

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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President's Message

**There will be a virtual meeting of the Surratt Society
on Saturday, April 22, 2023, from 2 to 4 p.m. ET via Zoom**

According to the Surratt Society's Bylaws, its annual meeting must be held in April and the election of officers is to take place during the meeting. The Executive Committee has decided to hold the meeting virtually again this year.

There will first be a brief business meeting, which will include the election of the Executive Committee. The proposed slate of officers for the 2023-24 term is:

President	Louise Oertly
Vice President	Bill Binzel
Treasurer	Tom Buckingham
Secretary	Rebecca Morris

As we are going to be virtual, all votes will be taken by a show of hands or other means supported by the meeting platform.

As an added incentive to attend, after the business meeting there will be a mini-conference with two speakers: Kate Clifford Larson and Julian Sher.

Dr. Larson is the author of *The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln*. She will speak on "Civil War Memory and the Reimagining of Mary Surratt."

Julian Sher will speak on his latest book, *The North Star—Canada and the Civil War Plots Against Lincoln*, which will be released on April 25th. It has been praised by assassination historians, including Ed

Steers and Dave Taylor. Sher's latest book looks at how the Confederacy utilized Canada to their advantage, as well as at the lives of several Canadians who played instrumental roles in the war and in the pursuit of John Wilkes Booth.

See more information on both speakers on page 2.

If you have signed up on our email list (and I encourage our member to do so), you will get a notice about the conference. The meeting is open to all; **however, you must pre-register in advance on our website, www.surrattmuseum.org.**

Keep your fingers crossed that technology will cooperate with us, and this will be as successful as last year's virtual meeting.

Hope you can join us on April 22nd.
Louise Oertly, President

This newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the Surratt Society, a non-profit affiliate of the Surratt House Museum, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt Society's website is surrattmuseum.org Contact us at surratt.society@gmail.com or by mail at: Surratt Society, 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791-3853.

The Surratt House Museum's phone number is (301) 868-1121.

Let Us Introduce Our Conference Speakers to You

DR. KATE CLIFFORD LARSON is the Writer-in-Residence at Furman University and a *New York Times* Best-Selling Author. Her latest release, *Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Oxford, 2021), was named one of the Best Biographies of 2021 by Kirkus. She is also the author of *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (2004); *Harriet Tubman: A Reference Guide to Her Life and Works* (2022); and *Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter* (2015). She is best known to members of the Surratt Society for her 2008 book, *The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln*. She has served as the Consulting Historian for many film, print, and exhibit projects, including *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State and National Park* and *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway and All-American Road*, Eastern Shore, Maryland; and *Harriet Tubman Home and National Park*, Auburn, New York.

JULIAN SHER is an award-winning journalist and the author of six widely-acclaimed books, including *White Hoods: Canada's Ku Klux Klan* and "*Until You Are Dead*": *Steven Truscott's Long Ride into History*. As an investigative reporter, he worked for *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*. He was the Senior Producer of CBC's *The Fifth Estate*, Canada's premier investigative TV program for five years. He has directed and written major documentaries, covering wars and intrigue across the globe. His documentary *Nuclear Jihad*, produced for *The New York Times* and CBC, won the broadcast equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. His latest film, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, won three top Canadian Screen Awards, including Best Documentary. He is also active in protecting media freedoms, as a Senior Fellow at Toronto Metropolitan University's Centre for Free Expression and working with Journalists for Human Rights.

How the Army of the Potomac Was Told of Lincoln's Assassination

By James O. Hall

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, August 1986

The privately held papers of Union General Horatio Wright contain two telegrams from Major Thomas Eckert, War Department, Washington. The first was sent at 12:40 a.m., April 15, 1865, to General Marsena Patrick, Provost Marshal, Army of the Potomac. General Patrick then sent two copies to General Meade (in command) and to all corps commanders, of which General Wright was one. It is interesting to note that the City Point telegraph lines were operational, contrary to the claims of Otto Eisenschiml. It is odd that Major Eckert did not name John Wilkes Booth as Lincoln's assassin, a fact well known before the telegraph was sent. [Editor's Note: At the time, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was still interviewing witnesses at the Petersen House where Lincoln laid dying. It was not until 3:00 a.m. that Stanton was confident enough in the information

to say in a telegram to Major General John Dix that the “investigation strongly indicates J. Wilkes Booth as the assassin of the President.”] The second telegram, sent both to General Meade and General Sheridan on April 16th, names Booth as the assassin. There is no explanation for the 24-hour delay in the telegram.

