

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly

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President's Message

The mid-1800s marked a transition period in U.S. Christmas customs, as traditions from other countries started to blend together. Over the years, we have embraced the German Christmas tree, the English hanging of the greens, and the Scandinavian mistletoe. Even the various gift givers—St. Nicholas, Father Christmas, Pere Noel, Sinterklaas, Kris Kringle, etc.—have merged to become Santa Claus.

The origins of the mistletoe go back to pagan traditions, but the earliest written reference to kissing under the mistletoe appears in 16th century England. A berry was plucked for each kiss and, when the berries were gone, all kissing privileges ceased. Tradition said that the mistletoe was not to touch the ground once it was cut, until its removal from the house. However, there were two schools of thought for the future of the mistletoe. One custom said it was to be the last green removed once the Christmas season was over. Another tradition thought it would preserve the house from fire and lightning, so the branch would hang until the following Christmas Eve, when it was replaced with a fresh one.

Every year, millions of children worldwide send a letter to Santa with a detailed shopping list and reports on their siblings and even their parents. Today, these special letters to the North Pole go via the U.S. Postal Service. However, USPS's involvement was not always the case.

For many years, a child would write the letter and toss it into the fire burning on the hearth. The draft would carry the letter,

even if it was just ashes, up the chimney. Theoretically, Father Christmas would read the smoke and know just what to bring. It was after the Civil War that a Christmas illustration by cartoonist Thomas Nast provided the North Pole address. However, the fate of the Santa letters dropped into the mailbox was now up to local postal workers. It wasn't until 1912 that a postmaster general in New York City organized an effort to respond to these letters. This effort has now evolved into the nationwide "USPS Operation Santa Program," where postal elves and volunteers make the wishes of children come true. USPS also offers "Greetings from the North Pole," where "Santa" will answer a child's letter with the reply postmarked from the North Pole.

For more information on Operation Santa Program and Greetings from the North Pole, go to the USPS website.

Whatever religious or cultural traditions you and your family celebrate this holiday season, I wish you a happy and safe one.

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.

Mrs. Surratt and the Media

By Joan Chaconas

Reprinted from the *Surratt Courier*, December 1987

I thought it would be interesting to go through a few old magazine and newspaper articles and some early books and see just how people viewed Mary Surratt.

The *Chicago Tribune* for May 13, 1865,¹ had this to say: “The most defiant and reluctant and yet the best posted witness will be old Mrs. Surratt. I say ‘Old’ for she is the mother of young men and women [sic] as well as of the conspiracy. Yet she really would not be taken for more than forty; buxom, light-haired [sic] rosy-cheeked with a cold, clear, devilish pair of gray eyes, she would make a good stage landlady ready to look after her own interests and to get all the money she could from her customers.”

On May 15th, the *Tribune* further told its readers that: “Mrs. Surratt, the most prominent of the accused, sits at the west end of the reporters’ table and near her counsel. This wretched woman is dressed in full mourning. She wears her bonnet and veil during the sessions of Court. Her age is probably fifty. She is of the large Amazonian class of woman, square built, masculine hands, full face, lifeless gray eyes, hair not decidedly dark, complexion swarthy. Altogether her face denotes more than the usual intelligence....the eyes are rather soft in expression and at variance with her other features....she seems of undaunted metal [sic] and fitted for Macbeth’s injunction to bring forth only men children. Yet she does not seem like Lady Macbeth from the crown to the toe full of cruelty....the unfortunate is in irons. A bar ten inches in length passes from one ankle to the other and is attached to an iron band that encircles each of her hands.”

On May 17th, the paper referred to Mrs. Surratt as “this miserable creature” who is a strong woman reconciled to her fate and on May 18th it appeared that she was “breaking down.” One observer in the courtroom thought that Mrs. Surratt was somewhat subdued, but at the same time she darted “a glance of hatred toward the judge.”

The *Constitutional Union* newspaper dated July 7, 1865, had this to say about her. She “appeared to be perfectly resigned to her fate....she wore a black bonnet with a heavy black veil. She also wore a long black dress which dragged the ground. Her arms were bound behind, as well as her ankles.”

The *Washington Daily Morning Chronicle* of July 8, 1865, read Mrs. Surratt was “one of the most active and energetic of the conspirators.”

The *New York World* for July 7, 1865, contains an article written by George Alfred Townsend in which he refers to Mrs. Surratt as a “middle aged woman dressed in black, bonneted and veiled” and further describes her as she sat on the scaffold by saying, “Mrs. Surratt was very feeble and leaned her head upon alternate sides of her armchair in nervous spasms; but now and then, when a sort of wail just issued from her lips, the priest placed before her the crucifix to lull her fearful spirit.” As the priest prayed, her “face lost is deadly fear, and took a bold, cognizable survey of spectators. She wore a robe of dark woolen, no collar and common shoes of black listing. Her general expression was that of acute suffering, vanishing at times as

if by the conjuration of her pride, and again returning in a paroxysm, as she looked at the dreadful rope dangling before her.”

In describing the hanging of Mrs. Surratt, *The Daily National Intelligencer* for July 8, 1865, said: “Mrs. Surratt was brought out first....she wore a black alpaca dress and a veil over her face.”

The *New York Daily Tribune* for September 2, 1873, displayed a letter written and signed “Truth” under “Letters from the People.” In part it stated, “It will be shown that John Wilkes Booth was the petted favorite of more homes in Washington than that of Mrs. Surratt, and that she was only duped and fooled as others were by him and his fellow conspirators.”

