. Badden,     | Rev. J. A. Williams,  | L. D. CIE,        |
| A. S. Conroy,          | J. W. Conroy,       | Rev. J. Asher,      | Rev. A. L. Stantford, | Jacob C. White,   |
| A. H. Green,           | James Needham,      | Rev. Elisha Weaver, | Thomas J. Bowers,     | Morris Hall,      |
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| L. R. Seymour,         | James H. Gordon,    | Henry Minton,       | Rev. J. P. Campbell,  | Franklin Turner,  |
| Rev. William T. Catto, | Samuel Stewart,     | Daniel Colley,      | Rev. W. J. Alston,    | Josee E. Glasgow. |

A Meeting in furtherance of the above named object will be held

### And will be Addressed by

U. S. Steam-Power Book and Job Printing Establishment, Ledger Buildings, Third and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia.

Nothing enraged the defenders of slavery more than Lincoln's willingness to enlist African Americans — many of them former slaves — in the Union armies. Over 180,000 black soldiers and sailors fought for Northern victory in the Civil War. (Courtesy of the Gilder Lehrman Collection, on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library)

Johnson; Powell/Paine was to kill Secretary of State William Seward; Herold was to assist in the getaway. Booth himself would perform the "decisive & great" deed at Ford's Theatre.

Naturally the actor knew the theatre. Booth had no trouble getting into the state box where the President and Mrs. Lincoln, accompanied by a young army

officer and his fiancée, made up a little theater party. Timing his moves with the knowledge of a play he had often acted himself in Richmond, Booth stepped into the box. Just a foot or two separated the muzzle of his little pistol from the back of Lincoln's head. Booth pulled the trigger. The bullet crashed through the back of Lincoln's skull and tore across his brain. Throwing down the empty gun, Booth laid

open the arm of the officer with a big bowie knife before vaulting from the box to the stage directly below. The twelve-foot jump should have been easy for the acrobatic actor. But in swinging himself over the rail, Booth caught a spur on one of the flags draped from the box and landed awkwardly. He fractured the bone in his left leg just above the ankle. The actor recovered enough to shout his "Sic Semper Tyrannis!" and "The South is Avenged!" before fleeing the theatre.

Pandemonium broke out, but soon several doctors were by Lincoln's side. "His wound is mortal. It is impossible for him to recover," stated Charles A. Leale, the first physician to examine the president. "A solemn and reverent cortege" from the audience carried the unconscious president to a little room in a boarding house across the street from the theater. Placed diagonally on a too-small bed, Lincoln's wounded body struggled to live through that long, ugly night. Finally, at 7:22 on the morning of April 15, as a cold spring rain fell across the city of Washington, Abraham Lincoln died.

### Aftermath

Booth escaped the city and eluded capture for almost two weeks. Federal cavalry finally cornered him in a Virginia tobacco barn, less than one hundred miles from Washington. When he refused to come out, the soldiers set the barn on fire. Then, against orders, a veteran sergeant took aim and fired. The bullet passed through Booth's neck, severing his spinal cord and paralyzing him from the neck down, while still leaving him in excruciating pain. He died a few hours later, as dawn was breaking, on the porch of the nearby farm house.

In the North, the first response to the assassination was predictable enough. "Damn the rebels!" cursed Gideon Welles. "This is their work." His colleague in the Cabinet, War Secretary Stanton, declared that the murder was "deliberately planned and set on foot by the rebels, under the pretense of avenging the South and aiding the rebel cause." The new president, Andrew Johnson, vowed retribution: "They shall suffer for this." Two weeks after Lincoln's death, Johnson issued a proclamation declaring that "the atrocious mur-

der of the Late Pres. Abraham Lincoln and the attempted assassination of Hon. W. H. Seward were incited, concerted, by and between Jefferson Davis... and other rebels and traitors." Huge rewards were offered for the capture of Davis and the other Confederate leaders allegedly responsible for the assassination. Eight people were swiftly tried and condemned by a military court for participating in Booth's plan, including Mary Surratt (John Surratt's mother), whose connection to the plot was tangential at best. Four received prison sentences (three for life). The other four, Powell, Herold, Atzerodt, and the unfortunate Mrs. Surratt, were hanged in July 1865. The court ruled that the conspirators had acted on the direct orders of the Confederate government.