U.S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH
12:40 am April 15, 1865
By Telegraph from Washington
To Gen'l M.R. Patrick,

Copy to Gen'l Meade and Corps
Commanders

The President was assassinated at Ford's Theatre at ten thirty (10:30) tonight and cannot live. The wound is a pistol shot through the head. Sec'y Seward and his son Frederick were also assassinated at their residence and are in a dangerous condition. Gen'l Grant has been telegraphed to at Philadelphia and returns to Washington at once.

Thos. T. Eckert
Maj. & A.D.C.

U.S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH
Apl 16, 1865
By Telegraph from Hd. Qrs. A. of P.
To Corps Commanders

The following is for your information.
A.S. Webb
Brig. & Cos.

Washington April 16
Maj. Gen'ls Meade & Sheridan

The President died at 7:22 yesterday morning. J. Wilkes Booth was the assassin of the President. Sec'y Seward passed bad night but is much better this am and is probably out of danger. His son Frederick will not live although he still lingers with wonderful tenacity.

Thos. T. Eckert

What People Saw That Night at the Theater

April 14, 1865, was Good Friday. Not a day most Christians would attend the theater, but on April 3rd Richmond had fallen and on April 9th Lee had surrendered. After four long years, the end of the Civil War was in sight and the City of Washington was celebrating. What better place to go that night, than Ford's Theatre to see the comedy, *Our American Cousin*. Unfortunately, that night the unimaginable happened. The President of the United States was shot by the assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Those who had attended the play or who had played other parts in this story that night would share their memories with others, first in letters with friends and then in later years with reporters. Into the Twentieth Century, newspapers ran eyewitness accounts of what people saw at Ford's Theatre on the evening of April 14, 1865. However, as with any eyewitness account, the closer it is written to the event, the more likely the person's recollection is accurate. That is why this issue features letters written to friends in the weeks following the assassination. Perhaps in a future issue of *The Surratt Courier*, the memories of that

night written 20-plus years after the assassination will be published again. However, those memories will have to include a great many Editor's Notes to line up with the known facts.

This year is the 158th anniversary of the President Lincoln's assassination. Let's take a look at some shared memories of that night in letters written within weeks of the assassination.

Eyewitness Account

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, July 1988

John C. Brennan provided us with a clipping from the June 20, 1889, edition of the *New York Independent*. It reprinted a letter written by Clara H. Harris to a friend just two weeks after she witnessed the assassination of President Lincoln.

Lincoln's Last Days

By Andrew James Symington, F.R.S.N.A.

In 1865, a 16-page letter, written that year by Miss Harris, who was in the theater box with the Lincoln party when the President was shot, was given me by a friend who had just received it from Mrs. Stowe. Of this letter, Mrs. Stowe remarked that, under the circumstances, it would one day be regarded as historically valuable and of national interest. At all events, in its intelligent and reliable testimony is borne to the domestic virtues of one of the gentlest, best, and wisest of men.

It is sad to know that other tragic events followed the party, for Miss Harris, who afterwards married her stepbrother, Major Rathbone, was killed by him in Germany [in 1883], and Rathbone, I believe, is at present the inmate of a lunatic asylum.

Although not written for publication, and touching toward the end of other matters, after the lapse of four-and-twenty years, I venture to give the whole letter in its integrity.

Washington, April 29th

My Dear M----:

I was very glad to hear from you again, your letter proving that in all events of your matronly life our old friendship is not forgotten.

You may well say that we have been passing through scenes sad indeed. That terrible Friday night is to me yet almost like some dreadful vision. I have been very intimate with Mrs. Lincoln and the family ever since our mutual residence in Washington, which began at the same time, and we have been constantly in the habit of driving and going to the opera and theater together. It was the only amusement, with the exception of receiving at their own house, in which the President and Mrs. Lincoln were permitted, according to custom, to indulge, and to escape from the crowds who constantly thronged to see them, more than from any decided taste for such

things. They were in the habit of going very often to hear Forest, Booth, Hackett, and such actors, when playing in Washington.