Years later in the December 17, 1883, *The Washington Republic*, an article also prepared by Townsend, Judge Holt is quoted as saying “that she [Mrs. Surratt] was the master spirit among them all. She was a woman of unusual nerve and also of unusual intelligence. During that trial her behavior was firm.... I believe that she kept those men up to their work—that Booth himself was inferior to her in purpose....Mrs. Surratt...gave shelter to the others, she went out and found board for them, she drove the carriage out to her tavern where the arms and accessories had been hidden within a few hours of the crime. I consider her the center of the conspiracy.... I have never doubted that Booth imparted to Mrs. Surratt at that time the information that he meant to kill Mr. Lincoln...that night.”²²

In an unnamed and undated newspaper article that I would guess to be of the 1880s, it states that “the seven men did not arouse as much interest as the one woman, Mrs. Mary E. Surratt. She was represented as the arch conspirator with Booth.... In Mrs. Surratt’s behalf, it could be shown that she was a respectable, homekeeping, intelligent woman, a fond mother and a devout Christian.” The reporter goes on to describe Mrs. Surratt’s tearful goodbye to her daughter Anna, he writes, “In American history there had never been...such a scene as that of the morning of July 7, 1865.... The tears and sobs of Anna Surratt as she hung to the neck of her mother—who in her anguish suffered at her daughter’s touch and tears, the torture of a hundred deaths.”

In the *North American Review* for September 1880, J.W. Clappitt, one of Mrs. Surratt’s lawyers wrote: “...among those whom Fate had rudely jostled within the grasp of an excited Administration was a woman, whose name and history and sad end will descent to the latest generations of time—Mary E. Surratt.” Clappitt goes on to describe Mrs. Surratt’s state of indebtedness at her husband’s death and how she moved to her Washington boardinghouse. Weichmann is said to have falsely “sworn her life away.... Why could not the facts explaining this circumstantial evidence and confirming the innocence of Mrs. Surratt be established before the Military Commission? I answer as my belief, that the commission was organized to convict.”

A reporter for *The Washington Post* for October 1909 wrote a lengthy article entitled “Shall We Mark the Spot of Mrs. Surratt’s Execution?” It starts off “A monument to Mrs. Surratt! The idea at first seems too fantastic to be conceivable and yet if a census of the views of Washingtonians were taken today, the suggestion would find favor and warm support in many hearts, for there are thousands, not only in the Capital, but throughout the nation who believe that the one woman who was executed as having a hand in a conspiracy resulting in the assassination of President Lincoln was more sinned against than sinning.” He goes on to say, “Mrs. Surratt is described by those who knew her as being a buxom-looking woman; her hair was brown and worn parted in the middle and combed down over the ears. She had feline gray eyes that seemed to search the very thoughts of those she regarded. By nature, she was kind and thoughtful of

others, and her home was known throughout the countryside for Southern hospitality. She was a good Christian woman, honorable in her undertakings. I have never heard her express any disloyal sentiments. Among her neighbors, she was noted for her sympathetic kindness to those in distress or sickness. Oftentimes, during the war, when many soldiers, on both sides, passed her door, she fed, sheltered, and clothed them...on one occasion, she is said to have cut up the last ham...for a crowd of starving Union soldiers....”

Reporter Ruth Neely writes in *Home & Country*, March 1912: “There is little question but that Mrs. Surratt knew and was in sympathy with the plan to abduct President Lincoln...but this plan failed...all complicity of Mrs. Surratt in any treason went with it.”

A Lincoln trial court reporter told his story to the *New York Times Magazine* April 19, 1916. Edward Murphy stated, “I was personally present during the entire trial, and I assert now, as I have from the beginning my firm conviction of the absolute innocence of this unfortunate woman.”

American Motorist magazine for November 1933 reporter Thomas Cummings writes, “Now that time has healed old wounds, fair-minded Americans in the North, as well as the South, deplore the hanging of Mary Surratt as an accomplice of Booth.” In this same article Cummings quotes from John Surratt, Jr.’s, personal diary for the date of July 8, 1865. “They have hung my mother. She was no party to the mad freaks of Booth.”³

Here’s what some books have to say about the lady.

The U.S. Secret Service in the Late War by General Lafayette C. Baker (1892). Baker states: “Surrattsville, only 10 miles from Washington, has been throughout the war a seat of conspiracy.... Treason never found a better agent than Mrs. Surratt. She was a large, masculine, self-possessed female, mistress of her house, and as a rebel as Belle Boyd or Mrs. Greensbrough [he must mean Greenhow]. She had not the flippancy and menace of the first, nor the social power of the second; but the rebellion has found no fitter agent.” Baker refers to Booth as “the head and heart of the plot and to Mrs. Surratt as “his anchor.”

The Judicial Murder of Mary E. Surratt by David DeWitt (1895). On writing of the trial DeWitt states: “Last, there emerges from the dungeon-like darkness of the doorway the single female prisoner, Mary E. Surratt. She, alone, turns to her right and consequently, when she is seated, has the left hand corner of the platform to herself...she is a lady of fair social position, of unblemished character and of exemplary piety; and besides, she is a mother, a widow, and, in that room...the sole representative of her sex.”

DeWitt quotes Judge Bingham as stating that “none conversant with the testimony of this case can for a moment doubt, that John H. Surratt [Jr.] and Mary E. Surratt were as surely in the conspiracy to murder the President as was John Wilkes Booth himself.” To which DeWitt replies, “If he [Surratt, Jr.] was innocent, then much more was she. Mary E. Surratt, I repeat, suffered the death of shame, not for any guilt of her own, but as a vicarious sacrifice for the presumed guilt of her fugitive son.”

