

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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Surratt Society Announcements

2025 Surratt Society Conference

The date of the Surratt Society's 2025 Conference has changed.

It will be held virtually via Zoom

on Saturday, April 5th, from 2:00 - 4:30 p.m. (ET).

Please note that the date has changed from what was tentatively posted on our website.

As required by the Surratt Society's Bylaws, there will be a brief business meeting for the election of officers for the 2025-6 term, followed by two presentations

Paul Severance will speak on the trial of the Lincoln Assassination Conspirators

Francis J. Gorman is the author of a newly published book, *Confronting Bad History - How a Lost Cause and Fraudulent Book Caused the John Wilkes Booth Exhumation Trial*. Frank was the attorney for Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore in the effort to exhume the body of Booth.

It should be an interesting program, and it is free and open to all. HOWEVER, you will need to register in advance.

Registration details will be posted as soon as they are available.

There will not be a Surratt Society Booth Escape Route Tour in April 2025.

We hope to resume them in the Fall.

This newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the Surratt Society. The Surratt Society's website is surrattmuseum.org or 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, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt House Museum's phone number is (301) 868-1121.

Will the Real “Peanuts” Burroughs Please Rise?!

By Joan L. Chaconas

Reprinted from the President’s Message, *Surratt Courier*, June 1989

[2025 Editor’s Note: This is a reprint of an article written nearly 40 years ago and uses words from their 1865 context—wording we would not use today. But just as we can’t rewrite history, we present the article as written.]

We should all be familiar with the account of Peanuts, who held Booth’s horse briefly behind Ford’s Theatre while Booth was inside committing his awful crime. Booth, having shot Lincoln, jumped from the box, dashed across the stage, and out the back door.

At this point, perhaps, Booth was surprised to see Peanuts holding his horse, as he had given the reins over earlier to Edman Spangler. No doubt, Peanuts was surprised when Booth burst out through the door and angrily demanded his horse. There ensued a brief scuffle during which Peanuts received a thump on the head with the butt of Booth’s knife and Booth, finally mounted his horse, galloped furiously out of the alley and out of sight.

On April 15, Peanuts was among the many who gave statements to the Federals. This statement was brief and signed with an X. On April 24, he gave a much lengthier statement. In the first statement, given to Justice Olin, his name was listed as Joseph Burroughs; in the second, it was John C. Bohraw. The following is the April 24 statement taken from the LAS files in the National Archives.

John C. Bohraw, living with his father, 511 10th St., says:

I used to tend door at Ford’s Theatre—the stage door between the Star Saloon and the theater. My duties at that door were not to let any strangers in there. I was to let all persons who belonged in the supernumerary and no one else. Was not to allow anyone else to go in. Gifford could give an order to let anyone in, and it would be observed. Would not have let Booth in if I had not any order from Gifford. They generally call me John “Peanuts” around there because I used to peddle peanuts. Have known Booth about four months. Mr. Gifford brought me a job to attend to his horses. He asked me if I knew anything about tending horses, and I said I did, and he then engaged me to take care of Booth’s horse and buggy, which I did. Gifford would sometimes pay me—but Booth more generally for the horse’s feed. Bought feed every two weeks. Booth did not come there very often. He used to have one horse. He kept two horses there one night—the other one was a light horse. His own horse was a light bay mare; could not tell how high she was; small with a pretty long wavy tail, hanging down to about half way from her hocks down to her feet; mane long but not too long, not plaited; a pretty heavy fetlock. Did not notice a star on her forehead, small nostrils. Had small ears, sloping rump. Think she had a white foot behind but I’m not certain; legs black; very spirited; very uneasy, scratching against the bench but not stamping. I cleaned up the buggy on Monday, and the horse and buggy were sold Wednesday, I believe. Do not know who he sold them to.

The last horse he brought there was blind in one eye. Booth brought the horse to the stable, and Spangler got a halter for the horse. He started to take the bridle off, but Booth said he did not want it off, as it was too much trouble to put it on again for he wanted to use the horse at night.

Saw Booth at 5 or 6 o’clock. He said that the soldiers were in the habit of looking at the saddle blanket he would put his shawl under, and he did so. Between 9 and 10 o’clock, he went

out at the stage door—the door I tend to—out to the front on 10th Street. Ned Spangler had the horse at that time. Do not know how long he kept him. Ned Spangler held the horse—not Maddox. He sent another man to him to come and hold the horse—a man named Debonay. Ned told me to come out and hold the horse for Mr. Booth and I did so. I held him for about 10 minutes.