### Memory and Forgetfulness

The court's theory that the assassination was a "Confederate grand conspiracy" did not prevail for long. No Confederate officials were ever formally accused of Lincoln's murder, in part because some of the testimony at the trial of the conspirators turned out to be perjured. But there were other, more compelling, reasons that the North turned away from a belief in Southern guilt. The idea that Lincoln's murder had been planned by a band of Southern patriots, or worse still by the Confederate government, could only retard the process of reunifying the North and South after the bitter conflict. Racism also played a part in the reinterpretation. By 1876, when Federal troops were withdrawn from the South, most of the European Americans of the Northern states had abandoned the struggle to guarantee equal rights to African Americans. Most white Americans, in the North as well as the South, accepted the prevailing racial beliefs of the era, which postulated that the races were inherently unequal. Few wanted to remember that slavery and racism had brought on the war, and fewer still were willing to make the additional sacrifices necessary to create a fair and just biracial society.

A romanticized notion of the Civil War and the "Lost Cause" of the Southern Confederacy came to dominate American memory of the bloody years. Most white Northerners were only too happy to

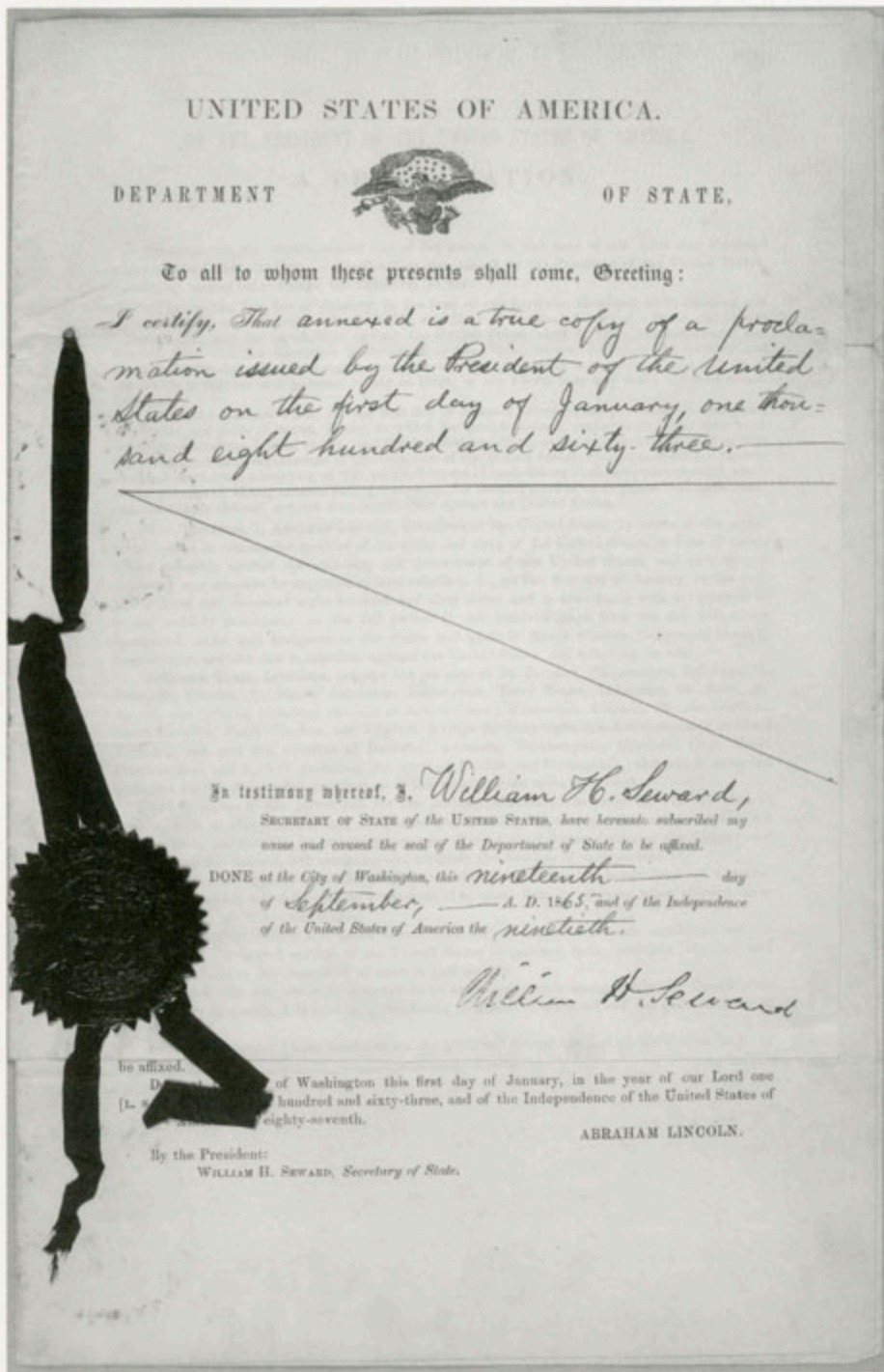


J. L. Magee, *Satan Tempting Booth to the Murder of the President*. Lithograph, 1865. Within a few decades of Lincoln's death, Americans came to see John Wilkes Booth as an attention-starved psychopath, a madman, or a figure of demonic evil; anything but a politically-aware enemy of the government. (TLM #1691)

embrace what one historian has recently termed the "culture of reunion." It was politically expedient, and it was certainly more pleasant, simply to forget how savage and tragic the great war had really been. It was certainly more comfortable not to remember how deeply Americans had hated one another, and how eagerly they had killed those who were now once again their fellow countrymen. So the war over slavery was transformed into a glori-

ous contest between noble white men in Blue or Gray, fighting for abstract principles of Union or states' rights. Slavery and race were largely forgotten, as was the indispensable contribution of the 180,000 African American soldiers who fought for the Union. The South lost the war, but won the battle of the history books.