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln by Osborn Oldroyd (1901). Oldroyd writes: “Mrs. Mary E. Surratt was 45 years of age [Editor’s Note: she was 42 years old] at the time of the trial. She was raised in Prince George’s County, Maryland.... She was considered the belle of Prince George’s County.... Mrs. Surratt was deeply attached to her church, family, and the Southern Confederacy.... While she may not have been privy to the murder of the President, there was but little doubt as to her approval of the proposed abduction.”

Why Was Lincoln Murdered? by Otto Eisenschiml (1937). Eisenschiml writes: “The uncontradicted testimony of all witnesses showed that Mrs. Surratt was a pious, industrious housewife, a devoted mother and a capable business woman.”

By the Neck by August Mencken (1942). The author writes: “Headquarters were established by the conspirators at the boardinghouse run by Surratt’s mother, Mrs. Mary E. Surratt.... The three men (hanged) were undoubtedly guilty, but no evidence was offered at the trial to prove that Mrs. Surratt had any knowledge of the conspiracy, yet, boardinghouse mistresses being what they are, it is difficult to believe that she did not have some idea as to what was afoot in her house.”

Death to Traitors by Jacob Mogelever (1960). Author Mogelever recounts the events of a raiding party of a dozen detectives that took place in late fall of 1862. The party was led by John Odell, who had carefully gone over the plan with his chief, Lafayette Baker. The destination of the group was Port Tobacco, Maryland, a notorious blockade running village in lower Maryland. The men were to stop for rest and food at the tavern operated by “an Amazon-type” woman named Mary Surratt. Quoting from Mogelever’s book: “Mary Surratt was well known around his (Lafayette Baker) headquarters. In the prewar years, her tavern had been a favorite resort of the planters in the area. Prominent residents of the Nation’s Capital also had made it a rendezvous for merrymaking.⁴ Directly on the route to Port Tobacco....Surrattsville’s tavern....became a meeting place for rebel couriers and Secesh supporters.” Baker and his men had stopped at the tavern many times only to be refused service by its owners. John, Jr., would usually come out to help them and then return with comments such as “Mother is ill,” “the servants are away,” or “since the war, we have been unable to get supplies.”

Mrs. Surratt became known at Baker’s headquarters as the “Virage.”⁵ Stan Baker, Lafayette’s detective brother, described her as a “masculine appearing woman with a stolid, sour face and eyes as expressionless as those of a fish.”

On this particular 1862 visit to Mrs. Surratt’s tavern, the party of Baker’s detectives were admitted to the dining room and fed the most “sumptuous a meal as we could wish.” According to the author, “all the silver plate and finest china were in glistening evidence under the full blaze of the big dining room chandelier.” Mrs. Surratt was slightly indisposed on this visit and had retired to her room. As the party of detectives left, one was heard to say “Her fishy eyes had a venomous glitter which would have done credit to a rattlesnake about to strike. The thought flashed through my mind, ‘I hope that I may never be in that woman’s power.’”⁶

Authors and newspaper reporters in general were not too kind to Mrs. Surratt. Because she was physically a large woman and seemed to have a mind of her own, this may have counted against her. And how many times have those of us with grey eyes had a “venomous glitter” in them?! Would we want to be considered a criminal because of our glitter?!

The purpose of this article is not to prove guilt or innocence. The Surratt Society does not take a stand on either side, nor do I.

The Military Tribunal back in 1865 found her guilty, albeit on circumstantial evidence. But if, and that’s a big little word, she was in on the kidnap plot, and did not report what she knew to the proper authorities for investigation—and the kidnap plot turned to murder, she was just as guilty as Booth when he pulled the trigger. That’s the way the law read then, and that’s the way the law reads today.

You, dear reader, form your own opinions!

George Alfred Townsend

By Joan Chaconas, President's Message
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, October 1980

In a phone conversation [now several years ago], I learned of a small gift collection of George Alfred Townsend's papers in the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis. I mentioned this to James O. Hall, who said that he hadn't seen them. So, we decided to go over and have a look. There are about 25 folders, containing notebooks, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, etc. Of course, I was looking for anything that had to do with the Surratts, and imagine my surprise when I found mention of the tavern in Surrattsville in Townsend's notes for "A Talk with Louis Weichmann."

But, before I go into that part of the story, I feel you should have some background on the illustrious Mr. Townsend.

George Alfred Townsend was perhaps the best-known war correspondent, journalist, and lecturer of his time. He was born in Georgetown, Delaware, on January 30, 1841. When he graduated from a Philadelphia high school in 1860, he immediately took a job as a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. One year later, this very confident young man was writing for the *New York Herald*, and by November of 1867, he wrote that his "name is familiar with every editor" and that he had "got to the top of the journalists' ladder."

During the Civil War, Townsend was a war correspondent with McClellan's army in the Peninsula Campaign against Richmond. He covered the Western Maryland campaign, and he was with Pope's army in the campaign that ended with Second Bull Run and Chantilly.

For a long time, Townsend was the highest paid correspondent in Washington, D.C. He wrote for nearly 100 different newspapers and on many varied subjects. Townsend was quite sociable and very talkative. However, people didn't mind that he talked so much, because he always had an interesting story to relate. His writings were called "brilliant, racy, sparkling, scintillating," and his daily letters were the most widely read newspaper articles of the day.

In 1865, Townsend married Bessie E. Rhodes of Philadelphia and, according to his notes, his wedding was witnessed by 10,000.

A few years after the Civil War, he began signing his works with the pen name "GATH." He probably got this from a passage in the Bible (Samuel 2, Chapter 1, Verse 20). [Editor's Note: He also used the pen names G.A.T., Swede, Laertes, and Johnny Bouquet.]

