

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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President's Message

Minutes from the Surratt Society's 2025 Annual Meeting and Conference.

On April 15th, the 2025 Annual Meeting and Conference of the Surratt Society was called to order by William (Bill) Binzel, President, at 2:05 p.m. Bill noted that a quorum of the membership was present.

By unanimous consent, the reading of the minutes of the previous annual meeting and the Treasurer's report were waived and approved.

Louise Oertly, Vice President, reported that the Executive Committee agreed not to reinstate the annual dues to the Society. Bill stated that the Society is in a good financial position with its only significant outlay being an annual contribution to the maintenance of the Lincoln Discussion Symposium website started by Roger Norton and which will be continued. It was noted that Laurie Verge was a frequent contributor of posts to the site, and it is in her honor that the Society gives its support.

Bill thanked Tom Buckingham, who has served for many years as treasurer of the Surratt Society and on its Executive Committee. Tom and his wife, Betsy, were long-time volunteers at the Surratt House Museum, and he made the decision not to seek re-election.

The election of officers for the coming year was next on the agenda. The slate of nominees was as follows:

President	William Binzel
Vice President	Louise Oertly
Treasurer	Dr. Nathan Willis
Secretary	Rebecca Morris

No nominations were received from the floor. Scott Schroeder moved to approve the slate of officers and Erin Simile seconded the motion. Bill requested that the slate be elected en bloc. No objection being raised, the slate was approved by voice vote.

Bill thanked Louise for her efforts to keep *The Surratt Courier* alive and expressed his appreciation, in particular, for the latest edition.

At 2:14 p.m., Scott Schroeder moved to close the business meeting, Louise seconded, and the motion was passed. After the speakers' presentations, the conference adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

This newsletter is the Surratt Society's bimonthly publication. 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.

Surratt House Museum is a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt House Museum's phone number is (301) 868-1121 and email is surratthouse@pgparks.com.

Synopsis of Speakers Presentations

Bill Binzel introduced the first speaker, **Dr. Paul Severance**, who gave a presentation on the trial of the Lincoln assassination conspirators.

The original plot against Lincoln was to kidnap him and hold him to force the return of Confederate prisoners. The plan failed but Booth continued to plot against Lincoln. His fury was ignited on April 11, when Lincoln made a speech from the balcony of the White House suggesting that the vote might be extended to African Americans.

On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre and, with Davey Herold, fled south out of the city. By April 26, Booth was dead, and his fellow conspirators had been captured. The men were held on two monitors off the Navy Yard; Mary Surratt was held in the Old Capitol Prison.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who was effectively in charge of the trial proceedings, insisted that it be held as a military tribunal. He overrode objections as to the constitutionality of that type of trial as opposed to a trial in civil court. He believed that it would be impossible to find an unbiased jury in Washington. As the trial date approached, the prisoners were moved to the Washington Arsenal Penitentiary. Stanton also insisted that the trial be held quickly and in secret.

On May 8, the trial began in a room on the third floor of the Old Arsenal Penitentiary. Dr. Severance presented short biographies of the key players in the trial including the nine military officers that sat as the jury. Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt served as Chief Prosecutor. Over the next seven weeks over 300 material witnesses were called including, unusually, several African Americans. Keeping the trial a secret proved impossible and after the first day, eleven reporters were allowed in and seated at a special table in the courtroom. Eventually, even members of the public were allowed in.

On June 29, the Military Commission met to review the evidence and deliver a verdict. A guilty sentence required a majority vote; the death sentence required 2/3. To no one's surprise, guilty verdicts were returned the next day and Herold, Atzerodt, Powell and Mrs. Surratt were sentenced to death. The other prisoners would not find out their sentences until weeks later. On July 7, the death sentence was carried out.

The trial was undeniably biased in favor of the prosecution. Irregularities included:

- There was a single charge of conspiracy made to cover all the defendants
- There was no presumption of innocence
- No pre-discovery
- The prosecutors sat with the jury and were allowed to confer with them
- The defendants' lawyers were not allowed to counsel their clients
- Hearsay evidence was allowed
- Of 34 objections from the prosecution, all were sustained. Only two of the 15 defense objections were sustained
- The military jury was allowed to question witnesses
- There was no appellate authority but to the President

There were some positive aspects to the trial:

- It was open to the public and press
- Transcripts of the testimony were made available to the press every day
- The defendants had competent lawyers
- Daily health inspections were made of the prisoners
- Mrs. Surratt was given special consideration due to her poor health

In the end, many questions remained: the guilt of Mrs. Surratt; the constitutionality of a military tribunal vs. civilian court; did President Johnson see the petition for leniency for Mrs. Surratt? As to the latter, Dr. Severance stated that Judge Advocate General Holt insisted for the rest of his life that Johnson had seen the petition and either ignored it or forgot it.

The second presentation was given by **Francis Gorman** on the John Wilkes Booth exhumation trial. Mr. Gorman is an attorney and represented Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore at that trial. He has since written a book on the trial titled, *Confronting Bad History - How a Lost Cause and Fraudulent Book Caused the John Wilkes Booth Exhumation Trial*.

Mr. Gorman began by acknowledging the great contributions to his work made by Laurie Verge and James O. Hall and continued with a timeline beginning at the death of Booth.

John Wilkes Booth was killed at Garrett's farm on April 26, 1865. His body was brought back to Washington on April 27 and put on board the monitor, *Montauk*, where an autopsy was performed. His body was then buried under the floor of a storage room at the Old Arsenal Penitentiary, where it remained for four years despite repeated pleas by his family that he be returned to them for burial.

Finally, in 1869, the body was exhumed and taken to Baltimore where it was buried in an unmarked grave in a plot recently purchased by his mother in Green Mount Cemetery. His father and four siblings were later exhumed and buried in the same plot. [Editor's Note: On top of John's coffin was a box containing the remains of his siblings—Frederick, Elizabeth, Mary Ann, and Henry Byron.]

Between 1870 and 1991, rumors circulated that the man buried in Green Mount Cemetery was not actually John Wilkes Booth. The rumors reached a fever pitch with the publication of a book by Finis L. Bates titled, *The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth* in 1907.

Bates was a lawyer who had represented a man named John St. Helen in a court case. Years later, Bates was called to St. Helen's deathbed where the latter revealed that he was actually John Wilkes Booth. He claimed that at the time he was supposedly planning the kidnapping of Lincoln, that he was actually in Southern Maryland scouting escape routes. He returned to DC on April 14 and met with Vice President Andrew Johnson to tell him that the kidnap plot had failed. Johnson then said he wanted Lincoln killed that evening when he attended Ford's Theatre. Johnson said he would make sure General Grant did not accompany the Lincolns that evening and gave him the password, "TB" to get over the Navy Yard Bridge and out of town.