The night before the murder was that of the general illumination here, and they drove all through the streets to see it; a less calculating villain might have taken that opportunity for his crime, or the night before, when the White House alone was brilliantly illuminated, and the figure of the President stood out in full relief to the immense crowd below, who stood in the darkness to listen to his speech. He spoke from the center window of the Executive Mansion. I had been invited to pass the evening there, and stood at the window of the adjoining room with Mrs. Lincoln, watching the crowd below as they listened and cheered. Of course, Booth was there, watching his chance. I wonder he did not choose that occasion, but probably he knew a better opportunity would be offered. After the speech was over, we went into Mr. Lincoln's room; he was lying on the sofa, quite exhausted but he talked of the events of the past fortnight, of his visit to Richmond, of the enthusiasm everywhere felt through the country; and Mrs. Lincoln declared the past few days to have been the happiest of her life. Their prospects indeed seemed fair—peace dawning upon our land, and four years of a happy and honored rule before one of the gentlest, best, and loveliest men I ever knew. I never saw him out of temper—the kindest husband, the tenderest father, the truest friend, as well as the wisest statesman. “Our beloved President”—when I think that I shall never again stand in his genial presence, that I have lost his friendship so tried and true, I feel like putting on the robe of mourning which the country wears.

My own dear father [Ira Harris, a U.S. Senator from New York] was deeply attached to Mr. Lincoln; they thoroughly sympathized in many things, and Mr. Lincoln, perhaps being able to discern in him an honest, unselfish nature, in that akin to his own, was wont with him to throw off the restraints of the politician and talk over things as with an old friend.

The shock has been a terrible one to him; he feels his death to be a deep, personal affliction.

You were right in supposing the Major Rathbone who was with us to be the “Henry” whom you knew in Albany.

We four composed the party that evening. They drove to our door in the gayest spirits; chatting on our way—and the President was received with the greatest enthusiasm.

They say we were watched by the assassins; ay, as we alighted from the carriage. Oh, how could anyone be so cruel as to strike that kind, dear, honest face! And when I think of that fiend barring himself in alone with us, my blood runs cold. My dress is saturated with blood; my hands and face were covered. You may imagine what a scene! And so, all through that dreadful night, when we stood by that dying bed. Poor Mrs. Lincoln was and is almost crazy.

Henry narrowly escaped with his life. The knife was struck at his heart with all the force of a practiced and powerful arm; he fortunately parried the blow, and received a wound in his arm, extending along the bone, from the elbow nearly to the shoulder. He concealed it for some time, but was finally carried home in a swoon; the loss of blood has been so great from an artery and veins severed. He is now getting quite well, but cannot as yet use his arm.

I hope you will pardon me this dreadfully long letter. I did not realize how much I was writing. I have been quite ill, and have as yet answered scarcely any of the numerous letters I have received in the last two weeks.

We are preparing to close our house here for the summer, and return to Albany on the 8th of May. My sister Amanda is to be married on the 25th of next month, to Mr. I. Ewing Miller of Columbus, Ohio, and we must all hasten on to the wedding. It would give us a great pleasure if you and Mrs. Johnson could be present. It will be a quiet morning wedding. Please give my kindest regards to your husband. My sisters are in Albany or they would unite with my mother in

love to your self. Again I must apologize for the length of this letter. I am not given to such errors, and will promise never to transgress in that way again.

Ever yours sincerely,
Clara H. Harris

P.S. Please give my love to Mrs. Stevenson, if you see her. C.H.H.

Langside, Glasgow

A Bit of Americana

Reprinted from *The Surratt Society News*, March 1982

Mr. David C. Andrews of Andes, New York, has been kind enough to allow us to carry the following family letter. [The original letter is now in the hands of a Lincoln collector.] But first, here is a little background.

The writer of this letter, Elizabeth Dixon, was the great-grandmother of Mr. Andrews. Her husband, James Dixon, was a U.S. Senator from Connecticut during and after the Civil War. He and his wife were very close friends with the Lincolns, but it is doubtful, as some have speculated, that the Dixons were among those invited to Ford's by the Lincolns that night. As the letter notes, the Senator was not in Washington at the time; and besides, Mrs. Dixon was much too religious a woman to even entertain thoughts of the theater on such a sacred day as Good Friday.