Townsend covered and wrote about the Lincoln assassination, the Conspiracy Trial, and the trial of John H. Surratt, Jr., along with the war between Prussia and Austria, and the Paris Exposition. In short, he seemed to cover all the big events everywhere. His style of writing was quite wordy and critical, and the very graphic descriptions of his subjects were often uncomplimentary. He especially liked to "roast" politicians—for this, he was greatly respected by men in high places.

One of his favorite subjects was John Wilkes Booth. Townsend traveled over the route that Booth used in his escape, interviewing everyone along the way and writing a most interesting column.

In the 1880s, he wrote two books: *The Entailed Hat* (1884) and *Katy of Catoctin* (1886). Royalties from these books were quite handsome. At this time, Townsend purchased land at Crampon's Gap, South Mountain, Maryland, and built a complex of five large homes for himself and for his children. He called the area *Gapland* (now Gathland State Park). It was this same area that he had written about while with McClellan during the Battle of South Mountain in September of 1862. While he lived here, Townsend visited the various battlefields again and wrote of them often.

In 1896, Townsend had a monument erected on the Gapland Road near his homes to honor the war correspondents. This monument, in the shape of a 50 feet high and 40 feet wide Moorish arch, is still standing today in the same spot that Townsend had chosen. It is quite an impressive sight. Several of the homes are still standing, and one houses a museum with Civil War mementoes and writings of Townsend on display.

Townsend entertained lavishly at his home in Gapland—inviting all the diplomatic, literary, and aristocratic greats from Washington, Baltimore, and New York.

By the late 1890s, Townsend's health and money began to ebb; and he soon was forced to move from his mansion in Gapland to a modest dwelling in Washington, D.C. On April 16, 1914, George Alfred Townsend had penned his last words—he died at the home of his daughter in New York. He was buried in East Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia.

And now for the tidbits found in the Annapolis files:

In 1868, while John Surratt, Jr., was in prison, Townsend had occasion to interview Louis Weichmann, who was called upon to testify at the Surratt trial. Weichmann, of course, was a schoolmate of young John and a boarder at the H Street home of Mrs. Surratt at the time of the assassination. Much of his testimony was used against his landlady. Another interesting fact that I discovered was that Townsend and Weichmann both attended Central High School in Philadelphia. Weichmann graduated in 1859 and Townsend in 1860. Could they have known each other from school days?

Here are the notes of the interview with Weichmann—just as Townsend took them down. Let me caution you here that the notes are faded with age and often difficult to decipher. I have transcribed them to the best of my ability, but a few words may be doubtful.

From the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis, Maryland, George Alfred Townsend Gift Collection, files HG-684. This is from folder #100.

A Talk with Louis Weichmann [white teeth].

- Feb 1859 sent to St. Chas. College Ellicott Mills, diocese of Va. At that time Surratt there studying for Florida—both for priesthood. New Chas. Carroll of Carrollton place. Surratt came 4 or 5 months afterwards Sep. 1859.
- Both there til 1862.

- Surratt laborious, was brilliant, good conduct. An exempl[ry] Society of Angels.
- Weichmann never good enough (for) it. No war papers allowed there: Everything secession. Surratt haughty.
- In July 1862 both left. W. and S. same day. Surratt's farewell: Jenkins president, small, thin, once great fop. Surratt cries.
- W. then came to Philadelphia, 2 months staid. Sep. '62, W. accepted Professorship in Borromeo College, Md. 4 months staid [sic] left Dec. '62. Then went on Northern Central R.R. to Ellangowan (or little Texas) all Catholics, 2000 lime burning town, staid two weeks there in December. Taught there voluntarily. Schoolhouse burned 2 nights before Christmas. Two days after Christmas 1862, went to Washington, taught in St. Mathews College.¹
- Surratt's father died in August 1862 at Surrattsville of apoplexy suddenly. Annie almost cra[z]y—he [Surratt] wrote to W. asked for teachers place in Borromeo.
- 15th of Ja. '63 W. wrote to Surratt that he was in W [Washington]. Surratt came up. Healthier.
- Spring March went to Surrattsville with John in carriage, rainy day Friday heard so much about it. Crossroad, common frame, two story, eight rooms² in house, porch in front. Staid Saturday and Sunday. Piano, Cards, two Jews there [are] blockade runners. Playing California³, pants in boots. John attended bar, post office, 300 acres, bar-room resort of all folks there, rough hilly road on level house, two or three barns, peach and apple orchard. Old lady⁴ saying beads, John, Annie, colored cook [Rachel], 4 negroes. Cards for men. Annie played cards well. Just then County election.⁵ Marine Band at 3 a.m. Herold with 'em, following shabby. H took drink, played "Dixie," government band. Sat 8 a.m. returned again. Three bronze lions on mantel piece, given by Father.
- On 4th March 1861, when Lincoln inaugurated, Isaac [Surratt] went South to Texas. Herold then in drug store Navy Yard. He lived on Island, his mother respectable widow, seven sisters.
- Annie violent temper, furious secessionist, careful in black dress, played well, had been in love with _____ Barry⁶, in Southern Army.
- Two Jews caught two days afterward with \$50,000.
- Monday morning left. Stopped Walsh Store⁷ saw Herold, got cigars. [Saw him again at C.M. College]⁸

[NOTE: At this point in the interview, the information pertains to Weichmann and a gentleman by the name of Ste. Marie. That section has been omitted here.]

- 9th of Jan. 1864 got position in Commissary dept. of prisoners. \$1200. Boarded with Mrs. Handy.
- Mrs. Surratt convert. Old S. Protestant. Mrs. Surratt's mother now lives near Surrattsville.
- John Surratt at convent 10th & G Street
- They moved to Washington 1st Sep. 1864, 22nd Dec. '64 W. met Booth⁹. Surratt then with Adams Express Co., moved to W. to keep boarders. Get John something to do, got \$600 a year to Lloyd as soon as moved W. went there.
- Booth led all for sure. Annie and old woman rivals for Booth, "My Pet."
- "God has his own end in keeping me there."