Although St. Helen recovered, he supposedly turned up later in Enid, OK, as a man named David E. George. George committed suicide but during his life, he also claimed to be John Wilkes Booth. Finis Bates traveled to Oklahoma and identified the body of George to be that of Booth. The undertaker holding the body refused to release it, because he was making money charging people to view the supposed corpse of Booth. The body was embalmed so many times that it eventually became mummified. After holding the mummy for 10 years, the undertaker sold it in 1915 to a man in Baltimore who began renting it out. [See page 4 for more about David E. George.] Later two gentlemen named Nathaniel Orlowek and Arthur Ben Chitty took up the story claiming that the body buried in Green Mount Cemetery was not that of John Wilkes Booth.

In 1994, they filed a Petition to Exhume seeking to dig up the body and subject it to scientific analysis to prove its identity once and for all. They based their petition on the Finis Bates book. For the next two years, Mr. Gorman and his fellow advocates, with the help of James O. Hall and Laurie Verge, sought out witnesses to refute the story and deny the claim. The most compelling witnesses testified that examination of the body could take up to six months and the exhumation would actually be an archaeological dig because multiple bodies were buried in that plot, and no

one knew which was Booth's. These facts led Judge Caplan to deny the petition, a decision that was later upheld on appeal.

The Case of David E. George

By James O. Hall

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, March 1992

In mid-December 1902, a man who gave his name as David E. George registered at the Grand Avenue Hotel, run by S. S. Dumont, in Enid, Oklahoma Territory. He looked to be about 60 years old, just another derelict floater. The territory was full of such men. George spent most of his time drinking at Jack Bernstein's saloon—where he pawned his watch for \$10. Otherwise, he kept very much to his room. On 31 December he called in an attorney, L. N. Houston, and made a will with bequests that turned out to be nonexistent. He told Houston he was going to die.

At about 8:00 a.m. on 13 January 1903, George purchased 15 grains of strychnine at the Watrous Drug Store. Later that morning the maid, Minnie, heard loud groans from George's locked room. Help was summoned and another hotel resident, Lee Boyd, was sent up by Mrs. Dumont to investigate. Boyd climbed over the partition and found George on his bed in convulsions. Doctor R. A. Field, whose office was nearby, arrived quickly but before he could prepare a syringe, George was dead. According to both Boyd and Doctor Field, George died about 10:30 a.m. without uttering a word. He was beyond that.

The body was taken to the undertaking establishment of W. B. Penniman. That afternoon the *Enid Daily Wave* ran a little story reporting the suicide.

On 15 January 1903, the *Enid Daily Wave* ran another story about George, a sensational account that soon caught national press attention. George was really John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln! The origins of this story reached back almost three years to El Reno, Oklahoma Territory, where George had lived for a time.

Mrs. Jessica Kuhn, a 28-year-old widow, was living in El Reno near the home of the J. W. Simmons family. She was a great friend of their daughter, May, and was almost a daily visitor in their home. She got to know their boarder, a hard-drinking and eccentric painter named David E. George. One day in April 1900, while Mrs. Kuhn was there, George came home in obvious physical distress, saying he was going to die. Mrs. Kuhn thought he might have taken poison or some drug, perhaps morphine.

While waiting for a physician to come, Mrs. Kuhn sat by George's bed. He told her a remarkable story. His name was not David E. George—not at all—he was really John Wilkes Booth, and he had killed Lincoln. George soon recovered, but his account made a lasting impression on Mrs. Kuhn. On 23 May 1900, she married a Methodist minister, E. C. Harper, and moved to Medford. She told her new husband all about George's strange "deathbed confession," and there the matter rested.

At the time George committed suicide, the Harpers were living in Enid, where the Reverend Harper had recently taken over a church. Mrs. Harper saw the account of George's death in the *Enid Daily Wave* of 13 January 1903. This brought back memories of the day she sat by the bed of David E. George in El Reno and heard him confess that he was John Wilkes Booth. Could the dead man be the same David E. George? She asked her husband to go down to the Penniman's

undertaking establishment and look into it. The Booth story broke in the follow-on article in the *Enid Daily Wave* of January 15th.

In Memphis, Tennessee, an attorney named Finis Bates read the George-Booth account in the local paper newspaper. As a young man, he had set up a law practice in Granbury, Texas. In 1872, he became friendly with a saloon keeper, John St. Helen. With this friendship came an astonishing experience. As Bates told of this later, St. Helen became very ill. During this illness, he told Bates that his real name was John Wilkes Booth and gave Bates a “tintype” picture of himself. Sometime afterwards, Saint Helens greatly expanded on this by explaining to Bates how he had escaped after he assassinated President Lincoln.

Bates was excited by what he read about the George suicide. Could David E. George be the man he had known in Texas as John St. Helen about 30 years before? Bates promptly set out for Enid to see what he could make of it.

Upon arrival in Enid, Bates identified the embalmed body as that of the man he had known as John St. Helen. Thus, in circular fashion, George was Saint Helen, Saint Helen was Booth, so George was Booth. Bates spent the rest of his life trying to prove this. In 1907, he published a book on this subject, *The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth*. The book reportedly sold over 70,000 copies.

It is not the purpose here to review the complex details of the Bates book. Essentially, it holds that Booth escaped at Garrett's farm, and that another man, “Roby” or “Ruddy” was the one shot in the burning barn. A high-level government conspiracy prevented the truth from coming out. But a myth was born, and it has grown over the years in hundreds of magazines and newspaper articles, in books and movies, and on television. The myth has gathered many adherents, true believers, unshaken and unshakable. It will go on and on.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, I conducted extensive research into this matter. My files are huge. Out of all this, I concluded that David E. George could not be John Wilkes Booth. Some of the reasons were given in *The Surratt Courier* for December 1991. Others have done similar research in the past, but their findings are almost unknown today. Perhaps it would be useful to outline salient points made by two of these researchers.

In 1920, Harry Ford became interested in the George-Booth account, apparently with the intent of buying the mummified body. He instructed one of his employees, Fred L. Black, an editor of the Ford publication, *The Dearborn Independent*, to investigate—spare no expense. In late 1920 and running through 1921, Black travelled widely, mostly in Oklahoma and Texas, searching out and interviewing dozens of people who had any knowledge of John St. Helen and David E George. Black utterly demolished any notion that David E. George and John Wilkes Booth were one and the same. The whole thing was nonsense and Black so advised Ford.

Some of Black's findings were reported in a series of articles in *The Dearborn Independent* in the spring of 1925. Black continued his interest for several years, ultimately producing a manuscript which has never been published. This manuscript, along with Black's files, are now in the library archives of Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

Years back, I spent two days going through Fred Black's materials, looking for items of interest—particularly elements of identification. It seemed to me that the physical characteristics of George, as compared to those of Booth, would be decisive. Booth was known to be about five feet and seven inches tall, compactly built, with black hair and dark eyes. Some describe Booth's dark eyes as “black,” the pigmentation geneticists say does not exist in humans.

