

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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President's Message

Last year the following question was sent to the Surratt Society and forwarded to me for an answer. I thought I would share my reply with you.

“Did John Wilkes Booth break his leg from jumping onto the stage or when his horse fell on him?”

The short answer is “yes.” To the best of my knowledge, the Surratt Society has never taken a position on the question of how and when John Wilkes Booth broke his leg, but has tried to present the facts (as best we know them) so that people may draw their own conclusion. In the course of drawing a conclusion, there are two primary considerations: what is the source of the information; and is the source credible?

What do we know about John Wilkes Booth's broken leg?

We know that he fractured his fibula, the smaller of the two bones in his lower left leg. Perhaps the closest source was Booth himself, who wrote in his “diary”: “I struck boldly and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, was stopped, but pushed on. A colonel was at his side. I shouted Sic Semper before I fired. In jumping, I broke my leg. I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night with the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump.” Those sentences are the source of the belief that Booth broke his leg as a result of the leap from the President's box at Ford's Theatre.

However, Booth's “diary” was actually an 1864 day book from which Booth routinely removed pages when he needed a piece of paper. Booth was appalled by the newspaper accounts that he had acted cowardly in firing the fatal bullet from behind Lincoln. Booth greatly exaggerated the events at Ford's Theatre and his escape that evening. For example, Booth was not “stopped,” but merely presented his card to Charles Forbes, Lincoln's valet, outside of the box (which, routinely, was not “guarded” as there was no Secret Service details in those days). Lincoln enjoyed the theater and meeting actors. Booth's name alone opened the door to the box. A “colonel” was not at Lincoln's side. Lincoln's guest that night was Major Henry Rathbone, who was not in uniform, further proof that Booth gleaned that information from the newspapers. There

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is no other source that says that Booth “shouted Sic Semper” before he shot Lincoln. Most witnesses report that he shouted that as he held the bloody knife above his head at center stage (ever the actor) after attacking Major Rathbone. What Booth described of his injury is a compound fracture. What Dr. Mudd noted was a simple fracture. Booth says that he rode sixty miles that night; it was thirty miles from Washington, D.C. to Dr. Mudd's. In short, Booth was not attempting to accurately record history. He was attempting to inflate his role in assassinating Lincoln. So, Booth's “diary” is the source of the theory that Booth broke his leg at Ford's, but its credibility is questionable. His claim that he broke the bone in his escape from the theater sounded much better than his horse fell (as Booth considered himself an excellent rider).

In 1991, Timothy S. Good, a National Park Service Ranger, collected and published a book entitled *We Saw Lincoln Shot - One Hundred Eye Witness Accounts*. Not one of the accounts (most in the form of letters) that were recorded in the days immediately after the assassination describe Booth as limping across the stage at Ford's Theatre. Booth did land awkwardly onto the stage, but bounced right up and his movements are described as “lightning quick.” The accounts of Booth limping across the stage were not recorded until later, after it was widely known that he had a broken bone in his leg. When Booth ran out the back door, he mounted his horse. Horses are always mounted and dismounted from their left, meaning the rider's left foot is put into the stirrup, and is used to throw the rider's entire weight up and over the horse. The process is the same in dismounting. Booth had no noted difficulty in mounting his horse at Ford's. According to the statement of the boy holding Booth's horse (Joseph “Peanuts” Burrows), Booth kicked at him with his right leg to get the reins, a rather remarkable feat for someone balancing on an injured left leg on horseback, even if Booth's adrenaline was pumping.

The next person to see Booth, about 20 minutes after he escaped from Ford's, was Silas T. Cobb, the Sergeant of the Guard at the Navy Yard Bridge, which crossed the Eastern Branch of the Potomac (today known as the Anacostia River). Cobb described Booth and his horse in remarkable detail, including the fact that Booth was not wearing gloves (which was unusual for riders going any distance on a horse). Cobb made no mention of Booth or the horse being in any distress or injured. Cobb told Booth that he would be allowed to cross the Bridge, but he would not be allowed back into Washington until daylight. Booth assured Cobb that would not be a problem.

Booth and his accomplice, David Herold, rendezvoused at Soper's Hill in Maryland, about ten miles south of the Bridge. At some point thereafter, Booth and Herold exchanged horses. To dismount from one horse and mount another would be very difficult for a man with an injured left leg to do. The pair proceeded to Surratt's Tavern to retrieve weapons that had been hidden there. When Mrs. Surratt's tenant, John M. Lloyd, attempted to give Booth a rifle, Booth declined it saying that he had injured his leg and could not ride and carry a carbine.