- Good Friday order from Stanton, all Catholics at home & went home. Mrs. S. dissipated [disappointed].
- Weichmann, McDermit, Holahan, Clarvoe, 8 or 10 others.
- Thinks Surratt wrote letter night of murder dated Montreal.

Sources:

¹ See Chapter II, pages 13-17 of Louis Weichmann's book, *A True History of the Assassination & the Conspiracy of 1865*, for a comparison of facts taken down by Townsend in 1868 and then later written by Weichmann himself.

² There are nine rooms in the Surratt House. Then there would have been nine rooms and a kitchen.

³ California—this could be the name of a card game. Anyone out there know?

⁴ Certainly not very complimentary to Mrs. Surratt, no matter who's words they were. She had not yet turned 40!

⁵ Elections about this time: May 1, 1863, the election of school board trustees (Md. Code of Local Laws 1860), Judges and Clerks (tax levy list 1859-1865) and November 1, 1865, the election of Constable, Justice of Peace, and Supervisory (Report of Judges of the Election in Prince George's, 1863). However, they are all after Easter. So, who are the "newly elected officials" who were being serenaded" as related in Weichmann's book?

⁶ It was hard here to determine whether Townsend wrote "Dr." or "Da". There was a young 22 years old, named William David Barry living near the Surratts at this time.

⁷ Walsh's Drug Store was near the Navy Yard where David E. Herold was employed as a prescription clerk.

⁸ See Chapter III of Weichmann's book for an overall comparison regarding Weichmann's visit to Surrattsville. In his book, Weichmann has Mr. Surratt dying in July of 1862, but in the Townsend interview, Weichmann correctly stated that Mr. Surratt died in August of 1862. On page 21, Weichmann points out that the Surratt home in Surrattsville might be called "a regular secession headquarters," but that he "did not come into possession of these facts from personal knowledge," that he learned of this from people he met at the "Conspiracy trial in 1865." However, in his interview with Townsend, he mentions "two Jews" being "there" who were "blockade runners" and he even knew they were "caught two days afterwards with \$50,000." Also, in his book, Anna became "a young woman of much culture," whereas in the 1868 interview, she had a "violent temper" and was a "furious secessionist."

⁹ See Chapter IV, page 32, and Chapter IV, note 3, page 466, of Weichmann's book. The 1868 interview shows Weichmann meeting Booth on December 22, 1864. At the 1865 trial, Weichmann gave the meeting date as January 15, 1865. This was later established that December 23, 1864, was the date. Actually, it was around December 20th that Booth was in Charles County. He checked back into the National Hotel on the 22nd and on the 23rd met with Dr. Mudd and John Surratt, Jr., at which meeting Weichmann was present.

Along with the Weichmann interview was a lengthy article that had been published, probably in 1868, but no date or name of the newspaper was visible. A portion of this article dealt with John Harrison Surratt, Jr., as follows:

Out Towards Surrattsville

... Close by this cemetery, you see an old burnt bridge, showing its black fangs above the brown tide of the Anacostia. A ½ mile below is the Navy Yard Bridge, over which, when I had walked, a signboard with the name of Farmers and Drovers Hotel drew me in. I saw behind the bar, while cooling off on a glass of ale, the frequent picture of the same man, here in citizen's clothes, there in a Zouave uniform.

"Give me that photograph," I said.

"It's Johnny S'ratt," answered the landlord.

Beneath the photo were the words: "Entered according to the Act of Congress by John Surratt." He had copyrighted his picture to secure a revenue for comforts while in jail. It showed him to have a fine, brawny, scholarly figure with the lines of anxiety and self-reliance in the face.

"You have seen the conspirator often?"

"Herold, I knew well," he said. "He was a fine skater. He's been in this room often. But Lord, I never thought him to have heart enough for a thing like that. Johnny S'ratt I knew very well."

"Did he seem capable of such a thing?"

"Yes sir, he was a very ambitious man, a very ambitious man. I seen his mother's brother go past here yesterday with one of the men that swore against her. They were riding in a buggy. Say I 'That is Surratt and no mistake.' John Surratt was a very ambitious man."

Surratt's picture is a common ornament in Taverns of Wash. He lives in the Old District Jail yet, feeding well, free to be visited by any. The ancient Cap. [Old Capitol] Prison, where his mother was confined, has been purchased by Sargent [sic] at Arms Brown of the Senate and altered into a row of good looking brick houses. It is no longer recognizable.

As one of his last acts before leaving office, President Andrew Johnson pardoned the conspirators and released them from prison. However, before this happened, newspaper articles of the time were voicing their opinions. Here is what Townsend had to say on the matter, especially about Dr. Mudd. [Editor's Note: This quote is only a small portion of a longer article, *The Christmas Pardon*, which is also reprinted on page 11.]

Johnson the Pardoner

from the *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1869

The next work of Johnson will possibly be to pardon Mudd, Arnold, Spangler and others, at the Dry Tortugas. Petitions are again in circulation, asking him to do this. In sober fact, there is nobody there of consequence, excepting Mudd; the entire set is composed of poor, shiftless, tavern-counter fellows, almost any one of whom would have done anything mean for anybody. If Mudd is ever pardoned, let the poor thieves and "soakers" with him also go. He was well-off and an incarnadined red-headed rebel from the first. They will have no friends to speak for them. Let Johnson pardon nobody or only the poorest, or all.

