

# *The Surratt Courier*

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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## **2026 ANNUAL SURRATT SOCIETY CONFERENCE RESCHEDULED MEETING MINUTES**

On April 25, many participants were unable to connect via Zoom to the Surratt Society's meeting due to technical difficulties. Therefore, the Surratt Society decided to reschedule its annual meeting to the following Saturday, May 2, 2026.

At the rescheduled meeting, last year's minutes and treasurer's report were approved as read. Also, as per the Surratt Society's Bylaws, the meeting included the election of officers. As there were no nominations from the floor, the proposed slate of officers was approved en bloc by a show of hands.

The officers for the 2026-2027 term are:

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

Following the brief business meeting, there were two speakers:

- Michael Mazzeo spoke on the history and restoration of Rich Hill, via a guided tour. In 1865, it was the home of Samuel Cox and John Wilkes Booth's third stop in his attempt to escape. See the January/February 2026 issue of *The Surratt Courier* for more information on this subject.
- Joe Barry discussed the audience at Ford's Theatre on the night of April 14, 1865, and their recollections of Lincoln's assassination. For more information on this subject, see *The Surratt Courier's* September/October 2025 issue for his article on James Stewart, the March/April 2023 issue for 1865 eyewitness accounts, and this issue for eyewitness accounts recorded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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IN THIS ISSUE: This issue offers two more stops Booth made along his escape route, Bryantown Tavern and Cleydael. There is information on a small 1864 memorandum book, better known the Booth's Diary and the eyewitness accounts mentioned above.

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*This newsletter is the Surratt Society's bimonthly publication. The Surratt Society's website is [surrattmuseum.org](http://surrattmuseum.org). Contact us at [surratt.society@gmail.com](mailto:surratt.society@gmail.com) or by mail at: Surratt Society, 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791-3853.*

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

## Bryantown Tavern

The village of Bryan Town (as it was spelled until the late 1800s) dates to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and was one of Charles County's four earliest principal settlements. It is believed that the name came from the proprietor of an early inn which stood in this vicinity around 1750. The village was first formally recognized in county records in 1783, located at the intersection of two major county roads of that era. The site was originally part of a proprietary manorial grant of 3,333 acres called Boarman's Manor, awarded to Major William Boarman in 1676. One of Major Boarman's descendants owned and operated the first known store in this location (1768), and Boarman descendants still live in the vicinity.

The town's growth as a prosperous trade and mercantile center by the mid-1800s was closely intertwined with many of the most important individuals, families, and events that shaped the social, economic, and cultural history of the area. Few physically cohesive settlements ever developed in the region because of the rural agricultural system of Southern Maryland. However, this town was approved as a postal stop in 1820, and by 1840 was a four-mile area consisting of at least 17 structures, including seven mercantile establishments, a tavern, a hotel, and several professional offices. By 1860, records show six doctors, one constable, a hotel keeper, three blacksmiths, one wheel wright, a coach maker, two bootmakers, three merchants, four clerks, five mechanics, six school teachers, two millers, one magistrate, two lawyers, one carpenter, one Episcopal priest, and one Roman Catholic priest. During the height of its prosperity before the Civil War, Bryantown was rivaled in size by only one other county town, Port Tobacco, which was then the county seat.

Historic Bryantown Tavern (also known as Bryantown Hotel) was built ca. 1820. It was originally situated on 12 acres of land sold to Jesse Cooke for \$720 in 1819. It was quite possible that Cooke built the existing tavern and served as the first proprietor of what was most likely a combination of hostelry and private residence. Cooke also served as Bryantown's first postmaster and later as County Sheriff.

As you entered this historic tavern, you might have felt the ghost of some familiar Civil War figures. Thomas Harbin was postmaster here in the 1850s. During the war, he became a leading figure in the Confederate espionage system which flourished in Southern Maryland. It was to the tavern in the fall of 1864 that Dr. Samuel A. Mudd brought a dashing young actor by the name of John Wilkes Booth to meet Mr. Harbin. On April 15, 1865, Dr. Mudd came to the town from his nearby farm and learned of the assassination of President Lincoln—while playing “host” to the assassin and his accomplice, David Herold. Upon returning home, Dr. Mudd would send the two on a circuitous route which bypassed the Federal infestation in Bryantown.

During the manhunt that followed, Bryantown Tavern became the most important spot in Southern Maryland for directing the pursuit of Booth. A telegraph station was set up, and Colonel H.H. Wells commanded a military station where suspects were detained and questioned and where county residents “notorious for their hostility to the government” were required to take the unconditional oath of allegiance. Among those invited to enjoy Colonel Wells's “hospitality” were Dr. Mudd, Thomas Jones, Samuel Cox, and the Surratt Tavern's own John M. Lloyd.