As for the people named in this letter, Mrs. Dixon sent the letter to her sister, Louisa Wood. Clemmie and Bessie were the two Dixon daughters and Jamie was their son (who was the grandfather of Mr. Andrews). Born in 1846, Jamie was a Union Army lieutenant at the tender age of 19 and won several commendations. He was later promoted to the rank of captain and was also to serve with George Armstrong Custer in the Seventh Cavalry in the early years of the post-Civil War Indian wars. Fortunately for him, he mustered out of the Army prior to the debacle at the Little Big Horn in June of 1876.

Also, Surratt Society member Roger D. Hunt contributed the following information: The "Mrs. Kinney" referred to in the letter is Mrs. Mary Cogswell Kinney, a sister to Elizabeth Cogswell Dixon. "Constance" was Mrs. Kinney's only daughter. Mary lived and died at 22 Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. Constance eventually married Count Ciannati, an aide-de-camp of Prince Humbert, and is, presumably, buried in Italy. Mrs. Kinney is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., under a beautiful monument having the deceased's likeness sculptured into one side.

Also in the family's possession is a small calling card on which is written the following: "28 President's Square" on one side and "Will Senator Dixon please call and see me at once?" on the other side. It is dated January 8, 1864, and is signed "A. Lincoln."

The reference to the suspected poisoning of President Johnson is a reference to the fact that the Lincoln assassination was apparently part of a vast plot to wipe out all of the government's leaders.

Please note that the small personal notes at the start and close of the letter and also the fact that the ladies in those days were extremely formal. For example, they always referred to their husbands or someone else's as "Mr." and signed their full names at the close.

Our thanks to Mr. Andrews for sharing this family heirloom with us, which was written on May 1, 1865.

My dear Louisa,

I received the photographs you were kind enough to send me and, as soon as possible, Clemmie will finish one for you. We only arrived home on Wednesday, quite worn out with fatigue from the exciting scenes we had passed through the previous week. We are always very tired unpacking and getting settled and this year we were in unusual confusion from having had a ceiling torn down. Mr. Dixon had everything moved and was here expecting to receive us, but in the mist of plastering was telegraphed to come to Washington on account of the murder of the President.

I was strangely associated with Mrs. Lincoln that night for I had not seen her to speak to all winter. As I had been in mourning, and Bessie and Clemmie each had charge of wards in the Hospital, I had devoted myself to the sick and wounded soldiers in their charge, not visiting at all. On Good Friday, I had been at the church in the morning and passed the rest of the day at the Hospital and we all came home very tired and went to bed at half-past nine o'clock. Jamie is in the Army and a young schoolmate and friend of his is staying with us to take care of us. I had been asleep when I was awakened by a carriage driving violently up to the door and stopping. The street was so still every sound could be heard, and the bell rang loudly. It was then just eleven o'clock and I heard the colored boy who slept in the basement go to the door and ask who it was.

The man answered, "A message from Captain Robert Lincoln for Mrs. Dixon." I immediately thought he had come up from the Army and brought some bad news about Jamie, who was probably sick or wounded and he had sent this carriage for me. I opened the window, my heart standing still, and asked what it was. The man answered. "The President is dead and Captain Robert Lincoln wishes you to come to Mrs. Lincoln as quickly as possible." Of course, I thought that the President had died at the White House and knowing my familiarity with sickness and death, they had sent for me. So, I hastened to dress and summoned Jamie's friend and sent for Mrs. Kinney and then we set off. The man said that the President was murdered at the theatre and taken to the house opposite in Tenth Street so we drove there and found it already guarded by a regiment of cavalry.

In the back room over a back building, on a common bedstead covered with an Army blanket and a colored woolen coverlet, lay stretched the murdered President, his life's blood slowly ebbing away. The officers of the government were there and no lady except Miss Harris, whose dress was splattered with blood, as was Mrs. Lincoln's, who was frantic with grief beside him, calling on him to take her with him, to speak one word to her—but her agonizing appeals were of no avail!

I held her and supported her as well as I could and twice we persuaded her to go into another room. All night long, we watched this way, from half-past eleven to seven the next morning.