Final Note: Those of you who have read Townsend’s book, *The Life, Crime, and Capture of John Wilkes Booth* (1865), will know how unkindly he spoke of Mrs. Surratt and the conspirators. It would not have been to Townsend’s advantage to defend these people. He, too, was a very ambitious man; and he wrote what he felt his readers wanted to read—and, most probably, what his northern editors wanted to print.

For those of you who would like to go through the Townsend papers, go to the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis, Maryland, and ask for the George Alfred Townsend Gift Collection, HG-684. Have fun!

Chicago Tribune
January 1, 1869

THE CHRISTMAS PARDON

Who Are Affected by It

Jeff Davis, Breckinridge, Jubal Early, Judah Benjamin, A. H. Stephens, R. E. Lee, Etc.

Sketches of the Bowed Chivalry.

Last Days of the Pardoners.

Washington, Dec. 25.

To go abroad this morning was like looking into your mirror. The exquisite winter climate of the Potomac was seen to delicious advantage—every far height and hill cut clean against the cold sky; all the vapors were dead in the absolute stillness; the sound of a footstep was almost painful in its distinctness. Caught in the morning sunlight, like a river by the frost, the world stood still and brittle, and into the Christmas dawn the news of Mr. Johnson’s pardon was like the dropping of a lighted cigar. It did not fizz; it just went out after a minute. The falling of a small icicle from a little n---r boy’s nose would have made more report. I heard one man, catching at the newspaper and seeing the huge headline of “Pardon,” say:

“Andy’s pardoned the last of ’em, I see. I say, Bill! Look out of the windee and see that purty rooster’s gaff!”

“Magnificent gaff!” says the other with great interest, and they talk on such slight matters as gaff learnedly, but say not, a word about the proclamation. Neither does anybody. A lot of ragged obscurities, like six shiftless Assiniboine Indians in winter, without a pocket-handkerchief to go around or a drink of gin for the chief, or a whole shirt tail for the remnant of the nation, the foreign exiles of the rebellion will probably read this proclamation and say:

“Pardoned? Yes! But where are we to get the money to go home? If he had just wrapped up the pardon in a shinplaster or a chew of tobacco, it would have brought some comfort.”

CAUSES FOR ISSUING THE PARDON

In issuing the pardon, Johnson has acted under some solicitation, and still it is probable that he would have preferred to have Davis, perhaps Breckinridge, tried. If by any accident these men could have been convicted, he has stood ready to pardon them at any time since the Philadelphia Convention, for political motives of his own, chiefly. In this last act, as in all political ones of his administration, he has taken counsel of Seward. This is a strange instance of how little we know men. The rough and revengeful threatener of the lives of traitors, whose bitter periods upon the odiousness of treason were made text-words by the more vindictive people of our party, and used to substitute their utters for Hamlin by Lincoln’s side, has proved like all loud braggarts, at last, to be the least among the many of moral courage, and worthless even of vindictiveness. Diverted by every flatterer, moved by every piece of gossip, a hearkener to bar-room criticism, surrounded by an official family of boys, profligates, whippersnappers, too jealous to suffer the reproof of a man like a man, too self-acquainted to suffer the company of a gentleman anyhow, we find Mr. Johnson, even in his pardon, contemptible. The great Executive gun, set up in Lincoln’s hallowed embrasure, that was promised to fire straight ten-inch terrors at treason, began by backing, snapping, fizzing, falling, and at last, when men heartily hoped that it would capsize or burst, it turned the other way, kicked and fizzed as absurdly in the direction of its friends, and has finally passed out of the catalogue of ordnance, so that into its great bore a few rebel beggars have crawled at last to die—just what happened to the ridiculous hoop-and-stave cannon invented by the Sieur Gamboge. The enemy crawled into its immensity to get out of the reach of musketry, as Jeff Davis will creep into Andrew Johnson to get out of the fire of the law and Congress. Did ever an administration expire in such burlesque? Did ever a braggart so resolve to call? So is it with all braggart brutality, of which there is a good deal hiding in our own party now. The true slayers of treason began with no threats against it. Grant, Lincoln, Andrew [Johnson?], George H. Thomas—who will find a promise from either of them to make treason odious? They took up the sword with a sigh. They made freedom illustrious by their deeds, but not by their vaunts. And among the men of our party who have lately been most solicitous to have Johnson punished, you will find those most resembling him. The dirty little ruffian of the mob, who stands on its outskirts and mingles his execration with the hoarse cowardice of the rest, crying “Hang him” would be a craven Sheriff were his the responsibility. So, Johnson, a remote demagogue, yelled fiercest, “Hang traitors.” His voice distinguished him: he was “fetched” forward and made Sheriff; the great roar went on of “Hang them!” Behold! The loudest ruffian was, in responsibility, the feeblest officer!

This world is full of Johnsons. At Johnson’s [impeachment] trial, similar little ruffians cried “Impeach him.” Failing in this, they cried at Senators and editors, “Impeach them!” “Clear the Senate!” “Stop my paper!” The basest are always the loudest. The hoarsest threats come from the rear of the crowd.