In the decades following the Civil War, much of Southern Maryland experienced economic decline, although Bryantown's importance remained relatively stable until it was mercantile and service oriented. In the late 1800s, however, the advent of the railroad caused a shift in the population patterns and competition from new and more prosperous villages and towns, such as the new county seat of LaPlata. By 1914, there were still as many as 15 structures standing in

Bryantown. By 1950, only one store remained. By the 1970s, several of the older homes had been torn down, as had all the of the earlier stores and shops. Bryantown settled into a quiet residential area, which today belies its once busy and prosperous history.

While in the area, you may want to sneak a peek at The Brick House adjacent to the Tavern. Built about 1820-30, this Federal style dwelling combines Flemish and common bond brick work. Situated nearby on the crest of a hill is Evergreen, built in 1874 by Henry Alexander Turner. It is a fine example of Victorian Carpenter-Gothic architecture and is believed to have been built on or near the site of an earlier home owned by William N. Bean, who ran a nearby store until his death in 1868. That store was demolished around 1930. Bean also owned a blacksmith shop in the same vicinity near the crossroads.

Follow Oliver Shop Road south “out of town” instead of returning to Route 5, and you will pass the very impressive Smith House, located at the south end of the village, surrounded by shade trees and wide expanses of open fields. It was built ca. 1913 by Benjamin Marcellus Edelen, Jr., on property inherited by his wife, Mary Boarman. It is said to have been constructed on the site of an earlier Boarman home, which dated about 1800.

About half a mile further on you will come to Saint Mary's Catholic Church. In a school affiliated with the church, young Anna Surratt was educated by the Martin sisters. Obelisk markers to the left of the church's front doors mark their graves. Also to the left, near the drive, are the graves of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Mudd. Ironically, Dr. Mudd is buried within yards of where he was introduced to John Wilkes Booth in November of 1864. Buried behind the church is Dr. William Queen, to whom Booth was sent that faithful fall with Confederate letters of introduction, which enabled him to make important contacts for his original scheme to capture President Lincoln.

Now turn around and return to Route 5. To venture further would send you into the back roads to La Plata, and these might hold more ghosts than you care to meet. Who knows, some Federal troops might still be combing the countryside, and the name “Surratt” does not fare well in their company!

[Editor's Note: Compiled by Laurie Verge from Charles County papers outlining Bryantown National Register Historic District.]

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## **Two Pages from Booth's "Diary" Dr. Richard H. Stuart Meets John Wilkes Booth**

By James O. Hall  
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, August 1996

It seems that even the beginning researcher of the Lincoln assassination is aware of Booth's infamous “diary.” It is often referred to in hushed tones, as if something sinister and bizarre were attached to this little book. Actually, it was a small, 1864 memorandum book that Booth had bought in St Louis. Some years ago, a spurious claim was made that the “missing pages” of the diary had turned up in the hands of a dealer of Americana. Along with others, including then Vice President Walter Mondale, James O. Hall helped to arrange with the National Park Service at Ford's Theatre, which owns the “diary,” to turn the memorandum book over to the FBI, along with

various other samples known to have been written by Booth. Other claims had been made that the entries were forged by “Stanton’s people” as part of some vast conspiracy.

The FBI photographed everything in the book under various kinds of special light. They confirmed that the “diary” entries and the samples were in the same hand—that of John Wilkes Booth. More importantly, since all existing pages were photographed, it was possible to lay them out to determine exactly which sheets/pages had been cut or torn out by Mr. Booth (or others, if you believe in the grand conspiracy). Everything from January 1, 1864 through June 10 is gone—cut or torn out. After that, only 4 1/3 sheets are missing. Booth began his so-called diary entries on the page for June 11. It seems reasonable to assume that sheets previous to this were missing before he began writing. The last of his first entry, and a hand-drawn calendar, occupy all of the page beginning June 14. There is nothing on the page beginning June 17 and the page beginning June 20. He picked up writing again on the page dated June 23 (which he redated Friday 21) and continue to write on down to the bottom of the page beginning June 29. There it ends. The next page missing covers July 17-22, then part of the page for August 10-15 is missing, two consecutive pages covering August 22-September 2, and finally a page for November 8-13, 1864. We can account for two of the missing pages, however.

On April 23, Booth and David Herold sought food and shelter from Dr. Richard H. Stuart at his summer home, *Cleydael*, in King George County, Virginia. Dr. Stuart was one of the wealthiest men in America, descended from the Stuart line of English royalty and married into the distinguished Calvert line of Maryland. During the Civil War, he had been arrested on several occasions for his Southern sympathies. At the time of Booth’s arrival, his home was filled with guests.