At that hour, just as the day was struggling with the dim candles in the room, we went in again. Mrs. Lincoln must have noticed a change, for the moment she looked at him she fainted and fell upon the floor. I caught her in my arms and held her to the window, which was open, the rain falling heavily. She again seated herself by the President, kissing him and calling him every endearing name, the surgeons counting every pulsation and noting every breath gradually growing less and less. Then they asked her to go into the adjoining room, and in twenty minutes came in and said, "It is all over! The President is no more!"

At nine o'clock we took her home to the house so changed for her and the doctor said she must go immediately to bed. She refused to go into any of the rooms she had previously occupied. "Not there! Oh, not there!" she said, and so we took her to a room she had arranged for the President for a summer room to write in.

I remained until eleven o'clock (twelve hours from the time I first went to her) and then left her a lonely widow, everything changed for her since they had left it so happily the evening previous.

As I started to go down the stairs, I met the cortege bringing up the remains of the murdered President which were taken into the great State bedroom, wrapped in the American flag. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

When I went to the house in Tenth Street, the carriage returned and Mary and Constance came down in it and have watched with Mrs. Lincoln and been with her frequently since. She is unable to leave her bed and, of course, cannot immediately leave the White House.

It is thought now that President Johnson was poisoned on the day of the Inauguration and that was the reason for his strange [and drunken] appearance, as nothing of the kind has been learned since, and as he appears with great dignity and sense.

Jamie passed safely through the battles, having been in six, and won the praise of his General. He came up to Washington and was in full uniform in the funeral procession. Ernest Kinney was also there on horseback. He was wounded in one of Sheridan's battles, a ball passing through his shoulder. He wound is not dangerous.

I hope Annie has recovered from the catarrhal attack and I would not let her study. Can she take cod liver oil? It is excellent for such complaints.

Give our kind remembrance to Mr. Wood and our love to Annie. With many thanks.

Your sister,
Very affectionately,
Elizabeth L. Dixon

Hartford, Conn.
May 1, 1865

An Eye-Witness Account of Lincoln's Assassination

From the February 12, [year unknown] issue of the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, taken from *The Saturday Review*, which published it by permission of Mrs. John W. Root, granddaughter of Mr. Knox. [Editor's Note: Timothy S. Good, author of *We Saw Lincoln Shot—One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts* (1995) located the original letter in the Princeton University Archives and reprinted in his book on pages 40-41.]

Washington, April 15, 1865

Dear Father:

It is with sad feelings that I take up my pen to address you. Last Friday night at 10 o'clock, I witnessed the saddest tragedy ever enacted in this country. Notwithstanding my promise to you not to visit the theater, I could not resist the temptation to see General Grant and the President, and when the curtain at Ford's rose on the play of *Our American Cousin*, my roommate and I were seated on the second row of orchestra seats, just beneath the President's box.

The President entered the theater at 8½ amid deafening cheers and the rising of all. Everything was cheerful, and never was our magistrate more enthusiastically welcomed or more happy. Many pleasant allusions were made to him in the play, to which the audience gave deafening responses, while Mr. Lincoln laughed heartily and bowed frequently to the gratified people. Just after the 3rd act, and before the scenes were shifted, a muffled pistol shot was heard, and a man sprang wildly from the national box, partially tearing down the flag, then shouting "sic semper tyrannis, the south is avenged" and with brandished dagger rushed across the stage and disappeared. The whole theater was paralyzed.

But two men sprang for the stage, a Mr. Stewart and myself. Both of us were familiar with the play, and suspected the fearful tragedy. We rushed after the murderer, and Mr. Stewart being familiar with the passages, reached the rear door in time to see him spring on his horse and ride off—I became lost amid the scenery and was obliged to return.

The shrill cry of murder from Mrs. Lincoln first roused the horrified audience, and in an instant the uproar was terrible. The silence of death was broken by shouts of "kill him" and strong men wept, and cursed, and tore the seats in the impotence of their anger.

Finally the theater was cleared and the President removed. Still greater was the excitement in the city. Rumors of the murder of Secy Seward and his son reached us as we gained the street. Mounted patrols dashed every where, bells tolled the alarm, and excited crowds rushed about the avenues. Despair was on every countenance, and black horror brooded over the city. Until long after midnight I was detained at Police Hd Qrs, giving my evidence, and when I sought my room, in a distant part of the city—dark clouds had gathered in the heavens, and soldiers sternly paced their patrol.