In the public memory of Lincoln's death, the original idea of a "Confederate



William H. Seward, certified copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, Sept. 19, 1865. This black-bordered, black-sealed document was certified by the Secretary of State during the official period of mourning for Abraham Lincoln. By signing the original Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Lincoln set in motion the process that led to freedom for four million enslaved African Americans, defeat for the Confederacy, and murderous rage in the heart of John Wilkes Booth. (Huntington Library)

grand conspiracy" was replaced by the concept of a much simpler conspiracy led solely by John Wilkes Booth who, on his own notion, decided to kidnap, and later to murder Lincoln. Moreover, this Booth

was crazy, or worse. As Abraham Lincoln was gradually transformed in the public mind to a veritable god of democracy, the question naturally arose: What kind of creature would kill a god? Booth had to be

a demon, a depraved psychopath. Lincoln's assassination thus became divorced from the context of the Civil War years, the most violent period in American history. Booth's crime became an aberration, "one mad act" somehow outside of history.

Booth's own words tell a different story: he killed Lincoln for clearly articulated political motives. As a white supremacist, Booth hated Lincoln for his emancipation policies and for his tentative embrace of racial equality. As a Southern patriot, he hated the man who had destroyed the dream of Confederate independence. When he pulled the trigger, Booth believed that he was acting for his country and for his race, and he did so with the expectation that his act would make him a hero. Yet this real Booth, the man who described himself as a "Confederate doing duty on my own responsibility," eventually became in American popular culture a kind of a cartoon villain, while the shot from his little pocket pistol became just a bolt out of the pathological blue, an act of psychosis or drunken frenzy, or perhaps the monomaniacal bid of a failed actor to win enduring fame. By treating Lincoln's death as an event as random and meaningless as a lightning strike, Americans could avoid the idea that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for the principle of racial equality, a principle that the nation had ceased to honor during the "Jim Crow" decades that followed Reconstruction.