From there, Booth and Herold rode another 15 miles south, to the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd. Herold told Dr. Mudd that his “friend's” horse had fallen and injured his leg. From Dr. Mudd's statements, we have perhaps the best description of Booth's injury: “On examination, I found there was a straight fracture of the [fibula] about two inches above the ankle. My examination was quite short and I did not find the adjoining bone fractured in any way. I do not regard it a peculiarly painful or dangerous wound; there was nothing resembling a compound fracture.” In addition, Dr. Mudd stated that when Booth arrived, “He seemed to be very much injured in the back and, complained very much of it.” What Dr. Mudd describes were common injuries to individuals whose horses fell over a root, rut, or stone at night, trapping the rider's foot in the stirrup.

There is no x-ray, but if Booth broke his leg from his leap to the stage, it seems likely to have produced a more jagged compression fracture upon landing, and not a “straight fracture.”

On their arrival at Dr. Mudd's, their horses were given over to the care of Thomas Davis, a laborer at the farm. Davis was questioned on April 29, 1865, and told investigators that the “roan” (the horse described by Sgt. Cobb as being ridden by Booth across the Navy Yard Bridge) had “a mark about the saddle where he had been hurt; his shoulder was swelled right smart; mark was behind the saddle, an old sore; the swelling of the shoulder was fresh.... [S]he was lame in her front left leg[;] she was very lame...].”

One must ask the question, if not for Booth's injury, would the name and life of Samuel A. Mudd have been lost to history?

So, that's what we know, and I invite you to draw your own conclusion.

I hope that is helpful.

Bill Binzel

President, Surratt Society

John Wilkes Booth Escape Route Tours. For many years, the Surratt Society conducted all-day tours of the John Wilkes Booth Escape Route from Washington, D.C., to Caroline County, Virginia, and one of our most popular tour narrators was Dave Taylor. COVID and other factors curtailed those tours by the Surratt Society. On his own initiative, Dave is undertaking an effort to reestablish the Booth Escape Route Tours in 2026. For more information and dates, visit: <https://LincolnAssassinationTours.com>.

Joseph B. Stewart **The Kentucky Giant Who Chased Booth and Caught Scandal**

By Joseph A. Barry

The conventional account of the Lincoln assassination holds that after John Wilkes Booth descended to the stage, the audience remained dumbfounded and frozen in their chairs. This characterization is largely true, but there is a remarkable exception in Joseph B. Stewart, the prominent Washington, D.C., lawyer who sprang from his front row seat and pursued Booth out Ford's Theatre. Stewart's retelling is uniquely detailed—and one of the few from an active participant rather than a passive observer. Yet, his bold claims have invited considerable skepticism which—owing to the sparse reporting on him—call for further analysis. Was there something in Stewart's character that compelled him to act? Although we cannot answer every question from that fateful night, we can shed some light on Stewart's veracity.

Joseph B. Stewart was born on January 31, 1822, in present-day Trimble County, Kentucky. His father, William, fought in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Stewart's brother, William Junior, served as a Brigade Surgeon in the Civil War with the U.S. Volunteer Corps. Joseph, however, never served in the military—despite modern references to him as an Army major. He was not in the Mexican-American War, and he sought a substitute when he was drafted in the Civil War.¹

Stewart attended the Transylvania Law School in Lexington, Kentucky, which was a leading college of the day. He practiced under Henry Clay and established a presence in Washington, D.C., where he was admitted as a counsellor to the U.S. Supreme Court in late 1851. Earlier that year, Stewart married Harriet Hughes, a Southern belle who died from tuberculosis less than two years later. On August 6, 1855, Stewart stumbled into the Bloody Monday riots in Louisville and saved an Irish immigrant from certain death by the violent mob. Up to one hundred people died that day at the hands of armed Know Nothing nativists. By 1857, having gained wealth by successfully litigating two substantial lawsuits, Stewart moved to Washington, D.C., in search of even bigger cases.²

Stewart quickly made his mark in the Nation's Capital. He was an enormous man at six feet five inches, weighing over 260 pounds, with a booming voice to match his frame. He was one of several lawyers involved in a claim by Benjamin Perkins, an industrious sea captain who prepared two contracts to supply Russia with gunpowder and rifles during the Crimean War. Perkins bore the cost of producing the munitions, but the Russians reneged. Stewart assumed the leading role for the claim, but it went dormant during the Civil War.³

In September 1861, Stewart married Octavia Ridgely, daughter of Lieutenant Henderson Ridgely who fell in the Mexican-American War. Octavia herself shared the limelight by testifying in the sensational 1859 trial of Representative Daniel Sickles, who murdered the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, Phillip Barton Key (the son of Francis Scott Key), after discovering he was having an affair with his wife.⁴

Throughout the Civil War, Joseph B. Stewart was a leading lawyer in Washington, D.C., living in a K Street mansion and earning the moniker "Big Boss of the Lobby." He had ready access to Congress, cabinet members, and business tycoons. Notably, Stewart authored the key provision in the Pacific Railway Act of 1864. This facilitated private funding for the transcontinental railroad, as government bonds had failed to attract sufficient capital for construction. He also served as the Secretary of the Washington, Alexandria, and Georgetown Railroad.⁵

On the evening of April 14, 1865, Stewart attended *Our American Cousin* with his sister-in-law and two other women. After hearing the shot and seeing Booth vault to the stage, Stewart claimed he immediately understood the situation and jumped out of his seat "at the same instant" Booth faced the audience. Stewart also said he recognized Booth as the assassin, having previously seen the famous actor at hotels throughout Washington, D.C., and having once met him.