PRACTICAL USE OF A PARDON

How useful is this pardon? The prevailing opinion is that it will prevent the infliction of punishment for trial of indictments for other offences than treason—no more. It will not prevent the treason. The rebel Jubal Early, who burnt Chambersburg and stole money from Frederick

City, is still responsible, like any other highwayman, for these crimes. John C. Breckinridge is yet liable to any warrant for a private misdemeanor. Indeed, this pardon is as is but a short-cut to what Johnson was been doing for three years, pardoning rebels piecemeal. He has ceased, by this proclamation, to hold personal audiences of mercy, and thrown into an "etcetera" the last column of criminals. But the Congressional amendment always holds good. None of these men are qualified for holding public office under the nation, it is under consideration to pass an enactment making it a penal offence to take office in violation of that amendment. Whatever the effect of this pardon, it may be presumed that hence forward the sentiment of the country will set toward restoring the privileges of the South, rebel and Unionists alike, and this not because of Mr. Johnson's proclamation, but because we have found for the last two years that we cannot convict anybody for treason, and because the Republican instincts of men as well as their common sense patriotism take ground against ostracization. The nation is finding it an ungracious and an expensive task to be mingling in the local concerns of the people, legislating against prejudices instead of against crimes, and altogether fallacious, besides, to hope that by creating little politicians in the South we can hold the affections of the South. "Carpet-bagging," as a right to move and live anywhere, and claim citizenship on the same terms as the native, is decreed by our charter, but "carpets-bagging," in the sense of making Congress an asylum for decayed characters, is not a commendable institution. In this Congress, you may take notice, almost every returned "carpet bagger" is a high tariff man. The carpet bag that the needy colonizer took South seems to have contained no other baggage than tariff tracts. Entering Congress with much outcry against pardoning rebels, we find that these new Pilgrim Fathers are merely "drummers" and "strikers" for Pennsylvania protectionists. Thus, the South, as an agricultural region, is misrepresented. Thus, the Northwest is outvoted. Thus, the swindling schemes of railroad iron makers and valuable charter buyers find supporters from States which seldom cast a vote for a tariff. And this is why. Republicans are beginning to see that the best that Congress can do is to restore and universalize suffrage in the South, and trust to itself to nationalize the South.

EXILES TO COME BACK—BRECKINRIDGE

John C. Breckinridge, dwelling in Canada, will be one of the first men to return to the States, if he has not already done so. He has been living upon borrowed money since 1866, is shabby, without designs, without any disposition to suffer apotheosis. He was preparing, to my knowledge, three weeks ago, to return to New York, city, having taken counsel of his friends and resolved not to visit Kentucky, for fear of an ignorant ovation there, a grand parade of the illiterate cutthroats, who bushwhack each other on that "dark and bloody ground." It was proposed that John, in New York, city, should engage in the practice of the law, pick up some stamps, wait for the days of Democratic triumph, and possibly, at some remote period, reappear in politics. But a friend of his, who told me of this design, added:

"I don't think Breckenridge will ever appear again in politics. He feels that he, more than any other man, brought trouble to Kentucky, by his unfortunate adhesion to the Confederacy, and thinks that after this mistake he ought not to take responsibility again. There is money in New York. It is about the only place left where a Southern military or political reputation is honored—even the South paying little heed to such things now."

Breckinridge, curiously, is one of those pro-slavery heroes who hold Presbyterian sympathy as opposed to pro-chivalry ones. He always believed that the English Parliament did right to cut off Charles Stuart's head. His traditions were entirely Calvinistic, while those of

Robert E. Lee and the Virginians were of the Crown, the "establishment," and other haberdashery of a nursery. Breckinridge is regarded as having established the best military reputation of any civilian in the rebel army. He is still a young man, of the sophomoric type of mind, a sweet-lipping Tom Ewing, handsome, pretty at a speech, a browser on the grave of Henry Clay, and his oratory is full of green grass. Breckinridge was kept well under, till Clay became old and spavined: then the Democracy burst through the wicket, and this young Presbyterian's *figure brave* went to the Vice Presidency. If any of the pardoned rebels can make their salt by the sweat of their brow, it will be Breckinridge not that he has great calibre, but he is willing to work.

EARLY

Jubal Early is a good lawyer for his part of the world, but one of the worst men produced by the rebellion—ungenerous, savage, surly, incapable of good citizenship, never popular with his men, never struck by a beam of sunshine but it glinted from him and lost its hue. He would have turned the war into anarchy of piracy if he could, being a hearty convert, for the last year of it, to the belief that thieving was warrantable. He has saved enough money out of it to live in Canada without complaining, and from that province has indicted coarse, vituperative books against Sheridan and other officers, one of which I possess. He says, among other things, that Sheridan had "no enterprise." Early would make the very worst man to return to the country, hating it thoroughly, while Breckinridge is probably still capable of a cheerful co-operative allegiance.

BENJAMIN

Judah Benjamin has no need of any country, being by blood at home in any. He is a counselor-at-law in England, fairly successful, "in" findings, mighty at theft and thrift, an Ahasuerus of genius. He probably has no wish to return here and will die with his face to the East. A linguist, a literary man, a financier, a doctor in the law, and younger and handsomer than Disraeli, he might have been, had he any conception of republicanism, a Disraeli in America. His relations with the latter are said to be pleasant now. But Benjamin has no character left either South or North. It is probable that he will trouble us.

MASON

James Mason will have a hard road to travel when he returns. He commissioned the pirates that preyed on our commerce, and many-handed revenge will follow him speedily. He would have to hie [means hasten] him[self] to farming, like Robert Hunter, and shut up his ponderous jaw, subdue his pompous stride to the dimensions of a plow-furrow, and, at last utter with Wolsey, the cry of: "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I aped the King. He would not in mine age have left me naked."