Spangler went inside to attend the scenes—he had to shove them on and off. They have a mark that they do not shove them beyond. It is his duty to stop them from going too far. It does not happen very often that they do go too far. Sometimes they close up the passage when running them off, but seldom.

I did not want to go and hold the horse, but Spangler said if there was anything wrong to blame it on him—I heard the shot go off and thought it was in the piece. I then heard the people shouting and went forward to the door. I was over against the wall sitting on a carpenter's bench before. I was holding the horse in my hands. Mr. Booth came to the door, opened it and rushed out. The door was shut. He came up to the horse, put one foot in the stirrup, and struck me with the butt of his dagger and knocked me down. He struck although he was merely pushing me away. I had hold of the horse and he seemed to wish to get me out of the way—I was not attempting to hold the horse from him. He left the door open. It was pretty dark as he came out of the door he said “Boy, give me my horse” pretty loud. There was no box—he mounted from the ground. The reins were over the horse's saddle. He rode off down the alley, but I could not tell which way he turned.

Spangler told me to hold the horse until Booth came out. When he brought the horse there it was the first scene of the second act—though I do not really know.

When the curtain is down, I stand out on 10th Street, at the alley door, and when the curtain is up I'm inside on the stage. Did not see Booth out in front before the play commenced. Nobody tried the back alley door. When Forrest is there, it is locked because he is afraid of taking chills.

[On May 16, Peanuts was again questioned—this time at the trial of the Lincoln conspirators. This took place on the third floor of the eastern end of the Penitentiary building. Today this portion of the building still remains on the grounds of present-day Fort McNair in S. W. Washington. On the stand Peanuts had to say:]

Joseph Burrows, alias “Peanuts.” For the prosecution. --May 16.

I carry bills for Ford's Theatre during the daytime and stand at the stage door at night. I knew John Wilkes Booth, and used to attend to his horse, and see that it was fed and cleaned. His stable was immediately back of the theater. On the afternoon of the 14th of April, he brought his horse to stable, between 5 and 6 o'clock. He hallooed out for Spangler; when he came, Booth asked him for a halter. He had none and sent Jake upstairs after one. Jim Maddox was down there too. Between 9 and 10 o'clock that night, I heard Deboney calling to Ned that Booth wanted him out in the alley. I did not see Booth come up the alley on his horse, but I saw the horse at the door when Spangler called me out there to hold it. When Spangler told me to hold the horse, I said I could not; I had to go in to attend to my door. He told me to hold it, and if there was anything wrong to lay the blame on him; so I held the horse. I held him as I was sitting over against the house there, on a carpenter's bench.

I heard the report of the pistol. I was still out by the bench, but had got off when Booth came out. He told me to give him his horse. He struck me with the butt of a knife, knocked me down. He did this as he was mounting his horse, with one foot in the stirrup; he also kicked me and rode off immediately.

I was in the President's box that afternoon when Harry Ford was putting the flags around it. Harry Ford told me to go up with Spangler and take out the partition of the box; that the President and General Grant were coming there. While Spangler was at work removing it, he said, "Damn the President and General Grant." I said to him, "what are you damning the man for—a man that has never done any harm to you?" He said he ought to be cursed when he got so many men killed.

I only saw one horse in the stable when I was there between 5 and 6 o'clock, and I was not there afterwards. There was another horse there some days before. Booth brought a horse and buggy there; it was a little horse; I do not remember the color. The fellow that brought the horse there lived at the Navy Yard. I think he used to go with Booth very often. I do not see him among the prisoners. [Probably Herold, though the witness failed to recognize him among the prisoners and the guards.]

I saw Booth as he came out of the small door. I did not see anyone else. I did not see Spangler come in or go out while I was sitting at the door.

Cross-examined by Mr. Ewing.

It was about six or eight minutes after Deboney called Spangler that Spangler called me. I was sitting at the first entrance on the left, attending to the stage door. I was there to keep strangers out and prevent those coming in who did not belong there.

When I was not there, Spangler used to hitch up Booth's horse and hold him or feed him. Between 5 and 6 that evening, Spangler wanted to take the saddle off Booth's horse, but Booth would not let him; then he wanted to take the bridle off, but Booth would not agree to it; so Spangler just put a halter around the horse's neck, but he took the saddle off afterward.