As he gave chase, Stewart slipped from the orchestra rail, but quickly recovered and leaped to the stage. Upon reaching it, he saw Booth disappear "at the same instant around the left-hand stage-entrance." Stewart yelled "stop that man!" a few times, which went unheeded by the employees backstage. One of the theatergoers recalled that Stewart crossed the stage slower than Booth—likely because he paused briefly to look up into the president's box. One stagehand, Jacob Ritterspaugh, claimed to be the first to follow Booth out the door and testified seeing "a tall ... and pretty stout man" five-to-six yards behind him. Ritterspaugh heard someone (likely Stewart) yell "which way?" and responded, "this way." Stewart also remembered asking for direction as he ran, and hearing "he is getting on a horse."⁶

Stewart's approach to the back door was the most impactful part of the chase. He saw a person standing three feet from the door, and claimed it was Edman "Ned" Spangler, a carpenter and sceneshifter at Ford's Theatre. Although the story grew that Spangler slammed the door in Stewart's face, multiple employees placed him in his normal workstation well away from the

backdoor. Either way, Stewart was left free to exit the theater, and he lost additional time in reaching for the wrong side of the door.

Stewart's account of chasing Booth on his horse outside in Baptist Alley was even more dramatic. Stewart supposedly saw Booth imperfectly mounting the horse, causing a slight delay in his escape. He then described Booth guiding the horse into a leftward circle to avoid his grasp, and then a rightward circle, before accelerating beyond his reach and out of the alley. Joseph "Peanut John" Burroughs, the chore boy who held Booth's horse, did not mention seeing Stewart run outside. Stewart, however, recalled "a small person" passing directly under his right elbow. Two other witnesses in the tenement homes just twenty feet from the theater did not mention seeing or hearing Stewart. His description grew more colorful during the 1867 John Surratt trial, with the horse splashing mud in his face and brushing against his arm. The likeliest conclusion is that Stewart lied about his chase outside. It is possible (although not probable) he saw Booth exit Baptist Alley, but not in close proximity.⁷

Understandably, Stewart's claims drew many detractors and alternative accounts. James P. Ferguson remembered a two-to-three-minute gap between Booth and Stewart exiting, despite acknowledging Stewart was the first audience member onstage. (That Stewart waited so long before exiting is unlikely.) In 1887, Illinois Representative William Springer asserted Stewart's testimony "has not a particle of foundation in fact"—while also claiming himself to be among the first onstage. Harry Hawk, the only actor present when Booth landed onstage, offered a questionable story nearly thirty years later that after fleeing from Booth, he returned to the stage and Stewart (apparently in full view of the audience) grabbed him and screamed, "Where is that man?" In 1898, former police superintendent Almarin C. Richards complained to Louis Weichmann, the star witness of the Conspiracy Trial, "I do not understand why he gave his imagination such full play in embellishing the part he performed that night." However, Richards provided his own improbable account that he ran down from the second level of the theater and "groped" through the backstage area with Stewart a couple minutes after the shooting in search of the assassin.⁸

Others have dismissed Stewart's account as inconsequential owing to Booth's escape and the rapid identification of him as the assassin. In truth, his testimony was highly consequential for Ned Spangler. But it is unfair to assume Stewart had malicious intent, as he admitted "I do not undertake to swear positively that [Spangler] was the person I saw." Stewart also acknowledged "there is nothing to exclude from my mind the possibility of the door having been closed by the person who went out—by Booth himself. ..." At a time that demanded vengeance for President Lincoln's killing, Thomas Ewing, Jr.'s able defense of Spangler likely saved him from the gallows.