Others who knew Booth well remember his eyes this way:

“... his eyes were large, dark and expressive.” John Ellsler, stage manager and Booth’s partner in a Pennsylvania oil adventure.

“... big flashing dark eyes...” Claire Morris, actress.

“... dark and brilliant eyes...” Charles A. Krone, actor.

“... he had the large hazel eyes of his mother.” Asia Booth Clarke, Booth’s sister,

Of all those who commented on the color of Booth eyes, Mrs. Clark would undoubtedly have the most accurate memory. Still, one can never be certain that her understanding of the word “hazel” squared with the usual dictionary definitions: “Having a light golden-brown color,” or “light brown to strong yellowish brown.” Most likely Booth had dark brown eyes.

For some reason, Black did not lean heavily on the color of David E. George’s eyes. The references were just dropped into statements he took—almost in passing. He hunted up William H. Ryan, an assistant to undertaker W. B. Perriman, and made notes (undated, probably 1921) of the interview. Ryan had done most of the embalming of the body of George. He told Black that the corpse had eyes that “were a cross between blue and gray.” Ryan repeated this to a reporter for the *Oklahoma City Times* (24 February 1925, pages 1 and 2): “The body I embalmed had what I call faded blue eyes or blue gray eyes.” [We shall come back to Ryan’s recollections at another point.]

Black also located Mrs. Jessica Young (formerly Mrs. Kuhn and Mrs. Harper) at Amarillo, Texas, and interviewed her in depth on 21 January 1921. Mrs. Young remembered George this way: “He was a man five feet ten or eleven, of medium build, and walked with his shoulders well thrown back. He had very large deep blue eyes, his hair being sprinkled with gray; he dyed both hair and mustache.”

So here we have William H. Ryan and Mrs. Jessica Young as saying that George had blue eyes. The best evidence is that Booth had dark eyes—a shade of brown.

Note that Mrs. Young gave George’s height as “five feet ten or eleven.” This is consistent with the way George A. Clark and Eugene McConkey remembered George when he lived in Hennessy, Oklahoma Territory, in 1896 and worked as a painter. Clark told Black that George was “a rather lanky man.” McConkey described George as “tall.” Booth’s height was about five feet and seven inches. There is no way these descriptions can be made to fit John Wilkes Booth.

Another investigation of the George-Booth account was made for *Harper’s Magazine* by William G. Shepherd in 1924. This was published by the magazine in the November issue under the title, “Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth’s Escape.” The magazine instructed Shepherd “to probe the evidence to a conclusive issue.” In the process, Shepherd contacted some of the same people as Black, including William H. Ryan. Ryan again said that George’s eyes were blue.

Shepherd concluded that David E. George was not John Wilkes Booth and so stated in his article in *Harper’s Magazine*. He based this in part on handwriting. Shepherd found three signatures of George: one as “D. E. George” on a will he made in El Reno, Oklahoma Territory, on 19 June 1902; another as “D. E. George” on a check for \$350, dated 12 March 1902, drawn on the First National Bank, El Reno; and the third as “David E. George” on the will he made at Enid on 31 December 1902. The originals show these as strong and confident signatures. Shepherd then laid these George signatures down beside known Booth writing. He saw no resemblance.

There is another George signature which was not known to either Black or Shepherd. This was on an insurance application he made in El Reno in 1902 (day and month obliterated). This was signed “David Elihu George.” No beneficiary was named. The insurance was payable to “my estate.” Insurance agent noted on the application that George was born at French Camp, Mississippi, on 14 June 1844. Whether a policy was actually issued is uncertain.

Shepherd was also not aware of a little note, written by George on 13 January 1903 (misdated 1902), the day he committed suicide. This is on hotel stationery. A facsimile was published in Black's article in *The Dearborn Independent*, 25 April 1925. This reads as follows:

Jan 13, 1902

I am informed that I made a will a few days ago and I am indistinct of having done so. I hereby recall every letter syllable and word of any will that I may have signed in Enid. I owe Jack Bernstein about ten dollars, but he has my watch in pawn for the amt.

D. E. George

Copies of all the George signatures and the writing on the little note were compared to a substantial number of copies of known Booth writings from my files. Booth's handwriting is totally different, even allowing for changes that might have occurred over a period of time. Booth tended to hurry his writing; George's writing had a slow and "old timey" look. There is one George idiosyncrasy not found in any of the Booth exemplars. Where a lowercase "e" would be proper at the end or in the middle of a word, George sometimes wrote it out as an uppercase "E" in miniature. In his signature, George always separated this "E" at the end of his name.

In a number of Black's interviews with those who knew George, the word "odd" creeps in. In those days in Oklahoma Territory, psychiatry was an unknown to most citizens—be it a science or an art form. So, put simply, old George was "odd." The English might have said, "A bit bonkers, you know." The Scotch might have been more graphic, "He had a slate missing from his roof." Whatever else he was, George was definitely peculiar, a morose and hard-drinking painter, who may have been a drug addict.

Well, who was he? The territories had many men on the run from some scraps with the law, and others who had deserted families and wished to disappear. Pick any name you like and use it. Of course, David E. George could have been David E. George, born at French Camp, Mississippi, on 14 June 1844. We may never know for sure. But John Wilkes Booth, he was not.

As for the George mummy, its days on the carnival circuit are passed. The mummy dropped out of sight years ago.

A Word from the Enid Oklahoma Embalmer

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, January 1992

1992 Editor's Note: In the controversy over the possibility that another man was shot at Garrett's farm in 1865, a persistent story claims that the dead man had blue eyes. Booth's sister Asia Booth Clarke, in her book *The Unlocked Book, a Memoir of John Wilkes Booth*, clearly states that her brother "inherited some of the most prepossessing qualities of his father, and while that father's finally shaped head and beautiful face were reproduced in him, he had the black hair and large hazel eyes of his mother. [Webster's Dictionary defines hazel eyes as brown, flecked with green or gray.] These were fringed heavily with long, up curling lashes, a noticeable peculiarity as rare as beautiful. He had perfectly shaped hands and across the back of one he had clumsily marked, when a little boy, his initials in India ink."

An interview with William J. Ryan, the undertaker who embalmed the mysterious David E. George in Enid, Oklahoma, was published in the *Oklahoma City Times* on February 24, 1925 (pg. 2 col. 4). As you can see, the following interview seems to set the record straight.

Embalmer of Enid's "Booth" Doubts Story Drunken Old Painter Had Wrong Colored Eyes, Legislator Says

David E. George, believed by many to be John Wilkes Booth, Abraham Lincoln's assassin, was an inebriated painter, who had hallucinations that he was Booth, according to the story told Tuesday by William J. Ryan, representative from Garfield County, who said he was the undertaker who embalmed the body.

Ryan was an embalmer in the W. B. Penniman undertaking company at Enid when the body of George was brought to the that place.