I was out in front of the theater that night while the curtain was down; I go out between every act. When the curtain is up, I go inside. I did not see Booth in front of the theater that night, nor Spangler. I never saw Spangler wear a mustache.

Booth was about the theater a great deal; he sometimes entered on 10th Street, and sometimes from the back. The stable where Booth kept his horses is about two hundred yards from the back entrance to the theater. When I went to hold the horse for Booth that night, I think they were playing the first scene of the third act.

Spangler always worked on the left-hand side of the stage; that is the side the President's box was on, and it was on that side I attended the door. When I was away, Spangler used to attend the door for me; that was the door that went into the alley from Tenth Street. A man by the name of Simmons worked with Spangler on that side of the stage, and on the other side Skeggy, Jake, and another man worked. While the play was going on, these men were always about there. It was their business to shove the scenes on. They usually stayed on their own side of the stage, but when a scene stood the whole of the act, they might go round on the other side; sometimes they would go out, but not very often.

Recalled for the prosecution. --May 22

The stable in the rear of the theater was fitted up for Booth in January, by Spangler and a man by the name of George [Atzerodt?]. It was raised up a little higher for the buggy, and two stalls put in it. Booth occupied that stable until the assassination. First, he had a saddle horse, which he sold; then he got a horse and buggy. The buggy he sold on Wednesday before the assassination. Ned Spangler, the prisoner, sold it for him.

Cross-examined by Mr. Ewing

I do not know to whom Spangler sold it. Booth and Gifford told Spangler on Monday to take it to the bazaar on Maryland Avenue, but he could not get what he wanted for it there and sold it afterwards to a man that kept a livery stable.

“Peanut” was not a main character in this drama and after the trial he drifted out of sight—that is until January of 1869 when *Lincoln Lore* printed an article entitled “Did ‘Cough Drop Joe’ Ratto Hold Booth’s Horse?”

Joe Ratto did not hold Booth’s horse, but poor Joe was taunted so much by the local rascals he began to believe he did. In answer to some of his tormentors, he’d cry out “They can’t prove it!”

Ratto was one of Washington’s oddest characters during the 1930s. The story is that he came to this country from Italy and settled in Washington in 1861. He grew up around 10th and E Streets, the area of Ford’s Theatre, which could have lent some credence to the story linking him with Booth. Ratto was 92 when he died in 1946 and would have been about 11 or 12 years old in 1865. He was given the name “Cough Drop” because, as a youth, he used to wear a sandwich billboard advertising Lewis’ Famous Cough Drops and he peddled them to various downtown Washington saloons.

Ratto reacted violently to the jeers of “Didya hold Booth’s horse?”, so, of course, his tormentors teased him even more. Soon everyone in Washington referred to Joe as “the man who held Booth’s horse.” Unlike the street people of today, Ratto did have a fixed address--416 10th Street where he had a room above Sam Weisenberg’s Furniture Store. Joe “lived” out of the trash cans in the various alleys in the neighborhood and sold newspapers for money. One hundred pounds brought him one dollar. Guiseppe “Cough-drop Joe” Ratto was clearly a victim of circumstance; and with his death, the story of Peanut Burroughs, the boy who held Booth’s horse, quieted down—but only for a while.

In 1977, Surratt Society member John C. Brennan interviewed a gentleman by the name of Elmer Stein. The following is Mr. Stein’s story:

It was about May of 1930. I was working as a fireman at #14 engine house which was on 8th Street, between Kann’s and Landsburgs, next to the power station. One night at about 10 p.m., an old colored gentleman came to the station. He was real short and had real white kinky hair. He stood in the doorway with his hat in his hand and asked for a drink of water. I went to the cooler and got him a cup of water. He said he used to work in the stable across the street, where Landsburg’s warehouse is now. I asked him his name and he said he was known as “Peanuts” John Burroughs. I asked him when he was born. He didn’t know. I said to him, you seem to be quite an old gentleman and he said yes. He must have been about 75 or 80 years old. We talked and he said he worked as a stable boy and held Mr. Booth’s horse. I said “Oh, come on now” and then he told me this story. He said, “I was playing in the alley in back of Ford’s Theatre and Mr. Spangler called me over and said, ‘Here, boy, hold this horse.’ I was holding the horse and Mr. Spangler went back inside. All of a sudden, the door flew open and a man came hopping out of there and he grabbed the horse and said, ‘Let go of that horse, boy.’ I said no I wouldn’t, it was Mr. Spangler’s horse. He said it was his horse and as I still held on to the reins, the man reached down in his boot and pulled out a knife, the biggest knife I ever saw, I thought he was going to stab me, instead of that he hit me upside the head with that knife.” At that point the old colored