In support of Stewart's version of events, twelve eyewitnesses corroborated his chase inside the theater, with most placing him onstage shortly after Booth disappeared behind the wings. John L. Debonay, who stood by the first entrance on the stage right, testified repeatedly under cross-examination that Stewart was only two-to-three seconds behind Booth in exiting the stage. James S. Knox, sitting in the second row, wrote that he was the next person to get onstage shortly after Stewart. Knox's roommate, Edmund D. Wray (who picked up Booth's hat from the stage) testified to being quickly behind Stewart and Knox. Notably, Wray, Knox, and Stewart were the first three people to report their observations at the police station that evening.⁹

Stewart was at his peak influence following the newspaper coverage of him chasing Booth. He claimed detectives trailed him for several days after the assassination, which he attributed to having closely followed behind Booth in the theater. He complained about this to Secretary of

War Edwin Stanton, who called the detectives off. Looking back on his pursuit of the assassin, Stewart remained circumspect: “It was very fortunate that I did not catch him. If Booth had been killed, then the plot for the assassination would never have been discovered.”¹⁰

Around 1867, Stewart moved to New York, while maintaining a regular presence in the capital. Before Congress appropriated the Treaty of Alaska, Stewart lobbied for legislation deducting the Perkins claim amount (\$285,000) from the payment. Congress did not consent, but Stewart continued to press the claim with vigor. Tensions spiked between the U.S. and Russia, and President Grant eventually demanded the removal of the Russian Minister to the U.S., Constantine Catacazy, in early 1872. The Russians never paid the claim.¹¹

The last two decades of Stewart’s life were a downward arc replete with legal drama, financial misfortune, and scandal. Stewart was known to be a profligate spender, and an active gambler in gold and stocks. Shortly after moving to New York, he was arrested for embezzling \$200,000 in a stock scheme with the Erie Railroad but was later released due to lack of evidence. Meanwhile, he failed to receive several hundred thousand dollars in bonds from numerous lawsuits, which prevented him from escaping his worsening debt. Stewart eventually lost his homes in New York and Washington, D.C.¹²

In 1872, Stewart was involved in a corruption scandal with Senator Samuel Pomeroy from Kansas. Pomeroy was accused of bribing a state lawmaker. He also tried to bribe Stewart’s former law partner, Edward Clark, to admit drafting an incriminating letter in Pomeroy’s name. Stewart assisted Pomeroy in attacking Clark’s character. Nevertheless, in early 1873 the Kansas state legislature voted Pomeroy out of office.¹³

At the same time, Stewart was summoned before Congress to answer allegations of congressional bribes from the Crédit Mobilier company, which was purportedly an independent contracting and construction company for the Union Pacific Railroad. Stewart refused to name names and instead delivered a sanctimonious one-hour lecture on lawyer-client privilege. He was held in contempt of Congress, confined to a congressional room for over a month, and was criticized nationwide as the “contumacious witness.”¹⁴

The 1870s would only worsen for Stewart. Three months after his release, Octavia died of cancer at just twenty-nine years old. Stewart fell further into debt and was arrested several times for various financial improprieties. He shifted his attention south, representing railroads in Florida and North Carolina without success, causing him great anguish. Stewart’s health rapidly deteriorated, and he died in New York on August 7, 1882 from kidney inflammation. He did not have any surviving children, and he left behind significant debt, lingering lawsuits, and enduring questions about his veracity.¹⁵

Stewart followed the major trends that shaped nineteenth century America, but lasting fame remained perpetually beyond his reach. Although his actions on April 14, 1865, are unworthy of the heroic nature in which they are occasionally portrayed, we are still left to ponder, as one newspaper surmised, “how nearly the tragedy came to having a different sequel.” However imperfect Joseph B. Stewart’s story, we can take a small measure of comfort that President Lincoln did not suffer the fatal blow with the audience completely sitting down.¹⁶

References:

¹ The references to Stewart as an Army major originate from an error in Osborn H. Oldroyd’s 1901 book, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, which was amplified by Ford’s Theatre historical handbooks beginning in 1949. That Stewart was referred to as “Colonel” throughout his

adult life added to the confusion. “The Late Col. Stewart,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky) Aug. 11, 1882, p. 6; William Harrison Kemper, *A Medical History of the State of Indiana* (Chicago, 1911), p. 203; Zachary F. Smith, *The Battle of New Orleans* (Louisville, 1904), p. 199; *Consolidated Lists of Civil War Draft Registration Records* (Provost Marshal General's Bureau; Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865), RG 110, Nm-65, Entry 172; *National Intelligencer*, March 27, 1865, p. 3.

² “The Late Col. Stewart,” “The Louisville Riots,” *Washington Democrat* (Salem, Indiana), Sept. 28, 1855, p. 2; Steven G. Koven and Frank Götzke, eds., *American Immigration Policy: Confronting the Nation's Challenges* (New York, 2010), p. 29; “Married,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Jan. 25, 1851, p. 3; “Died,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Aug. 19, 1852, p. 1; “The Reeside Claim,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, May 30, 1857, p. 2.

³ William W. Evarts, In the Matter of Benjamin W. Perkins Against the Russian Government (Washington, D.C., 1861), 2-4; *Baltimore Sun*, Aug. 24, 1860, p.1.