"I do not believe now, and I never did believe that the body I embalmed was the body of John Wilkes Booth, the actor and assassin of President Lincoln."

Has No Prejudice

"I am not prejudiced. My mind is open for conviction but, so far, no theories have been advanced or proof offered to convince me that the man I embalmed as David E. George was John Wilkes Booth."

Ryan is 63 years old, a retired furniture merchant and undertaker. He was in the undertaking business for 48 years and 38 years as an embalmer. He was in the undertaking business in Enid for 22 years.

While Ryan was embalming the body, the first story was raised that the painter who had killed himself in Enid was Lincoln's assassin.

Ryan first embalmed George's body in the usual manner. When the controversy arose over its identity, the body was held in the Penniman undertaking establishment and Ryan says he treated the body three times later to preserve it.

Body Never Stolen

He denies rumors that the body was stolen while kept at the undertaking parlors. It never left the place until it was shipped away about eight years after George's death in 1903.

"The reason I am skeptical is that the body I embalmed had what I call faded blue eyes or blue gray eyes. John Wilkes Booth had coal black, piercing eyes. I have talked to persons who knew Booth and knew the color of his eyes. Among them was Captain E. J. Pierce of Whitehall, Illinois. Captain Pierce said he knew Booth well and that he had dark eyes, not brown eyes, but coal black eyes.

"The pigment in a man's eyes does not change color."

Ryan said that after the controversy arose about the identity of the body, he posed it for a photograph and showed these pictures to persons who knew Booth. No one he ever talked to identify it as that of Booth.

The representative was told the story of an Eastern doctor who declared he operated on Booth for a tumor. The operation left a deep scar in Booth's neck. He told Booth he would carry the scar to the grave.

No Scalpel Marks

"There was no scar on the back of the neck of the body I embalmed," Ryan said. "I looked for identifying marks all over the body. If there was any scar on the neck, I could not see it."

Ryan was then asked about the fractured left leg that was supposed to have been found on the body of George. Booth is claimed to have fractured a leg when he leaped to the stage of the theater where he assassinated Lincoln.

“Both legs of the George corpse were whole and sound so far as I could tell. A doctor up there, Dr. S. N. Mayberry, came and looked at the legs. He kept looking and looking and looking and finally he thought he could see a little bulge in the left leg, but I never could see it.”

Penniman in Columbus

The body now is in Memphis Tennessee, according to information Ryan has.
[Editor’s Note: The mummy has had many homes since this article was written. Its present whereabouts is unknown.]

W. B. Penniman, the owner of the establishment in which the body was embalmed, later sold out and moved to Columbus, Ohio, where Ryan believes he now is employed by the Belmont Casket Company.

The Mummy, the Autopsy, and the Rest of the Story

By Blaine V. Houmes, MD

[Author’s Note: This article was adapted in part from
“John Wilkes Booth and the Enid Mummy,” *Lincoln Herald*, Spring 2004.]
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, March 2008

When David E. George died in 1903, in a dreary little hotel room in Oklahoma, he had no idea that he would become a fixture in American mythology. Historical revisionists have persisted in the belief that John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln, was never caught and that Mr. George—or Mr. Saint Helens, depending on the story variation—was the real culprit.

They are not alone.

Many through the years have believed the story, and even the Enid townspeople believe it, particularly after various citizens recalled that Mr. George had confided to them his true identity. W. B. Penniman, the local undertaker, became certain a government investigation would occur and had the body embalmed at least four different times. He had also learned of the alleged wealth of David George (not to mention that of the Booth family) and appointed himself executor of the estate. But the Booth family refused to claim the body, and the land holdings and insurance policies that George had bragged about were found to be worthless.

The mummy was stored in Penniman’s furniture store and became a great attraction. Thousands viewed the body, and entire classrooms of schoolchildren and their teachers were given tours. Newcomers to the city were taken down to the shop to view the remains of “Old John,” which at times was propped up in a chair and was “...as well cured as one of the Swift hams...”¹ Mr. Penniman was eager to capitalize on his guardianship of David E. George—his furniture store flourished because of it—and even allowed a traveling salesman of funeral chemicals to perform one embalming in order that he might be able to say that he had had a hand in the work...”²

Mummification was not the original goal of William Penniman. The process of embalming became popular in the United States during the Civil War, allowing family members to contract with battlefield surgeons to preserve a soldier's body for transport back home. These early morticians employed formulas with toxic chemicals such as arsenic, zinc chloride, lead, and

mercury salts to maintain a life-like appearance.³ Although state laws were passed in the early 1900s prohibiting the use of metal salts in embalming fluids, arsenic remained widely used as a preservative until 1910. Mr. Penniman followed a similar procedure. His favorite concoction was Argon, a commercial product with formaldehyde (and allegedly no arsenic) as a base.⁴ Unfortunately, during the last embalming he miscalculated the dose, and the body of David E. George withered, turning into a darkened, rock-hard corpse.

After Memphis attorney Finis Bates gained possession of the body in 1921—first by suggesting that Mister George had been a client several years before in Texas, but later (and more importantly) by promising Penniman large royalties from tours on the carnival circuit—the mummy had, despite its exploitation, a rather mundane existence. Profits were erratic and when they began to sag, efforts to sell the mummy to automaker Henry Ford and others met with failure. Finis Bates died in 1923, but his widow continued efforts to peddle the body and finally sold it for \$1,000. It was then bought, sold, or leased several times, and at one point was even kidnapped or stolen, then held for ransom.

In 1928, the mummy was purchased by Agnes Black. She continued exhibiting the body and while it was on tour in Illinois during December 1931, arrangements were made with the Chicago Press Club for the mummy to be examined by Doctor Orlando F. Scott.

Dr. Scott was well-known in Chicago. He advertised himself wisely as an “alienist”—an early term used before psychiatry became a recognized specialty in 1934. Scott actually began his career as a physician on retainer to many factories. He had keen interest in forensic medicine, looking for malingering in work-related injuries. He often served as an expert witness in the courtroom.

Scott was also no stranger to newspaper headlines. His career often took sensational turns, not surprising when he once hypothesized that many criminals were “legally sane, but medically insane,” and that the evils of Bonnie Parker (one half of the “Bonnie and Clyde” gang) were due merely to “a pituitary gland out of control...”⁵

On December 13, 1931, Dr. Scott invited an assortment of physicians to examine the mummy in his office. The group—eager to see this sideshow novelty—included two pathologists and three surgeons, the Chicago Health Commissioner, as well as reporters, attorneys, and at least three other physicians. The mummy was weighed, measured, photographed, and X-rayed.