fellow showed me a scar on his head. He said the man knocked him down, got on the horse and away he went down the alley. He said, "I didn't know until long after that it was Mr. Booth."

Mr. Stein never saw the old gentleman again, and Peanuts once again disappeared. Was Mr. Stein's man the real Peanuts? Probably not. Mr. Brennan points out that back in 1865 when a person of color testified or gave a statement, it was noted after the person's name, that the person was "colored." Thus, if you look through the Pitman version of the trial of the conspirators, every person who is known to be "colored" has that description following his or her name. Peanuts, on the other hand, has no description of any sort following his name, which should indicate he was white. Simple, you say, that proves Peanuts was white. But Major Almarin Cooley Richards, Chief of Police in 1865, claimed in a Frank Leslie's article dated April 17, 1885, to have been at Ford's that April 14; and he said that he and J.W. Stewart made their way across the stage and out the rear of the theater to come upon a colored boy in the alley "whom we questioned sharply" and that "he disclosed the fact that the clatter of a horse's feet which we then heard some distance down the alley, was that of a horse that a man had found some difficulty in mounting, and which he [the boy] had been holding."

William Withers, the orchestra leader at Ford's that night, in an article in the *Toledo Blade* for March 28, 1896, mentioned "Peanut John, the Negro chore boy at the theater."

This leads us to a page of notes written by Stanley Kimmel, author of *The Mad Booths of Maryland*. These notes were typed by Kimmel on November 13 and 14 in 1934 while he was here in Washington. They read, "Peanut John (white boy who held JWB's horse, Ford's). Several in existence; one check by age he gave and at the time of assassination he would have been one year old. Another gave story as holding the horse in front of Ford's theatre, etc." It seems there was at least a handful of Peanuts around!

In the Nettie Mudd book, *The Life of Doctor Samuel A. Mudd*, on page 322, you'll find Edman Spangler's statement. Spangler makes no reference to the color of "Peanuts, but it does say that "Booth, Maddox, Peanut John, and myself immediately went out of the theater to the adjoining restaurant next door and took a drink at Booth's expense." It seems highly unlikely, or perhaps impossible, that if Peanut had been a person of color, he would have been allowed to sit down in a restaurant and have a drink with said company. It is also hard to imagine Booth drinking with a "colored" boy.

W. J. Ferguson in his book, *I Saw Booth Shoot Lincoln*, describes "Peanuts" as a "basket boy at Ford's Theatre whose job it was to transport wardrobes and costumes." Ferguson tells us that Peanuts was dull-witted and that he sometimes mixed baskets; but he does not identify him as "colored," which seems to be almost an automatic thing to do in the 1865, when writing of a person of color.

One other clue that points to Peanuts being white is the testimony of two "colored" women who lived in the alley behind Ford's. They identified James L. Maddox as the man holding the horse. Maddox was inside the theater at this time; but he was white, so even though the woman identified the wrong man, their story does tell us the man holding the horse was white.

Mr. James O. Hall checked the Washington directories from 1822 to 1899. There are many BORROWS, BARROWS, BURROWS, and BURROUGHS listed. He also checked the 1850 and 1860 census for BURROUGHS, BURROWS, BORROWS, but as of now has not been able to tie any of the BURROUGHS listed to any spelling to the 1865 Peanuts Burroughs.

At this point in our narration, we seem to come to the bottom of the well of information. We can conclude, but not positively, that Peanuts was white; but he might have been black. There

is no evidence as to his age, but he probably was about 15 or 16 years old. He was not literate as he couldn't write his name, and he vanished soon after the 1865 trial of the conspirators.

Peanut surely didn't see the elephant—it's more likely the elephant saw Peanuts. And, you know what happens then!