⁴ “Lieut. Henderson Ridgely,” *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 28, 1848, p. 1; “Fashionable Marriage,” *Philadelphia Press*, Sep. 3, 1861, p. 2; Chris DeRose, *Star Spangled Scandal: Sex, Murder, and the Trial that Changed America* (Washington, D.C, 2019), 308.

⁵ “The Power of the Lobby,” *Maury Klein, Union Pacific: 1862-1893* (3 vols, Minneapolis, 1987), I, 14-15, 28;

“Washington, Alexandria, and Georgetown R. R.,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 9, 1863, p. 1.

⁶ Joseph B. Stewart's testimony is found in William C. Edwards, *The Lincoln Assassination - The Trial Transcript* (E-Book, 2012), 421-31. Ritterspaugh's account is found in *ibid.*, 393-94, 726-31, 827-28. John L. Debonay claimed Booth moved faster than Stewart (*ibid.*, 805-7, 1167-70).

⁷ Joseph Burroughs's deposition is found in William C. Edwards and Edward Steers, eds., *The Lincoln Assassination: The Evidence*, (Champaign, Illinois, 2009), 141, 238, and his testimony is in Edwards, *Trial Transcript*, 465-66. The tenement dwellers' testimony are found in *ibid.*, 195-200; “Will the Real ‘Peanuts’ Burroughs Please Rise?!” *Surratt Courier* (June 1989), 1, 3-7.

⁸ James P. Ferguson's account is found in Edwards, *Trial Transcript*, 160-164, 782-83; Floyd R. Risvold, ed., *A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Conspiracy of 1865* (New York, 1977), 421; “Wilkes Booth Again,” *Critic* (Washington, D.C.), April 17, 1885, p. 1; “Harry Hawk Breaks His Long Silence,” *Evansville Journal* (Indiana), April 29, 1894, p. 5; Michael Burlingame, *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1996), 90.

⁹ The eyewitnesses to Stewart pursuing Booth inside the theater include: Jacob Ritterspaugh, John L. Debonay, William R. Smith (Edwards, *Trial Transcript*, 827), James S. Knox, Edmund D. Wray, Florence Riddle and her unnamed companion, Captain Henry Mason, Dr. George C. Maynard, Charles L. Willis, Albert Daggett, and an unnamed “old resident of Washington City.” “Lincoln's Assassination,” *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, May 25, 1887, p. 3; “Lincoln in the National Capital,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C., 27 (1925), 105; Albert Gallatin Riddle, *Recollections of War Times: Reminiscences of Men and Events in Washington 1860-1865* (New York, 1895), 331; *Sunday Standard*, April 13, 1919; Timothy S. Good, *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1995), 179; “No knife displayed Declares Maynard,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1915, p. 5; “Tragic Memories: Some Interesting Reminiscences of a Thrilling Night,” *Evening Star*, April 14, 1894, p. 17; “Police Blotters on Lincoln and Garfield Deaths Found,” *Evening Star*, April 6, 1928, p. 47.

¹⁰ “He Was One of Booth's Pursuers,” *Saint Louis Post Dispatch*, June 27, 1897, p. 14; Wilkes Booth's Pursuer,” *Herald and Torch Light* (Hagerstown, Maryland), Dec. 18, 1878, p. 1.

¹¹ Letter from Joseph B. Stewart to Thaddeus Stevens, June 16, 1867, Thaddeus Stevens Papers: General Correspondence, 1829-1869; 1867, Apr.-June, Library of Congress; “Catacazy’s Decapitation,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan. 10, 1872, p. 2; *New York Sun*, Dec. 25, 1872, p. 2.

¹² “The Power of the Lobby;” “More of the Erie ‘Pool’ Operators,” *Buffalo Commercial*, April 2, 1867, p. 2; Supreme Court of the United States, No. 501 (1875), Joseph B. Stewart, Appellant, v. Union Pacific Railroad Company, Eastern Division, 427, 683-84; Lee A. Farrow, “Intrigue, Scandal, and International Diplomacy: A Reexamination of the Perkins Claim” in *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations*, ed. William Benton Whisenhunt and Norman E. Saul (New York, 2017), 83.

¹³ “Grand Republican Rally,” *Topeka Weekly*, June 20, 1872, p. 3; Martha B. Caldwell, “Pomeroy’s ‘Ross Letter’: Genuine or Forgery?” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, 13, (Aug. 1944), 463-72.

¹⁴ “The Contumacious Witness in Prison,” *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 1, 1873, p. 1; Robert B. Mitchell, *Congress and the King of Frauds: Corruption and the Credit Mobilier Scandal at the Dawn of the Gilded Age* (Roseville, Minnesota, 2019).