Their findings were released on December 19, in a report signed by Dr. Scott and five of the physicians present. The Chicago Health Commissioner abstained, ostensibly due to his political office. The findings included certain “peculiarities” on X-rays and physical exam, including: an elevation of the right eyebrow, believed to be from a healed scar; a right thumb deformed at the knuckle, consistent with an old crushing injury; and a thickening of the left ankle suggesting a previous fracture.⁶ A rectangular signet ring, noted in one X-ray, was removed from the stomach area by cutting a flap into the back of the body. It was later identified by Chicago artist John Dodioroff as displaying an initial in the old English script, as perhaps the letter “B”.⁷

The group's findings, if correct, were important. Booth was known to have suffered a broken ankle at some point during his escape. He was known to have had many cuts from his theatrical swordplay and was known to have had a scar on his neck from an infection treated by Washington physician Dr. John Frederick May, about two years before the assassination.⁸ The Associated Press and Chicago newspapers also reported a thumb injury from Booth's youth, when his hand was caught in a windlass used for theater props.⁹

The report did not specifically claim that the mummy was the body of John Wilkes Booth. Indeed, Dr. Scott later admitted that, although the physicians signed the autopsy findings, their

interest “was not in identifying the body, but rather verifying body features which did or did not confirm the contention of the mummy’s owner.”¹⁰ Dr. Miloslavich, however, joined Dr. Scott in declaring to the press that “unless that mummy is the body of Booth, a most amazing and unbelievable set of coincidences has been encountered.”¹¹ Miloslavich in particular believed that the X-ray findings “prove almost without doubt” the mummy was John Wilkes Booth.¹²

Today, the Chicago autopsy is offered by historical revisionists as proof that Booth escaped and that David E. George was really John Wilkes Booth.¹³ The fact that the Booth family had accepted his body from the government in 1869, buried it as their own, has only inflamed the skeptics through the years, as they believe that this was yet another fraud committed to hide the truth.¹⁴

But there are other reasons to doubt the claim that David George was Booth. The signet ring found in the mummy's stomach, described often in contemporary news accounts, was never mentioned in the report of Dr. Orlando Scott. This may have been because it was unlike any ring John Wilkes Booth was known to wear. In several of Booth’s authenticated photographs, a ring is discernible on the little finger of his right or left hand, but all of those rings have round or oval settings, not rectangular as the one found by Dr. Scott.¹⁵

In addition, Finis Bates nor Dr. Scott ever mentioned finding a tattoo Booth was known to have on the back of one hand, applied clumsily with India ink while a youth. It was such a distinctive feature that at least 20 different people described it when they were either interviewed during the manhunt, present at the autopsy of Booth, called to testify at the trial of the conspirators, or while viewing his body before the final burial. The actor's sister, Asia Booth Clark, even described the tattoo in her memoirs.¹⁶

After first viewing the corpse of David E. George in 1903, Bates claimed in his book that certain features helped identify the body as that of Booth: A broken thumb; a broken leg, and a scar across the right eyebrow. However, this contradicts later correspondence when he had the body examined during one of the final carnival tours in 1921. He wrote at that time to a friend:

*I returned from California about a week or ten days ago and had my first opportunity to examine, and have surgeons and physicians examine, the body. We found no scars on the body... with the exception of a small scar, about an inch long. The surgeon says it was an incision which had been made in performing an operation on the upper part of the throat for a tubular gland. The surgeon said in examining the crippled foot that it had sustained a compound fracture of the arch and ankle, as clearly shown in the right foot and ankle. This is the extent of a thorough examination of the body....*¹⁷

Perhaps Dr. Scott had doubts himself. After the autopsy was complete and the press reports filed, two forensic scientists from Northwestern University Scientific Crimes Detection Laboratory examined the mummy in Dr. Scott's office. The laboratory was established in 1929, due to a growing frustration that the Chicago Police could not adequately fight organized crime, after the St. Valentine's Day massacre perpetrated by gangster Al Capone. An adjunct of the Northwestern University Law School, it was considered the first true crime lab in this country and became a model for the FBI lab established in 1923.

Leonarde Keeler and Dr. C.W. Muehlberger were asked by Scott on December 31 to look for a scar, particularly on the back of the mummy's neck. Despite using a Hanovia quartz mercury vapor lamp fitted with a Wood’s filter—sophisticated forensic equipment for the time—they found no suggestion of scar tissue. A statement by them concluded:

Mr. Keeler reported his negative observations to Dr. Scott and was asked by Dr. Scott to report that he had observed a scar. Dr. Scott told Mr. Keeler that it was just a publicity stunt, and

*it wouldn't mean anything to Mr. Keeler. Mr. Keeler refused to report anything contrary to what he actually saw or failed to see. Mr. Muehlberger was not approached by Dr. Scott in any such attempt to alter his findings.*¹⁸

Leonarde Keeler and C.W. Muehlberger were among the original staff members at the Crime Detection Lab. Muehlberger was assistant director and in charge of chemistry and toxicology. Although Keeler was nominally credited as a researcher assistant, his place in history had been secured in 1926, when he invented the first practical lie detector. More significant, however, was his development of successful test procedures and techniques for unmasking deception from recordings of blood pressure, pulse, and respiration. He was also popular with Northwestern University students. Chester Gould, inspired when studying with Keller, was so influenced by these pioneering advances in crime fighting that he later incorporated them into his famous comic strip, *Dick Tracy*.¹⁹

The response by Keeler and Muehlberger only added fuel to a contentious rivalry which continues today.²⁰ The doctors signing the 1931 mummy report were advertised as physicians from Northwestern University, yet not one had an appointment or was ever a member of the medical school faculty.²¹ Dr. Scott had already irritated the Northwestern law school administration—and continued to provoke them—by representing himself to the media as a “guest lecturer” and “instructor of legal medicine” at their school. He had, in fact, given a presentation at the law school on March 1, 1929, concerning the medico-legal aspects of work-related injuries, but after his attempts to exploit this single lecture, he was asked never to return.²²

After the 1931 examination of the mummy, several questions remained—most prominent of course: Was this really the body of John Wilkes Booth? Mr. Booth was known to have fractured his left leg during the escape. Although traditionally this was attributed to his leap from the Presidents box—his spur catching in a flag before he fell onto the stage—it may well have occurred later when his horse stumbled and fell on him during the escape.^{23,24} Finis Bates wrote that the actor struck his shin against the edge of the stage and broke his leg. Dr. Scott's report suggests an old fracture in the left leg, but this was reported in the media (after interviews with other participants) as either the right or left leg.