Author's Note: I used the term "to see the elephant" in the contexts with which I have been familiar, that is meaning "to go into battle." I have since been unable to trace the origin and true meaning of this phrase. Also, my thanks to John C. Brennan and James O. Hall for lending me their files on Peanuts Burroughs.

Editor's Note: According to *The Dictionary of Cliches* by Christine Ammer (copyright 2013), "Seen the elephant" means to have seen or experienced as much as one can endure. This term, which dates from the first half of the 1800s, uses "elephant" in the sense of a remarkable or surprising sight, practice, or the like. In the military, the phrase was used during the Mexican War of the 1840s to indicate having seen combat for the first time. In civilian life, the television show *Gunsmoke* (1974) had it: "I've had a checkered life. You might say I've seen the elephant."

We Lost Our Favorite Customer

By Sylvia W. Sproat

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, August 1985

This story was contributed by Sylvia Sprout of Apollo, Pennsylvania, and contains family reminiscences from Carl DuVall, age 94, whose father and uncle were selling newspapers at Ford's Theatre on the night of Lincoln's assassination. To our knowledge, 1985 was the first time this story was printed. It is a charming addition to the folklore surrounding the assassination.

Dawn streaked across the sky as Joseph (14) and Charles (16) DuVall crossed the Potomac on a ferry boat. The sun began to shine between the clouds as the boys left the ferry on the Washington side.

The city was starting to come alive with people as they went about their business. Freight wagons made the dirt streets deep with ruts, which increased the difficulty for their horses to pull them. Union soldiers moved across Pennsylvania Avenue. The Civil War had reached its fourth year, but rumors that it would soon be over echoed around Washington.

The first job of the day for the boys was to look to deliver two mules to the blacksmith's shop on Pennsylvania Avenue. In return, they each received 25 cents for riding the mules from the ferry boat to the shop. They would also try to earn extra money by hauling cord wood to the

prison for the guards and by shining the boots of the soldiers. To the boys it did not make a difference if the soldiers were Northern or Southern.

The DuVall family were French Huguenots from Quantico, Virginia. They did not take sides during the war, even though their land was in Southern territory. During two years of education at a private school, the four children of the DuVall family had been beaten up because of the family's stand against slavery. One day, an uncle accompanied the boys to school for protection. Their Southern neighbor shot the uncle through the ear with an arrow.

One morning while seated at breakfast, news came that Northern and Southern troops had met in conflict on their land. Their home was burned, and Charles's and Joseph's father, Henry, was taken prisoner by the military. The family did not know where they had taken him. Along with their mother and sisters, the boys fled to a fisherman's shack three miles west of Quantico Creek. There the family lived in deplorable conditions until it was safe to send word to Mrs. DuVall's wealthy brother in Alexandria, Virginia. He came with a wagon and tools and brought his sister and the children into the city to live—just two blocks from the prison where the father was held.

So, it was a typical work morning when the boys rode up Pennsylvania Avenue on the mules. They spent a busy day and it was late in the afternoon when they stopped at the newspaper office to pick up the papers. The March wind was making the air cooler as the boys made their way back down Pennsylvania Avenue towards the front of the White House.

They saw a tall figure in a black stovepipe hat with a blanket wrapped around his shoulders come through the gate. President Lincoln saw the boys. He called them over, shook their hands, and gave them 25 cents for a newspaper. The cost of the paper was two cents. Because Lincoln gave them this big tip, the boys always watched for him. As they talked to the President, Secretary Stanton came up to Lincoln. While the men exchanged war news, Lincoln saw a bug on Stanton's shoulder. He reached over, picking up the bug and putting it down on the ground.

Stanton said, "Why didn't you just kill that bug?"

"The bug will have a chance to live like I have," replied Lincoln, not knowing he had only a few days to live.

The two men walked down the street towards the War Department to check the military dispatches. The tall figure of Lincoln was unmistakable in the gaslight as the boys followed, heading toward the Potomac.

It had been a good day. They had sold their papers, delivered the mules, and shined dozens of pairs of shoes. But it had been a long day. Their mother worried when they were not at home by seven.

Each day the boys traveled to Washington and, in between, made trips to the prison. They made this same trip on April 14th. The war was over—for days Washington had been alive with celebration. The streets, restaurants, and the saloons were crowded with army men.