Yesterday morning the President died. At 8 o'clock, the kindest, noblest, truest heart ceased to beat, and Abraham Lincoln was dead. Bitter, bitter will be the tears of repentance.

Andrew Johnson has been sworn. His speech was simple. "The duties now are mine, the results are God's." I trust he may perform his task faithfully, but oh, for the confidence, and the hope that we had in Lincoln. Like a ship without a rudder is the nation tossed.

Outwardly are we quiet, but in each heart, what despair.
But I must cease—Lotta and Will R left here Friday night. I presume by this time they are with you. From them you can learn of me better than I can write. Love to all.

Your affect. Son
Jas. S. Knox

Eyewitness Accounts of the Lincoln Assassination, Circa 1865

Moses Sandford, April 17, 1865
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, September 2003

A copy of the following letter is in the James O. Hall Research Center. It was sent by a man named Moses Sandford to his friend John Beatty just two days after Lincoln's death. This letter is taken from a 1953 copy made from a photostat of the original manuscript at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The transcriber was Robert P.I. Frick, who describes the original as still having the piece of "Bosom" attached.

[Editor's Note: The 2003 *Surratt Courier* editor further added that the spelling, punctuation (or lack thereof), and other grammatical errors are as they appear in the original.]

Letter addressed to John Beatty, Esq.
Exchange Broker
Jersey City

[This note was added to top of letter:]

Write immediately as I am anxious to hear from You tell us where You was and what You were doing when You learn[ed] News

Washington, D.C.
Apl. 17th, 1865

Dear Friend Johnnie

You must excuse Me for Not Writing You befor but as the Old saying says better late than Never, so here goes, I hardly think a letter from this City Especially at this time and from an Old Friend will be apt to be thrown to one side and forgotten. I also send You Enclosed in this letter a piece of the Shirt Bosom worn By the President on the Night of his Murder and remained on him until he died. I wish you to give a piece of it to Billy Denver and Tom Greene. I could Sell every inch of it for \$5. But prefer dividing it among My Friends and More Especially You Billy and

Tom for I know You will keep and appreciate it also remember the donor and while looking upon it recollect that he Never forgets his Old and True Friends. I have his Nec tie and would not take \$50 for it have been offered \$10 for it several times. I suppose You would like to know how I came by his clothes. Well the Morning he died, Genl. Rucker came immediately to Our shop and had a Common pine Box Made to bring

[end first page]

him from 10th St. to the White House in after they arrived at the House they Cut his Clothes off of him and threw them in the Box we made and Sent the Box back to the Shop for Safe keeping it was placed in My Charge in My Room the Hardware Department, and Just as soon as the Coast was clear I unscrewed the lid and went through the Ward Robe for relics. I found on one of the Sleeves of his Shirt one of his sleeve Buttons Black Enameled trimed with gold and the letter L on the out Side with A.L. underneath that I sent to the Sect of War the Bosom of his Shirt was the Next thing which Met My Eye as it had considerable Blood upon it so I Just confiscated the whole of it the piece I sent You and another about the Same size is all I have left the Nec tie I wouldnt part with under any consideration. I have taken all the Screws out of the Box which wer turned down on him from 10th st to his house and have put others in their place. I will give You one when I come Home, the Box he was brought up in is within 5 ft of My Desk where I am Now Writing. Don't forget to give Tom and Billy a piece of it the ("Shirt Bosom") [sic] The murder took place Just 25 Minutes to Eleven on last Friday Night at Ford's Theatre on 10th St. the play

[end second page]

was Our American Cousin. I was at Grovers Theatre Next to Jim Lamberts Just 3 ½ Blocks from Fords they were playing Aladdin or the Wonderful lamp and had Just commenced the 4th Act I was at the time Sitting between 2 Detective Friends of Mine and one of them had Just asked Me the time which was 20 Minutes to Eleven. Miss German had Just finished a Song called Sherman March[es?] down to the Sea and was about to repeat it when the door of the Theatre was pushed violently open and a Man rushed in Exclaiming turn Out for Gods Sake the president has been Shot in his private Box at Fords Theatre he then rushed out Every boddy seemed glued to the spot I for one and I think I was one of the First who attempted to Moove ("it was Either Me or apple Jack for I was full of that") Every body followed I Made straight for Fords and Such another Excited Crowed I Never before whitnessed I asked who did it and was informd Wilks Booth they were Just Bringing the President out when I arrived on the Spot. I will leave the papers to tell You the rest. Business is Entirely suspended and the Whole city is draped in Mourning the Excitlent has pretty well