Chicago businessman Otto Eisenschiml, during research for his best-selling assassination book, *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?*, collected copies of the mummy's X-rays from Dr. Scott.²⁵ In 1996, when the X-rays were discovered in Eisenschiml's files, they were reviewed by skeletal radiologists in blind fashion: no name or medical history was provided, and comparisons were made with other X-rays, having the same anatomical views from a similar aged patient.²⁶ An opinion was requested regarding any observable trauma, past or present. On the X-rays of the Enid mummy, the radiologist found no suggestion of a healed leg fracture in either of the long bones (tibia or fibula) or in any ankle or foot bones. Normal healing of a broken leg or ankle usually requires one to four years, and a return to pre-fracture or normal shape—without deformity—can occur in children and young adolescents, but would not be expected in adults.²⁷

Similarly, X-rays of the mummy's hands revealed no trauma. The right thumb defect, described in Dr. Scott's report as originating from an “injury of a crushing nature” is questionable; the radiologist found it more likely from changes of tuberculosis or gouty arthritis. They found no evidence of recent or healed fracture.²⁸

This was actually the second review of the X-rays by radiologist. After acquiring the X-rays of the mummy, Otto Eisenschiml submitted the films in Chicago to Dr. Otto Schmidt and Dr. Lewis L. McArthur, both considered experts in reading X-ray films. Neither physician would confirm evidence of any fractures, but Mr. Eisenschiml was not discouraged. In 1940, he authored

a follow up book with additional detail, titled *In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death*.²⁹ He included an entire chapter questioning whether Booth had actually escaped from Garrett's farm, and almost a third of it dealt with David E. George.

Otto Eisenschiml was no slouch on a quest for detail. A trained chemist, he was meticulous in his research. He believed that hidden truths could be discovered, because finding answers to questions of history was "not unlike the solving of chemical problems"³⁰ and that "facts, facts, and more facts are needed and should be unearthed."³¹ While investigating the scars and skin markings Booth was known to have, Mr. Eisenschiml read books, scoured journals, and worked with eight different dermatologists to understand how the skin reacts under various conditions. His footnote in his book regarding these studies is a minor thesis on tattooing and the dermal effects.³² He finally acknowledged that, in his era of the 1930s, a tattoo could never be completely removed except by extensive surgery and thus was considered permanent. This should have been yet another serious challenge to any claim to the identity of the mummy—no tattoos, no neck scar, and no leg fracture meant no Booth.

One common thing about critics of Otto Eisenschiml has always been the way he interpreted facts. Their concern involves his reasoning and explanation of events, and how the facts were presented in a largely insinuating manner, allowing only the answers he provided.^{33,34} In the chapter dealing with Booth's possible escape, however, he hesitates—recounting the saga of David E. George and his transformation into a mummy, then vast vacillating between evidence pro and con whether the corpse was actually John Wilkes Booth. Eisenschiml noted that the mummy has some characteristics of Booth (shape of the head, position of the ears, long hands) but admitted there was no evidence of a broken leg, tattoo, or scar on the neck. He ended the chapter stating that despite the fact that the body of the man identified as Booth on board the *Montauk* had these three key features—and the mummy does not—there is only a "strong (but) not necessarily unassailable presumption" that Federal troops had actually caught the assassin of Lincoln.³⁵ Meaning: Maybe it's Booth, maybe it isn't.

His logic is still unclear. Mr. Eisenschiml compared on anatomic details which were subjective (approximate size and shapes) with specific details (fractured leg, scar, and unique tattoo) which are not. He gave them equal weight in his equation, despite the fact that the last three clues would be far more critical in any forensic identification. His conclusion is even more perplexing when considering that his strongest argument for definitive proof would have required an exhumation at Green Mount Cemetery, to compare any remnants of the boot buried with the assassin, along with one left at the house of Dr. Mudd.³⁶

The previous affidavit of Leonarde Keeler and C. W. Muehlberger, from the Scientific Crime Lab, again is important. It was actually collected by Otto Eisenschiml during his research, yet in his book he selectively printed only parts of the document:

*At the time of the examination, the back of the neck of the shriveled and dry brown body showed no gross evidence of a scar when examined by the naked eye in ordinary artificial light. When examined in ultraviolet light there was no difference in fluorescence of any part of the back of the neck....*³⁷

Eisenschiml chose not to publish the sentences incriminating Dr. Scott, when the physician attempted to coax Mr. Keeler into a lie. Although Orlando Scott didn't similarly approach Keeler's partner, in a letter (sent later to Otto Eisenschiml), C. W. Muehlberger made it clear that the mummy was not Booth.³⁸ Later, by the 1950s, Otto Eisenschiml had finally resolved his doubts and stopped challenging what appeared obvious. He admitted to at least one acquaintance that the

mummy was not Booth. By that point, however, he was also frustrated as rumors circulated that he was interested in buying the mummy.³⁹

Dr. Orlando Scott never wavered in his beliefs and went to his grave convinced that he had identified the true assassin of President Lincoln. His career continued to focus on medico-legal work, and his professional stationery, ironically, advertised the office as the “National Detection of Deception Laboratories, Inc.” Frustrated by Leonarde Keeler’s lack of cooperation in 1931, Scott devised his own lie detector system to compete. Unfortunately, all it gained him was more notoriety—the invention was a brain wave lie detector, and its value was immediately challenged by scientists.⁴⁰ The legal community also snickered when reading Dr. Scott’s promotional letter, which boasted: “We do not cater to the major crime that hits the front page—that is NOT scientific lie detection in my opinion.”^{41, 42}

At last report, the body of David E. George, preserved and kept above ground for over a century, is hidden by a private collector somewhere in eastern United States. And John Wilkes Booth, by most accounts, lies buried with his family in Baltimore MD.

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¹ *The Enid Daily Wave*. June 4, 1903.

² W. P. Penniman. “The Story of a Mummy with a History.” *The Seaside*. July 15, 1909: pp. 10-11.

³ Edward C. Johnson, Gail R. Johnson, and Melissa J. Williams. “The Origin and History of Embalming.” *Embalming: History, Theory, and Practice*. Ed. Robert G. Meyer. New York: Appleton & Lange, 1990.

⁴ Melissa Johnson Williams and John L. Konefes. “Environmental Concerns of Older Burial Sites.” *American Cemetery*. February 1992: pp. 22-24. Those living next to older cemeteries and relying on private wells for water—as opposed to municipal utilities—should consider having the water tested for arsenic. The authors speculate that early morticians often use large quantities of arsenic, and theoretically an average town cemetery from that era could have over one ton of it in the ground.

⁵ Orlando F. Scott. “Blaming Giddy Glands for Today’s Gay Life Tragedies.” Newspaper supplement. King Features Syndicate, 1936.

⁶ Typed copy, Otto Eisenschiml Papers. University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.

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⁸ Arthur F. Loux. “The Accident-Prone John Wilkes Booth.” *Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1983: pp. 263- 268.

⁹ *Chicago Sun and Springfield Journal*. (IL). December 18, 1931.

¹⁰ Orlando Scott. Letter to Leslie Traylor. May 6, 1945. Photocopy in the author’s collection.

¹¹ Edward L. Miloslavich and Robert Earle. “Did John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln’s Assassin, Live 38 Years to Flout the Law?” *Startling Detective Adventures*. April 1933: pp. 40-58.

¹² *Chicago Daily News*, December 18, 1931.