Charles and Joseph shined shoes all day. In the evening, they stopped at the news dispatcher and picked up their papers. They had a cart to hold them. It was April 14, 1865, and Lincoln was going to Ford's Theatre. There would be a sellout crowd for *Our American Cousin* with Laura Keane performing. Mr. Ford would allow the boys to sell the bulldog edition to the theater audience.

Before the evening performance, the boys visited an aunt a few blocks from the theater. Their mother knew they would be home late on the nights they sold newspapers at Ford's Theatre.

The boys were a familiar sight around the theater. They had gotten to know the actors, especially the famous actor, John Wilkes Booth. He was not overly friendly but bought an

occasional paper from them. Booth was a well-groomed figure. He wore the latest styles and walked with an air of elegance.

The boys ate supper, retrieved their cart, and started for the theater. It was a Friday night, and crowds walked the streets celebrating the end of the war.

Charles and Joseph arrived at 7:30 and set up their newspaper cart next to the ticket booth inside the lobby. People entered and made their way to their seats. Some of them talked about the President's arrival, and many stopped to buy a paper.

Charles was inside walking up and down the aisles selling his bulldog edition to the impatient customers, while Joseph sold in the lobby. The dim lights gave the audience just enough light to read by until the curtain was lifted.

It was nearly 8:30 when Lincoln's party arrived. The carriage pulled up to the wooden ramp to protect the passengers' clothes from the mud. Entering the lobby, Lincoln nodded to Mr. Buckingham, the ticket taker, and to Joseph. Then the party turned to the left and made their way upstairs, past the Dress Circle, to Boxes 7 and 8. The performers stopped, and everyone rose and applauded the President.

Miss Harris and Major Rathbone took their seats in box 8. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were in box 7, partially hidden by the drapes. John Parker, a bodyguard, observed the audience and went to Taltavul's saloon for a drink.

Inside the theater, 1,675 people enjoyed the play. At 9:45 Booth entered the lobby, passed by the news cart, and walked to the door to watch the performance. Then he left and went out the front door. He came back in again, and Joseph figured he was in and out for a drink.

About 20 minutes later, he returned again. He joked with Joseph and Buckingham, the doorman, then walked upstairs to the Dress Circle.

Charles was to the left of the stage in the Dress Circle when someone called, "The President wants a paper." Charles made his way along the back aisle of the Dress Circle and opened the President's box. The President's valet and guard had left.

When he entered, Lincoln was enjoying the play and was smiling at the lines. Charles handed Lincoln his last bulldog paper, and Lincoln handed him 25 cents. As he left the box, he noticed Booth sitting in the second row, second seat in the Dress Circle. He mentally questioned his presence, since he could choose quality seats below. Actors did not usually sit in this area.

Charles had sold his last paper and slowly made his way along the back of the theater and down the stairs to the lobby. In the lobby, he was surprised to find his brother on the floor with his papers all over the lobby.

"What happened?" asked Charles.

"Booth knocked me over. Then he ran out of the theater and up the street. Another man followed him and jumped over me. He ran down the street in the opposite direction. The second man was not in pursuit of the first one." remarked Joseph.

As the boys picked up their papers, they heard shouts that Lincoln was shot! In the next half hour, the people rioted. Crowds formed outside the theater, and a path had to be made to carry Lincoln across the street. Lincoln could not survive the bumpy road back to the White House, so he was carried to Petersen house. In the crowd outside, some yelled it was Booth, while others were not sure what they had seen in the gas lit theater.

The boys tried to tell officials what had happened in the lobby, but not one person would listen to them. They were only newspaper boys. They were not asked to testify.

It was daybreak, and Lincoln had died by the time the boys finally went home. Their mother had worried all night since she did not know the news.

During that week their father returned home. He had been a prisoner only two blocks from their home in the Alexandria County Jail. Their father and another prisoner had escaped by hitting the guard over the head with the very cord wood the boys had been delivering. He hid in the woods for two weeks and drank water from the ruts made by the wagon wheels. When they heard the war was over, the men looked for their families.

All their life Joseph and Charles believe Booth had escaped. Joseph took his son Carl [who was still living at the time this article was originally printed] many times to Ford's Theatre to explain what happened that night, hoping that someday history might be corrected. To them it was a tragic event in their lives. When I interviewed Carl, he said he promised his father and uncle that he would make sure their version of this assassination be known.

The family returned to their farm and built a new home. Today their farm is part of the National Park at Bull Run.