[end of page three]

died out. They have Emblamed the Boddy of the President and it will lay in State tomorrow and Next day. And the Funeral takes place on Thursday. We had a Big time last Week in the illumination line but that is all Forgotten. The Theatres Store Every place of Business and the Gin Mills are all closed and perfectly inundated with crepe it don't do for a Man to open his Mouth unless he talks the right way. \$30000 Reward has been Offered here for the arrest and conviction of the Murderer and up to date they are still at large. Swards House is Just 5 ½ Blocks from Fords Theatre. In the rear of Jackson Square and Nearly Opposite the White House on 15 and ½ st. he is getting along finely but his boy is very low indeed Friday Night Was a Night long to be remembered by Me I was on the Streets all Night. Its impossible for Me to describe the scenes as they Occurred here the City was in one continual whirl of Excitement crowds on every corner and 10th st was one solid Mass of Excited Men flourishing knives and revolvers and Yelling down with the Traitors instead of hunting for them Well Johnny I will have to bring this to a close, Give

my Regards to your Mother Tom Bill and all enquireing Friends, Write Soon and don't forget to give Billy and Tom a piece of that Bosom. For as true as Heaven I swair its Just wat [sic] I have represented it to be Receive this together with My Best Respects and Wishes from You True Friend

Moses Sandford

[end of page four]

Our American Cousin

Many know the name of the play that the Lincolns attended at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865. But do you know the storyline of *Our American Cousin*? If you don't, here is an article about the play.

By John Lockwood

Reprinted from *The Washington Times*, July 5, 2003, in *The Surratt Courier*, September 2003

Many Americans rightly associate the play *Our American Cousin* with the assassination of President Lincoln. Many also know that it was a comedy. But how many know that one of the comedic characters of the play actually acquired a life of his own and became part of 19th century pop culture?

Written in 1851 by Tom Taylor, an English playwright, the play revolves around a rich, but unpolished, Yankee from Vermont who is visiting his money-hungry English relatives. Although he sees through their schemes, he saves them from a corrupt lawyer who is swindling them. [In the end, everyone lives happily ever after—except the lawyer.] Among the cast of characters is one Lord Dundreary, an addlepatented gentleman whose chief role is to wander on and off stage commenting on the play and on whatever else comes to mind.

The play was first performed in New York [in 1858] and was subsequently sold for \$1,000 to Laura Keene, a successful actress, writer, manager, and producer. [Editor's Note: And for a time, a "friend" of Edwin Booth] When Miss Keene took the reins, she hired an English actor by the name of Edward Askew Sothern for the role of Dundreary. He was allowed to expand his role and even to ad-lib. Sothern soon turned Dundreary into a household name. With dropping mustache, mutton-chop whiskers, and a center part to his hair, the lord's attire included full coat, vest, cravat, and collar. A monocle completed the picture.

Sothern made the image so popular that one could soon purchase Dundreary shoes, monocles, false whiskers, etc. There were Dundreary dances and Dundreary stories. The character was also adopted to other settings.

Even after Lincoln's assassination, Lord Dundreary remained popular. An 1880 issue of *Harper's Weekly* printed a poem entitled "Lord Dundreary on Going to the Country." On February 22, 1889, Lord Dundreary marched in Alexandria, Virginia's, George Washington's Birthday Parade.

The role brought great fame to E.A. Sothern. While he also played serious roles, he was well-loved as Lord Dundreary until his death in 1881. His son, E.H. Sothern, then played the good lord until at least 1915.

[Editor's Note: In the play, the "American Cousin" was named Asa Trenchard (played on the evening of April 14, 1865, by actor Harry Hawk). John Wilkes Booth knew the play and knew Hawk would be alone on stage when he delivered the funniest line of the show: "Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdologizing old man-trap." Apparently, that was hysterical in the Victorian era, and Booth used the uproarious laughter from the audience at Ford's as the opportune time to strike Lincoln.]