¹³ Nate Orlowek. “Why We Believe Booth Died in 1903.” *The Surratt Courier*, January 1992: pp. 3-5.

¹⁴ F. L. Black. “David E. George as J. Wilkes Booth.” *The Dearborn Independent*. April 25, 1925: p. 14.

¹⁵ Richard J. Gutman and Kellie O. Gutman. *John Wilkes Booth Himself*. Dover, MA, Hired Hand Press. 1979

¹⁶ Asia Booth Clarke. *The Unlocked Book. A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth by His Sister Asia Booth Clarke*. Ed. Eleanor Farjeon. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1938.

¹⁷ Finis L. Bates. Letter to E. G. Liebod. April 26, 1921. Typed copy. Frederick L. Black Archives, Oakland University, Rochester Hills, MI.

¹⁸ Leonarde Keeler and C. W. Muehlberger. Signed statement. July 18, 1936. Otto Eisenschiml Papers, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.

¹⁹ Nancy Deneen. “Ken Alder’s Clues to the History of the Polygraph.” *Cross Currents*. Spring 2002: pp. 24-28. Northwestern University Weinberg College of Arts and Science, Evanston, IL.

²⁰ Readers of the Finis Bates book and the Orlando Scott controversy still contact Northwestern University two to three times a year, inquiring about the autopsy and the mummy. Administrators voiced frustration that upon advising

callers there are no secret files or other information, they are immediately accused of being part “of the conspiracy.” Personal conversation, January 15, 2007, with Patrick Quinn, Northwestern University archivist.

²¹ Leslie B. Arey. “An Alleged Irregularity.” *Northwestern University Medical School, 1859-1979*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1979. pp. 313-314.

²² In a remarkable series of letters dated 1930-1936, between Leon Green, Dean of the Northwestern University Law School, and Dr. Orlando Scott, regarding the liberties taken by Scott when promoting himself to the public became a volatile debate. First the law school dean tried to ignore Dr. Scott’s self-promotion, then gently suggested the misrepresentation should stop, and finally the suggestion became repeated demands. Dr. Scott was indignant, believing his free lecture allowed the privilege of advertising his connection. He finally stated (February 10, 1936) that matter should be resolved by “the trustees of Northwestern University” and not by “one of its subordinate instructors.” All letters are in the Leon Green papers 1929-1947, Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL.

²³ Michael W. Kauffman. “Booth’s Escape Route: Lincoln’s Assassin on the Run.” *Blue & Gray*. June 1990: p. 15.

²⁴ Michael W Kauffman. *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*. New York: Random House, 2004.

²⁵ Otto Eisenschiml. *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* Boston: Little Brown, 1937.

²⁶ The review was directed by Dr. Georges Y. El-Khoury, Department of Radiology, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Iowa City, IA.

²⁷ Lee F. Rogers. *Radiology of Skeletal Trauma*. New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1992: p. 200.

²⁸ All of the X-rays collected by Otto Eisenschiml show heavy opaque deposits in the skin. The skull film reveals a dehydrated, shrunken brain, similarly opaque. Although the formula for the embalming fluid Argon is unknown (the company ceased operations years ago), these X-ray findings are highly suggestive of a metallic deposit—such as arsenic, lead, or zinc. Whoever examines the Enid mummy should handle it carefully. When the mummy was examined in 1931, physicians attempting to open a back flap found the dissection difficult. They resorted to a saw, unknowingly exposing themselves to a toxic cloud of dust.

²⁹ Otto Eisenschiml. *In the Shadow of Lincoln’s Death*. New York: Winfred Funk, 1940: p. 79.

³⁰ Otto Eisenschiml. *Without Fame, the Romance of a Profession*. Chicago: Alliance Book, 1942: p. 345.

³¹ Otto Eisenschiml. *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* p. 438.

³² Otto Eisenschiml. *In the Shadow of Lincoln’s Death*. pp. 381-382.

³³ Thomas R. Turner. *Beware the People Weeping*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U. Press, 1982: pp. 2-4.

³⁴ William Hanchett. “The Eisenschiml Thesis.” *Civil War History*. 25(September 1979). pp. 197-217.

³⁵ Otto Eisenschiml. *In the Shadow of Lincoln’s Death*. p. 87.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 89

³⁸ C.W. Muehlberger. Letter to Otto Eisenschiml. July 18, 1936. Otto Eisenschiml Papers. University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.

³⁹ Otto Eisenschiml. Letter to Dr. Richard D. Mudd. March 4, 1954. Dr. Richard D. Mudd Papers. Georgetown University, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰ *Chicago Tribune*. March 23, 1950.

⁴¹ Charles M. Wilson. Letter to Leon Green. March 1, 1939. Leon Green Papers 1929-1947. Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL.

⁴² Orlando F. Scott. Letter to Central Scientific Company. January 20, 1939. Leon Green Papers 1929-1947. Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL.

Treasures Found When I Wasn’t Looking for Them

Editor’s Note: Isn’t it amazing what you find when you’re not looking for it. For example, did you know that Abraham Lincoln’s and Dr. Samuel Mudd’s families are related? According to a genealogical chart I found in the January 2008 *Courier*, Abe’s Uncle Mordecai Lincoln married Mary Mudd. Her uncle was Samuel Mudd’s great grandfather. I have a feeling the relationship is more of the distant cousin variety between the two men. I’ll try to investigate it more thoroughly

for a future issue. In the meantime, the following two articles seemed appropriate considering the main topic of this issue.

Did You Bid on It?

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, January 2008

If you are a devotee of eBay, perhaps you saw the recent opportunity to bid on the original bill that was submitted for the 1869 burial of John Wilkes Booth in Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland. Society member, Richard Sloan of New York, alerted us to this item. The closing date for the auction was December 1, 2007. We have not heard the final bid, but the starting price was \$6,250, and the item was estimated to bring between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

After being shot through the neck by Sergeant Boston Corbett on April 26, 1865, Booth was taken to the porch of Richard Garrett's house near Port Royal, Virginia, where he died in the early morning hours. The body was then sewn up into a blanket and transported to Belle Plaine, where it was hoisted onto the deck of the steamer, *John S. Ide*, for its trip up the Potomac River to Alexandria, Virginia. It was then transferred by tugboat to the Washington Navy Yard where it was placed aboard the monitor *Montauk*. The body was identified by a multitude of witnesses, and an autopsy was performed on board the monitor. Secretary of War Stanton then ordered the body to be buried in the Old Penitentiary on the grounds of the Washington Arsenal. It was taken there by boat and carried to a cell in the prison where a grave was dug and the corpse wrapped in an army blanket and lowered into the hole and covered.