The following article is reprinted in honor of President James (“Jimmy”) Earl Carter, Jr. (October 1, 1924 - December 29, 2024). He was the first former U.S. president to reach the age of 100.

One of President Carter’s Little-Known Acts

By Michael J. Brooks

President Jimmy Carter performed a simple act of compassion on October 17, 1978, when he signed into law “Senate Joint Resolution 16” restoring the U.S. citizenship of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

I’d not been aware of this little-known fact until visiting the Confederate White House in Richmond a few years ago. Our tour guide told a bit about the final years of Davis before the tour concluded, and he included a word about this act of reinstatement during the Carter administration.

Robert Bohannon of the Carter Presidential Library confirmed the specifics of this act to me. He admitted it was a congressional initiative—not a presidential initiative—but that Carter signed the bill as soon as it was sent to him.

“In posthumously restoring the full rights of citizenship to Jefferson Davis, the Congress officially completes the long process of reconciliation that has reunited our people following the tragic conflict between the States,” Carter said at the signing. “It is fitting that Jefferson Davis should no longer be singled out for punishment.”

The main instigator of the Davis citizenship initiative was Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1970s, Lott represented Mississippi’s Fifth Congressional District that included Beauvoir, Davis’s retirement home in Biloxi. The initiative required a 2/3s majority-vote for Congressional approval according to the Fourteenth Amendment but was approved overwhelmingly with only 15 “nays” in the House and a unanimous vote in the Senate. The act restored Davis’s citizenship effective December 25, 1868.

Lott was awarded the Jefferson Davis Medal for his efforts by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

An impetus to this act was the restoration of citizenship to General Robert E. Lee that occurred in 1975. Lee had applied for reinstatement in 1865. His request made its way to the desk of Secretary of State William Seward, who for some reason believed the letter was not the original, but a copy. Lee died in 1870, and the document gathered dust in a Washington archive for many years before being rediscovered 100 years later in 1970. Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia introduced a resolution to restore Lee's citizenship, and President Ford signed it into law on August 5, 1975.

Davis was born in a log cabin in Kentucky in 1808, not far from the birthplace of Lincoln and one year before Lincoln's birth. Both men fought in the Black Hawk War though it's uncertain whether they ever met.

Davis attended West Point and served in the Pacific Northwest before resigning as a first lieutenant in 1835 and eloping with Sarah Knox Taylor, the daughter of his commander, and later President, Zachary Taylor. Mrs. Davis died three months later of malaria or yellow fever while visiting Louisiana. Davis was deathly sick as well. Her death brought some conflict between Davis and General Taylor, who insisted he shouldn't have visited Louisiana in the "fever season." The men later reconciled. Davis married Varina Howell in 1845 and the newlyweds visited Sarah's grave on their honeymoon.

Davis represented Mississippi in the House and Senate and saw further action in the Mexican War as a colonel. He was named Secretary of War by President Pierce in 1853 and later returned to the Senate.

Carter noted Davis' record of service in his remarks: "[Davis] had served the United States long and honorably as a soldier, Member of the U.S. House and Senate and Secretary of War."

The tour guide showed us the second story window in the Confederate White House from which five-year-old Joseph Davis fell to his death in 1864. It is interesting that Presidents Lincoln and Davis exchanged letters of condolence upon the deaths of Joseph Davis and Willie Lincoln, who died two years earlier.

"Our Nation needs to clear away the guilts and enmities and recriminations of the past, to finally set at rest the divisions that threatened to destroy our Nation and to discredit the principles on which it was founded," Carter said as he concluded his remarks. "Our people need to turn their attention to the important tasks that still lie before us in establishing those principles for all people."

The major celebration of Davis' citizenship was held in 1979 in Todd County, Kentucky, coinciding with his birthday on June 3. President Carter was invited but was unable to attend. His letter of regret and remarks upon signing the bill were read at the ceremony.

It's significant that a president from Georgia—the heart of the old Confederacy—was willing to affix his signature to the document that, in many ways, closed the books on the War Between the States.

The author of this article, Michael Brooks, is the pastor of Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster, Georgia. This article is reprinted from a 2018 issue of *The Carter Collector*, which is the newsletter of the Jimmy Carter Political Items Collectors. Mr. Brooks has been a member Carter group for about 25 years and the editor of *The Carter Collector* for more than 20 years.