The national culture of reunion and the simple conspiracy theory of the assassination held sway for a century after the Civil War ended. Then the civil rights revolution of the 1960s prompted a reexamination of American history. When historians concluded that slavery was after all the root cause of the Civil War, it became increasingly difficult to ignore John Wilkes Booth's views on slavery and the fate of the Confederacy as motives for the assassination. Indeed, shifting interpretations have brought us full circle, back to the original thesis of a Confederate grand conspiracy.

Recent studies of the Lincoln assassination have suggested that by the end of the Civil War, both sides were willing to consider assassination as a legitimate tool of warfare. The Confederate high

# The Lincoln Flag

By Joseph Edward Garrera

President, Lincoln Group of New York

The story of the "Lincoln Flag" is one of high drama and unparalleled sadness. It began in the moment after President Lincoln was shot. Immediately Ford's Theatre was engulfed in a sea of madness and confusion. The central focus was the President's Box. The claims of patrons concerning what they heard and saw during the minutes after their eyes were drawn to the State Box were as varied as the number of persons making them.<sup>1</sup>

As the President lay on the floor of the State Box, unconscious and dying, he was tended by two young physicians. At the same time, the star of the "Our American Cousin," Laura Keene, was frantically making her way to the box. She was accompanied by others including Thomas Gourlay, who appeared as Sir Edward Trenchard in the evening's play and was also the father of Jeannie Gourlay, who had a small role in the performance.<sup>2</sup> Upon Ms. Keene's entrance into the box she commenced to offer such medical aid as might be possible.<sup>3</sup> She appealed to Dr. Charles A. Leale, the young twenty-three-year old physician in the box and seemingly in charge, to allow her to hold the President's head. Dr. Leale granted the request and she sat on the floor and held President Lincoln's head in her lap.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after Laura Keene was ready to leave. It was at this time that Thomas Gourlay reached for one of the few available things on which to rest Lincoln's head, as it would have been unthinkable to place the President's head directly on the floor. The nearest appropriate item within hand's reach was a large, partially folded American flag draped over the façade of the State Box. Generally, smaller flags were used to decorate the State Box, but on this festive evening, two of the five flags decorating the State Box were large ones that were partially folded and used as decorative bunting.<sup>5</sup>

It was at this very instant the "Lincoln Flag" came into existence. Thomas Gourlay reached for and pulled

one of the large flags off the balustrade and placed it under Mr. Lincoln's head. It now seemed much more appropriate to temporarily lay his head down. Events were moving rapidly; within minutes it was determined that the President must be moved to a more comfortable location.

Statements of persons who witnessed the President's removal from the box to the house where he died vary greatly concerning the number of persons involved and also regarding the way in which he was carried. Thomas Gourlay was among those who assisted.<sup>6</sup> According to Gourlay's descendants, he cradled Mr. Lincoln's head on the flag during the transfer from Ford's Theater to the Petersen House.

At the conclusion of this infamous short journey, Thomas Gourlay kept the flag upon which the head of the dying President



Bloodstains are still visible on this flag, used by the actor Thomas Gourlay to cushion Lincoln's head as the president lay on the floor of the state box in Ford's Theatre. (Courtesy of the Pike County [Pa.] Historical Society)

had rested for a few moments in Ford's Theatre, if not on the trip to the Petersen House as well. In later years, Mr. Gourlay passed the flag to his daughter, Jeannie Gourlay Struthers, who had relocated to the country town of Milford, Pennsylvania in 1888. Eventually Jeannie passed the flag to her only son, V. Paul Struthers, who in turn donated it to the Pike County Historical Society in 1954. From that time until its exhibition at The Lincoln Museum as part of "Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," the Lincoln Flag has never appeared outside of Pike County, Pennsylvania.