JEFF DAVIS AND STEPHENS

Jeff Davis is not in good health, not in luck, without any future. These men, Davis amongst them, will find sympathy in the South will mean anything but money. The Baltimore and rebel people are heartily tired of setting up Joe Johnson, who behaves with their patronage like Claude Meinotte with the gold snuff boxes of his friends, now fizzling out of an express company, now bankrupting a life insurance house, always befriended yet never earning his soup. Beauregard is in similar helplessness. The Southern people cannot help themselves, and the

rebellion is too old a martyrdom to raise ten-penny collections for it. The whole Democratic party of the North has had but one Vallandigham fund. Davis will probably pay no attention to this pardon. While the head of the rebellion, and, therefore, deserving of all reprobation, there was, probably, as little of the sneak about Davis as about any man in the South. Public sentiment there is quitting the adulation of Stephens and returning to Jeff. A Southern man of eminence said to me, some time ago:

"I belong to that small but now growing body of men who adhere to Davis as against the sentiment of the Virginians. He was the safest man for us—being in the war—because he was bold and never irresolute. Stephens was a half-hearted man, whether Unionist or Confederate. His presence in the government was an element of weakness and the party that rallied around him lost heart in the first year of the war. His "slavery, the cornerstone" speech alienated all foreign sympathy. When Davis proposed to recover this foreign sympathy by manumitting and arming the negroes, Stephens, Joe Brown, and other Georgians protested that they would leave the Confederacy if their negroes were taken. Davis stood up for the new nationality, and was prepared to sacrifice anything, slavery included, to gain it. Stephens occupied the narrow position of a man who would fight for his purse but never for his pride.

" No, sir!" concluded my informant, a former chief of staff of two prominent rebel Generals, "I know that you Northern men hold Davis to represent the entire enormity of the war vicariously, and he will be the last man to whom you will do justice. But he was always, personally, gentle, temperate, even clement, truly full of will and a rebel without hypocrisy. Stephens is a little manhood, small in moral courage, and just the sort of man after the truce to do your government more harm than ten Davises. Jeff Davis, pardoned, would be too proud to say a word. Alexander Stephens would whine, and gabble, and make new disaffection for men like Davis to meet with their lives some day!"

Mr. Stephens, I perceive, has been made a college professor in Georgia. This is the wisdom of the Southern Empire State to pension a garrulous old man, full of his lost cause, and anxious to vindicate himself, upon a school where a new generation is to be impregnated with his gab. Having made themselves ignoramuses and beggars to preserve the body of slavery, the Georgians now propose to spoil their boys by giving Stephens leave to imbue them with its ghost! Better to stop a gas leak with Stephens than to set him in a school. He is weak as a Court House pump. His book upon the War Between the States is conceived in the style of an eavesdropper to Socrates, and reads like an insipid dream of Savage Landor. If Providence meant to do the rising generation of Southerners the very worst harm, it would, as now, put them under the ruined shadows of Lee, Maury, and Stephens, to grow up as false, artificial and impractical as their fathers.

LEE

General Lee, who is, after all that has been said, the strongest instance of talent developed by the Confederacy, and, apart from his treason, a strong study of a man, is also doing harm to the next generation at Washington College. He does nothing of consequence as a college professor, keeps his college presentable, looks gracious and respectable always; but his influence, even as a lay figure, is bad, for it anchors the needy and gifted young Southerners to his expired tradition. A Southern father, if he has money to spend, ought to send his boy as far North as he can get—say to Michigan University, to Chicago or Wisconsin—not for the sake of new opinions, but to make a practical man of him and get him out of the evil vapor of a slavery that can never again have empire. Still, what is the use of talking to fathers? Better, by far, talk

to Southern boys. Let the angel of the Lord, if one can pray in type, speak to these young Samuels and Davids in their sleep and say, "Get thee out of the land where the squat-toad of slavery is at every cradle side. Better be buried in bulrushes than petted and poisoned at such a court."

JOHNSON THE PARDONER

The next work of Johnson will possibly be to pardon Mudd, Arnold, Spangler and others at Dry Tortugas. Petitions are again in circulation, asking him to do this. In sober fact, there is nobody there of consequence, excepting Mudd; the entire set is composed of poor, shiftless, tavern-counter fellows, almost anyone of whom would have done anything mean for anybody. If Mudd is ever pardoned, let the poor thieves and "soakers" with him also go. He was well off and an incarnadined, red-headed rebel from the first. They will have no friends to speak for them. Let Johnson pardon nobody, or only the poorest, or all.

Mr. Johnson, it is understood, is back with the Democracy again, and means to go into State politics in Tennessee. It is possible that his complete overthrow may make him wise to re-begin life; but it is only a generous nature that can be illiterate and yet recover a lost pedestal; a mean nature, likewise unlettered, may leap to eminence once, not twice.

GATH

The following poem was sent to *The Surratt Courier* by Robert D. Warner. He wrote this poem several years ago after watching a documentary on Mary Surratt, and says he has been haunted by the question of her guilt or innocence ever since. Mr. Warner believes that there is growing evidence to back up her last words, "I wish you to tell the people that I am innocent."

Poem to Mary Surratt

By Robert D. Warner

When the trap dropped out from under
And your life became undone,
With your last breath did you whisper,
"I did this for you, son."?

They hear your voice in that prison,
Ringing out in fright,
A ghostly cry of terror, snuffed
Like a candle in the night.

Did you wonder at the friends that
Your son chose to see
And a plot with against Abe Lincoln?
"Surely such things cannot be!"

Justice and inequity
Stared up at you from the ground,
From the graves beneath the gallows,
As the soldiers stood around.

From the reading of the death sentence
And the rope's fatal grip
To the end of your life snatched away
In one quick cruel trip.

The photographs are faded out
Of that sinister, sunny day
That even now the Internet
Can't seem to take away.

Forever there you'll dangle
Like Satan's Christmas Eve
In front of all those Union troops
Who stare and never leave.

Robert Warner is a retired English teacher, library media specialist, and a professionally trained writer with 340 poems and 240 songs to his credit. He is on Youtube under "the Dutchmyn".