¹⁵ *Baltimore Sun*, June 26, 1873, p. 2; “A Noted Man Arrested,” *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1878, p. 12; Jonathan Daniels, *Prince of Carpetbaggers* (Philadelphia, 1958), 284-86; “The Late Col. Stewart.”

¹⁶ “Wilkes Booth’s Pursuer.”

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Speaking of Typhus...

Understanding Old Medical Records and Death Certificates

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, February 2001

Looking up old medical records and death certificates can often leave one perplexed as to what some of the “diagnoses” really mean. Here is a medical translation lesson taken from an online genealogy link, courtesy of member Nancy Griffith.

Did great grandpa die of ague? That's malaria. The American plague? Yellow Fever. Apoplexy? Paralysis brought on by a stroke.

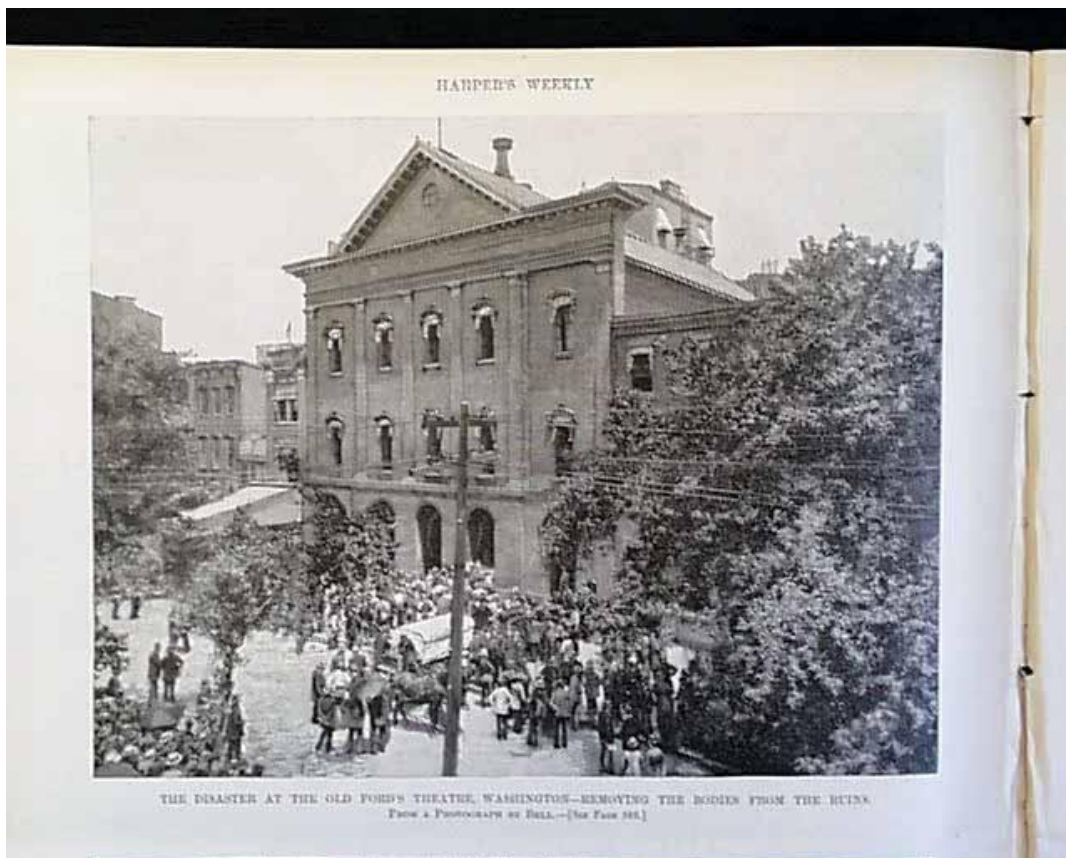
Bad blood? Syphilis. Biliousness? Jaundice associated with liver disease. Bladder in the throat? That diphtheria, and bloody flux refers to bloody stools. Brain fever means meningitis, and Bronze John is Yellow Fever (again). A boil, tumor, or swelling might be called Bule, and canine madness meant rabies. Consumption = tuberculosis; congestive fever = malaria; but with chills, it becomes malaria with diarrhea. Chilblain refers to the swelling of extremities due to exposure to the cold. Cramp colic is appendicitis. Dock fever takes us back to Yellow Fever (again). Falling sickness means epilepsy. Fatty liver is a term for cirrhosis of the liver. Flux of humor had to do with one circulation. French pox was syphilis, and great pox was syphilis too.

Heart sickness was a condition caused by the loss of salt from the body. Horrors was a term for delirium tremors. Green fever was a name for anemia. And a merchant might suffer from Grocer's itch—a skin disease caused by mites in sugar and flour. We'll close out this “fun” with King's evil, tuberculosis of the neck and lymph glands, and jail fever. Guess what? That's typhus.