## Notes

1 W. Emerson Reck, *A. Lincoln: His Last 24 Hours* (1987), p. 105; Timothy S. Good, *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts* (1995), passim.

2 Reck, *ibid.*

3 George S. Bryan, *The Great American Myth* (1940), p. 210.

4 Reck, p. 123.

5 Through statements made by Henry Clay Ford at the conspiracy trial and through photographs of a recreation of the State Box by employees of Mathew Brady Studios in late April or early May, 1865, it is reasonable to conclude that of the five flags decorating the State Box, the two draped over the balustrade of the box were very large and partially folded.

6 Reck, pp. 124; 376.

## Recommended Reading

Bryan, George

*The Great American Myth* (1940)

Its research is dated, and the author goes to excessive length to demonstrate that John Wilkes Booth really was killed in 1865 (despite the persistence of rumors to the contrary), but this remains the clearest and most well-written account of Booth's conspiracy to kidnap or kill Abraham Lincoln.

Good, Timothy S., ed.

*We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts* (1995)

Almost as valuable as the accounts themselves is the editor's introduction, in which he carefully collates the conflicting accounts to produce as definitive a description of the events at Ford's Theatre as we are ever likely to have.

Hanchett, William

*The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (1983)

This is a history not of the assassination, but of the bizarre conspiracy theories blaming Lincoln's death on everyone from Edwin Stanton to the Pope that have arisen since 1865. The author convincingly debunks them by showing both how and why they originated.

Tidwell, William A., with James O. Hall and David Winfred Gaddy

*Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln* (1988)

Tidwell, William A.

*April '65: Confederate Covert Action in the American Civil War* (1995)

Just when it seemed that William Hanchett had decisively refuted every conspiracy theory involving anyone other than Booth and his cronies, these books reopened the case against the Confederate government as an active party in the plot to kill Lincoln. Some historians remain skeptical while others, including Hanchett, have been persuaded that the case has merit; the issue remains unresolved.

Rhodehamel, John, and Louise Taper, eds.

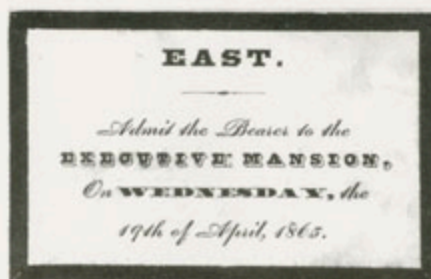
*"Right or Wrong, God Judge Me":*

*The Writings of John Wilkes Booth* (1997)

Although Booth, who died at the age of 26, did not leave a great deal of written material behind, what he did produce gives the reader dramatic insight into his motives.



A pair of gloves worn to Lincoln's funeral in Springfield, Illinois, by Sullivan D. Green, reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*. Mementos of Lincoln's death attained the status of religious relics for many Americans. (TLM)



A pass for admission to Lincoln's White House funeral. Mary Lincoln was too distraught to attend. (TLM)

## Not-So-Recommended Reading

Eisenschiml, Otto

*Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* (1937)

Eisenschiml, a former chemist, invented from whole cloth the idea that Secretary of War Stanton was implicated in Lincoln's death. By stretching a few shreds of circumstantial evidence and asking many leading questions (without answering them), he created a myth that continues to circulate today.

Balsiger, David and Charles E. Sellier, Jr.

*The Lincoln Conspiracy* (1977)

After an enjoying brief burst of media attention, including a made-for-TV movie of the same title, this book has faded into well-deserved obscurity. Although the authors bragged of finding new evidence, they were unable to back up their claims by producing the documents.

Bishop, Jim

*The Day Lincoln Was Shot* (1955)

The most-widely read book on Lincoln's assassination uses Eisenschiml's tactic of asking leading questions in place of historical evidence, although Bishop tries to create the impression that Stanton was a fool rather than a criminal.