In 1867, the body was exhumed and reburied in a pine box in a locked storeroom in a warehouse at the prison. The corpse was again positively identified when Booth's remains were exhumed again in 1869. The body was taken to Harvey and Marr's Funeral Parlor in Washington prior to being released to the Booth family. The corpse was then taken to Baltimore for burial preparations by J. H. Weaver. It was once again positively identified by many people, including John T. Ford, Harry Clay Ford, and members of the Booth family. The body was buried in the family plot in Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore on Sunday, June 26, 1869. Booth's individual grave remained unmarked at the request of the Booth family.

The item up for auction is the original bill for the third and final burial of John Wilkes Booth, given to the Booth family, Baltimore (Maryland).

Feby 18th 1869

“Mr. J. H. Weaver for J. W. Booth to Green Mount Cemetery,
for digging 1 Grave in Lot No. 9-10 area *Dogwood*,
for 250 Bricks for same at \$2 ½ per hundred,
for 7 ½ feet Stone Slabs, to cover at .75 cents per foot,
for sodding Grave,
for depositing in *Vault*.

Total \$20.88.

Second bill June 26/29 additional \$5,”

Assassins and their Doubles

Reprinted from the *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 25, 1871

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, June 2009

We'll end this month's newsletter with the following item from the March 25, 1871, edition of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Its original title is "Assassins and Their Doubles," but we think it is best summed up as "**Oh, brother...!**"

Laurie Verge

"When Wilkes Booth was at large, it was a physical honor to be mistaken for him for he was admitted to be a handsome man. Rumors survive that sundry young men, esteeming themselves irresistible in their personal attractions, used to affect melodramatic and mysterious airs at railroad stations. They would appear anxious to buy a ticket without drawing the observation of the alert authorities. By pretending to avoid, they succeeded in alluring considerable attention. Many of them were 'arrested on suspicion.' That was not embarrassing. They were detained just long enough to demonstrate their own identity. But the *éclat* of having been mistaken for a good-looking man, while it exhibited great lack of penetration in the authorities, stood the coxcomb in good service for not a little while. And their hearts would be rejoiced to hear bread and butter misses *simper* now and then in society. 'Did you ever notice the striking resemblance Mr. Prettyman bears to Wilkes Booth?' It is currently reported that these arrests of innocent and silly snipes as possible Wilkes Booths has enabled some of them, by advantage which waits on comeliness, to marry fortunes."

PS: Don't you just love Victorian flair for words?

[Editor's Note: Unfortunately, I couldn't find the original newspaper article to see if there was more information provided. In the meantime, see the July/August 2022 issue of *The Surratt Courier* on our website for several examples of "John Wilkes Booth" weddings that took place after the Garrett barn burned down in April of 1865.]

IN MEMORIAM

The Surratt Society has lost several longtime friends and would like to acknowledge their passing.

FREDERICK HATCH, a noted student of Lincoln's assassination, passed away on May 7, 2024, of a heart condition. He was seventy-nine years old. Mr. Hatch wrote three books about the assassination: *Protecting President Lincoln*, *The Lincoln Assassination Conspiracy Trial and Its Legacy*, and *John Surratt – Rebel, Lincoln Conspirator, Fugitive*. He also wrote a novel about the case, *For Honor or Dishonor*. Beginning in 1987, he started publishing a scholarly newsletter, *The Journal of the Lincoln Assassination*, which had a run of about thirty-six years, until ill health intervened. (The James O. Hall Research Center has a fairly complete run of his newsletter.)

The subjects of Lincoln and his assassination intrigued him to such an extent that he moved east from Texas, with his understanding wife, so that he could more easily conduct research. He loved attending the Surratt Society's annual conference and delivered a paper at one of them. He

also contributed to the society's *Surratt Courier* newsletter. Fred was a life member of the Surratt Society and the Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Society. During his last few years, he enjoyed serving as a docent at the Dr. Mudd House Museum.

Having served in the Vietnam War as a medic and receiving a Purple Heart for being wounded in action, Mr. Hatch was buried in the Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery in Cheltenham, Maryland. His wife, a brother, and a sister-in-law survive him.

FRANK HEBBLETHWAITE died on February 27, 2025, at the age of seventy-five. In the late 1980s, he worked for the National Park Service as the site curator at Ford's Theatre and the House Where Lincoln Died. For more than a decade, he was responsible for the care and interpretation of the assassination artifacts. He loved his work there. He was short in stature, but a giant in answering the questions posed by budding students and researchers. Frank became good friends with many of the country's leading assassination scholars and attended many of the Surratt Society's annual conferences.

Frank's last assignment was at the Park Service's Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site in Elverson, Pennsylvania. He died of Parkinson's disease and dementia, and his remains were cremated. He is survived by his devoted wife and two brothers.

Our thanks to Richard Sloan for the above obituaries.

JAMES SWANSON, author of *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*, one of the best-selling books about President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, died in Chicago, his hometown, on April 21, 2025, from brain cancer. He was 66.

Swanson earned an undergraduate degree in history from the University of Chicago and a law degree from UCLA. He had a varied career. In addition to writing more than a half-dozen books, he was a top-flight lawyer who served in the U.S. Justice Department and as a clerk for a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. He also worked at the U.S. International Trade Commission and was a policy analyst and writer and editor for the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, which announced his passing.

He was a collector of Lincoln memorabilia, which perhaps came natural to a man who was born on February 12, 1959, 150 years to the day of Lincoln's birth. His death came exactly 160 years after the day that the train carrying Lincoln's body left Washington, D.C., for Illinois.

Swanson's *Manhunt* was published in 2006 and has been a best-seller in hardback and paperback. In addition to *Manhunt*, he wrote another book about the closing days of the Civil War, *Bloody Crimes: The Chase for Jefferson Davis and the Death Pageant for Lincoln's Corpse*. He also wrote about the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the 1968 killing of Dr. Martin King Jr. His final book was *The Deerfield Massacre: A Surprise Attack and the Fight for Survival in Early America*. It dealt with a bloody battle in 1704 between native Americans and colonists in Massachusetts. He was on the board of the Abraham Lincoln Institute, the Abraham Lincoln Association, and Ford's Theater advisory council. He also served on the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, which helped observe the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth in 1809.

The contents of this obituary was taken from information originally posted on the Cato Institute's and the Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia's websites.

HELP THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CHARLES COUNTY RESTORE HISTORIC RICH HILL



- Built in 1729, the second oldest house in Charles County.
- Birthplace of Dr. Gustavus Richard Brown, one of George Washington's physicians; and Margaret Brown, who married Thomas Stone, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.
- The property where John Wilkes Booth and David Herold hid for four days following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Historic Rich Hill is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. It is a member of the Southern Maryland Equity in History Coalition and Museums4All.

The Historical Society of Charles County, Inc., a 501c3 non-profit, is seeking donations to help finish the interior of historic Rich Hill.
All donations are tax-deductible.

Please help us reach our goal to have this site open to the public this year.

Please mail your donation to: The Historical Society of Charles County
PO Box 2806 ~ La Plata, Maryland 20646

Become a part of our rich History!

www.richhillfriends.org