The Strange and Eerie Events That Came in the Years after Lincoln's Assassination!

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Edwin Booth, John Wilkes Booth's older brother, died on **June 7, 1893**. Two days later, at the time Edwin's casket was being carried from the Little Church Around the Corner in New York City, there was tragedy at Ford's Theatre. A 40-foot section of the front of the building collapsed from the third floor killing 22 people and injuring many others.



Harper's Weekly photo of bodies being removed from Ford's after the collapse.

Boston Corbett, the soldier who shot John Wilkes Booth, was appointed assistant doorkeeper of the Kansas House of Representatives in Topeka. In the state house, on Tuesday, **February 15, 1887**, feeling paranoid after being threatened by several men in Topeka, Corbett pulled out his revolver, made some threats, and waved his weapon in the air. No one was hurt. Corbett was

arrested, declared insane, and sent to the Topeka Asylum for the Insane. On **May 26, 1888**, Corbett jumped on a horse that had been left at the entrance to the asylum's grounds and escaped. He went to Neodesha, Kansas, and stayed briefly with Richard Thatcher, a man he had met during his imprisonment at Andersonville during the Civil War. He said he was heading for Mexico. Although a few stories exist, there is no absolute proof that Boston Corbett was ever heard from again. He may have gone to Minnesota. His final demise, however, still remains a mystery.

The young couple (**Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris**) who attended *Our American Cousin* with the Lincolns got married on July 11, 1867. The couple had three children. Rathbone suffered from "dyspepsia" or indigestion and severe mood swings. He was probably taking an opiate that could be purchased over the counter in the 19th century. In 1882 the Rathbones moved to Germany. On **December 23, 1883**, Rathbone went berserk. He tried to kill the children, then shot and stabbed his wife to death, and finally stabbed himself. When the police arrived, Rathbone mumbled, "Who could have done this to my darling wife?" and went on about people "hiding behind the pictures on the wall." He spent the rest of his life in an asylum for the criminally insane in Hildesheim, Germany. (The children were sent to live with Clara's brother, William Harris and his family.) While in the asylum Rathbone maintained that the walls were hollow and contained a spray apparatus which blew dust and gas on him causing headaches and chest pain. He died on August 14th, 1911, at the age of 73. He was buried in Germany in the city cemetery at Hannover/Engelohde. [SOURCE: The research of Mr. James O. Hall and Mrs. Peggy Hlavacek in a July 1982 article titled "The Rathbone Connection" by Frank Rathbun in the *Surratt Society News*.] For years it was felt Rathbone's remains were destroyed in a World War II bombing raid. Then it was felt the bones had been dug up and disposed of by cemetery personnel. However, new research by Eva Elisabeth Lennartz of Kiel, Germany, has shown that the remains of Rathbone still lie buried in the cemetery.

In **May 1875** an insanity trial for **Mary Todd Lincoln** was held in Chicago. The jury found Mrs. Lincoln "insane and a fit person to be in a state hospital for the insane." Mary spent the next several months in an **asylum** in Batavia, Illinois.

William A. Petersen, the German tailor in whose house the president died, accidentally took too much laudanum (a mixture of alcohol and opium derivatives) on **June 19, 1871**. He was found by Washington police on a park bench. The police took him to the station where they tried to pump his stomach. However, it was too late, and Petersen passed away. Petersen's wife, Anna, died exactly four months later. The Petersens were buried in Washington in Prospect Hill Cemetery.

On **November 7, 1876**, a gang of ghouls tried to **steal Abraham Lincoln's body** from the Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield. Their goal was to hold the body in exchange for the release from prison of a counterfeiter named Ben Boyd. The thieves had Lincoln's casket partly out of the sarcophagus when detectives, who had heard of the plot, rushed forward to stop the larceny in progress.

Robert Lincoln, the president's son, was in the White House when his father was shot. On **July 2, 1881**, Robert was with President James A. Garfield at Washington's Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station when the president was shot by assassin Charles J. Guiteau. In his own words, Robert reached the stricken Garfield within 15 seconds of the shooting. Finally, on **September 6, 1901**, when President William McKinley was shot by Leon F. Czolgosz at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, Robert was on a train just arriving in Buffalo.