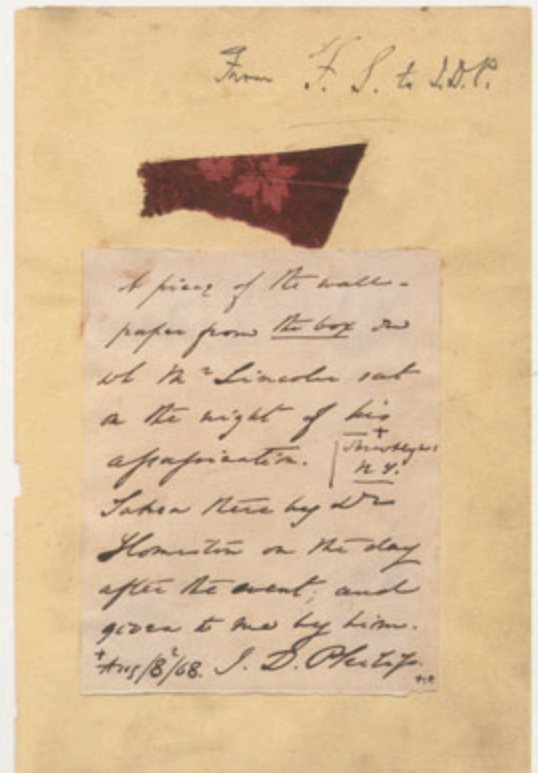


Max Rosenthal, *The Last Moments of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States*, colored lithograph, 1865. "Now he belongs to the ages" (or perhaps "angels") were the words spoken by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton at the moment of Lincoln's death. (TLM #1636)

command believed it had evidence that Lincoln had authorized a cavalry raid in 1864 to burn Richmond and kill or capture Jefferson Davis. Davis, in turn, may have personally approved a secret mission to blow up the White House and wipe out Lincoln and his cabinet in early 1865. This plot failed, but Booth, it is argued, knew of the proposed mining of the White House and decided to duplicate its results by orchestrating the murders of the president, vice president, the secretary of state, and perhaps General Grant and

other cabinet officers. So, even if the assassin was not acting on direct orders, he would have believed he was carrying out the intentions of the Confederate government when he killed Lincoln.

It seems unlikely that historians will ever be able definitively to prove or disprove the Confederate grand conspiracy thesis. They will, however, never again be able to ignore the political dimension of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.



From the moment that Lincoln's still-living body was carried out of Ford's Theatre, souvenir hunters began to collect mementos of the assassination. This piece of wallpaper was taken the next day from the box where the Lincolns had been sitting. (TLM)

# At The Lincoln Museum

## Grand Opening

April 20, 2001

6:30 — doors open

7:22 — dramatic presentation

Special guest speaker:

U. S. Representative Mark Souder

Members \$35 per person, non-members \$45

Now He Belongs To The Ages:



The Lincoln Museum announces the premiere of the exhibit, *Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. Fort Wayne is the only city east of the Mississippi River where this exhibit can be seen before it travels to its West Coast exhibit location at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens near Los Angeles. The exhibit brings together an array of artifacts and illustrations that may change the way many visitors think about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Original newspapers, letters, and other manuscripts will be on view alongside prints, paintings, and period photographs, as well as such dramatic artifacts as the knife used by one of John Wilkes Booth's conspirators to stab the Secretary of State. The exhibit brings together items from the collections of many distinguished institutions: the Huntington Library; Ford's Theatre National Historic Site; the Chicago Historical Society; the Gilder Lehrman Collection on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library; as well as treasures from The Lincoln Museum's own collection.

## Special Event

Joe Weed

**Swanee: The Music of Stephen Foster and Booth Shot Lincoln: Folk Memories of Historical Tragedies**

July 13, 2001

Musician/producer Joe Weed, creator of the musical components of the Museum's permanent exhibit, *Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment*, will tour the country this summer performing music from his new CD *Swanee: The Music of Stephen Foster*, which he has researched for the past three years. In recognition of the Museum's special exhibit, his Fort Wayne concerts will also include a set of folk and parlor songs related to the Lincoln assassination and other historical events.

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