In **February 1869** President Andrew Johnson released **John Wilkes Booth's remains** to the Booth family. On February 15th the pine coffin was opened and the body identified. Booth's head was found to be entirely detached from his body. The remains were sent to Baltimore, and there the detached head was passed around and looked upon by those present for the identification. Booth's third, fourth, and fifth cervical vertebrae, which were removed during his autopsy, are housed along with several mementos from Abraham Lincoln's autopsy (including the bullet that killed the president, the probe used to remove the bullet, fragments of the president's skull, hair from the president, and the blood-stained cuffs of the lab coat worn by Dr. Edward Curtis at the autopsy) at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Silver Spring, Md. Additional hair samples from Lincoln's autopsy are in the Lincoln Room Museum in the Wills House in Gettysburg and the Weldon Petz Abraham Lincoln Collection, at the Plymouth Historical Society & Museum which is located in Plymouth, Michigan. Another fragment from Booth's autopsy is in a bottle in the Mutter Medical Museum at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. In **October 1994** a petition was filed in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to exhume Booth's remains from **Green Mount Cemetery**. [See the May/June 2025 *The Surratt Courier*, p. 3, for more information.] The petitioners were people who identified themselves as Booth's relatives. The cemetery argued that its solemn duty was to protect the sanctity of those interred unless there was overwhelming evidence that the body buried there was not Booth's. Judge Joseph H.H. Kaplan ruled that the evidence for exhumation was insufficient. His 1996 decision was upheld by the Court of Special Appeals in Annapolis.

Not until the 1990s, historians didn't know what happened to **Lewis Powell's remains**. They were not claimed by his family and were buried in Washington's Holmead Cemetery in 1869. The cemetery was disbanded in the mid-1870's, and there is no record of what happened with Powell's body. However, his skull was discovered in 1992 in a collection of the Smithsonian Institution. The FBI confirmed the skull as Powell's. On **November 11, 1994**, Powell's skull was buried next to his mother's grave in Geneva, Florida. Lincoln assassination experts Betty Ownsbey and Michael Kauffman participated in the burial. Pastor Daryl Permenter of the First Baptist Church of Geneva performed the services. The Geneva Cemetery is a very quaint cemetery. The headstones of Lewis and his mother (who was born in 1811) are in a semi-shaded area.

Anna Surratt, Mary Surratt's daughter, had tried to see President Andrew Johnson to plea for clemency prior to her mother's hanging. Two men were instrumental in preventing her from seeing the President. One was former **Senator Preston King**. On November 13, 1865, King tied a bag of bullets around his neck and committed suicide by jumping off a ferryboat on the Hudson River. The other man who prevented the meeting with the President was **Senator James H. Lane**. On July 11, 1866, Senator Lane shot himself to death at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

During the weeks after the assassination, **Mary Todd Lincoln** received a great deal of comfort in the White House from **Dr. Anson G. Henry**, an old and trusted family friend. Dr. Henry accompanied Mrs. Lincoln back to Illinois when she left Washington in May of 1865. A few months later, on **July 30, 1865**, Dr. Henry drowned when the steamer *Brother Jonathan*, on which he was a passenger, sank off the coast of northern California.

In **January 1929** the one-time **Surratt boardinghouse** in Washington, D.C., was raided and padlocked by Federal authorities for housing large stocks of paraphernalia being used to violate the nation's prohibition laws. During the 1970's the house was raided on account of numbers racketeering. According to the February 1999, *The Surratt Courier*, since "becoming a nice Chinese restaurant in the 1980's, we have only heard good things...."

For 87 years it was thought no photographs of **Mr. Lincoln in an open coffin** existed. Then, in **1952**, 14-year-old **Ronald Rietveld** discovered one hidden away in the Illinois State Historical Library while researching the papers of Lincoln's personal secretaries. [Dr. Rietveld retired in 2009 as a professor emeritus at California State University in Fullerton.] The photograph had been taken by photographer Jeremiah Gurney, Jr., on **April 24, 1865**, as the body lay in state in City Hall in New York. Afterwards, it was immediately confiscated by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and was unknown until re-discovered by Rietveld.



Illinois State Historical Library Photograph Discovered by Ronald Rietveld

John Lloyd died in an unusual manner in **1892**. A great niece recalled: “He was in the construction business and died of an accident that occurred on one of his building projects. He wasn’t satisfied with some work that had been done and went up on a scaffold to inspect it. Near the other end of the scaffold flooring a load of bricks had just been deposited. As he reached the scaffold and stood on it, the boards gave way, and he fell to the ground. The bricks tumbled down upon him crushing his head, kidneys, and other parts of his body.” [Source: “That Man Lloyd” by Laurie Verge in the April 1988 *Surratt Courier*.]

NOTE: **President Theodore Roosevelt** wore a ring containing a lock of Abraham Lincoln's hair when he was inaugurated in 1905. The hair had been cut by Dr. Charles C. Taft, one of the attending physicians, the night of the assassination. The hair was purchased by John Hay on **February 9, 1905**, and was given to Roosevelt less than a month later. In his autobiography, Roosevelt wrote, “When I was inaugurated on March 4, 1905, I wore a ring he (John Hay) sent me the night before, containing the hair of Abraham Lincoln. This ring was on my finger when the Chief Justice administered to me the oath of allegiance to the United States.”