Doctor Stuart was none too pleased to find the assassin at his door and had no intention of being arrested again. He gave them food, but refused them shelter, sending them instead to a nearby shanty of William Lucas, a free black. Booth and Herold “evicted” Lucas and his wife from the cabin and there they spent the night. The next morning, before they left for Port Conway in a wagon driven by Lucas’s son, Charley, Booth wrote two sarcastic little notes to Dr. Stuart. He used pages cut/torn from his memorandum book, the famous “diary.” This was Booth's way of showing contempt for the treatment received at the hands of Dr. Stuart.

The first note, however, apparently did not suit Booth. So, he shoved it into the flap of the little memorandum book and wrote another one. When the book was taken from Booth’s body on the morning of April 26, 1865, the note was with it. It was used as evidence at the trial of John H. Surratt in 1867 (see page 402 of trial transcript). It reads:

My Dea—(piece torn out) forgive me, but I have some little pride. I cannot blame you for want of hospitality. You know your own affairs. I was sick, tired, with a broken limb, and in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog away from my door in such a plight. However, you were kind enough to give us something to eat, for which I not only thank you; but on account of the rebuke and manner in which, too (piece torn out). It is not the substance, but the way in which kindness is extended, that makes one happy in the acceptance thereof. The sauce to meat is ceremony. Meeting were bare without it. Be kind enough to accept the enclosed \$5 (although hard to spare) for what I have rec’d.

Most respectfully, you're obedient servant.

If the note was in any way signed, Pierrepont did not say so nor read it into the record.

This note was in the possession of Thomas T. Eckert at the time of the impeachment investigation of President Johnson in 1867. He said he compared it to the diary and found it was “torn” from the book. And, he noted that part of this note was torn off. Luther Baker later said Mrs. Stuart tore part of the note off. However, he must have been confused, as it seems obvious that the first note, the one found in the flap of the diary, is the one quoted above. (See pages 676-677 of Impeachment Investigation.)

The second note, also on a page from the “diary,” is the one actually received by Dr. Stuart. Eckert also produced it at the Impeachment Investigation, page 677, and read it into the record. This note differs slightly in wording, and the amount was reduced from \$5 to \$2.50. It reads:

Dear Sir: Forgive me, but I have some little pride. I hate to blame you for your want of hospitality: you know your own affairs. I was sick and tired, with a broken leg, in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog from my door in such condition. However, you were kind enough to give me something to eat, for which I not only thank you, but on account of the reluctant manner in which it was bestowed, I feel bound to pay for it. It is not the substance, but the manner in which a kindness is extended, that makes one happy in the acceptance thereof. The sauce in meat is ceremony; meeting were bare without it. Be kind enough to accept the enclosed two dollars and a half (though hard to spare) for what we received.

Yours respectfully,

STRANGER

April 24, 1865

In his statement of May 6, 1865, Dr. Stuart confirmed that it was this note that William Lucas brought over to his house on April 24 and gave to Mrs. Stuart. He said it was signed STRANGER and that it had \$2.50 rolled up in it, and that it was a leaf from a memorandum book. This note helped to spare Dr. Stuart from prosecution. Booth’s sarcasm was ample proof that Stuart had not granted him ready assistance. A correspondent for the *New York Herald* was with Luther B. Baker when he went with troops back to King George County, Virginia, to round up various people who had helped Booth and Herold or who had information. The correspondent was present at Dr. Stuart’s when Baker got the note from the doctor. See W.N. Walton’s account on the first page of the *New York Herald*, May 4, 1865. Walton quoted the second note in full, the one signed STRANGER.

While both of these notes were probably on the table at the 1867 trial of John Surratt, Jr. and were both produced at the impeachment investigation, they now have disappeared.

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### *Cleydael*

By James O. Hall

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, June 1985

One of the stops on the Surratt Society’s Booth Escape Route Tour is *Cleydael*, the summer home of Dr. Richard H. Stuart in King George County, Virginia. On the evening of April 23, 1865, Dr. Stuart refused to take in John Wilkes Booth and David E. Herold. As a reason, he explained that the house, *Cleydael*, was crowded already. Anyway, one of the questions usually

asked on the tour is this: “*Cleydael?* Where did that name come from?” Nobody seems to know. Well, it is a mystery no longer.

On Saturday, March 9, 1985, I gave a talk before the Prince Georges County Historical Society. There were two framed engravings hanging on the wall at the Calvert Mansion which interested me: Baron Henri Stier and his wife. They came to the United States from Belgium in 1794 to escape the creeping effects of the French Revolution. Baron Stier bought Riversdale and started erecting a home there in 1801. His daughter, Rosalie, married George Calvert. When Baron Stier returned to Belgium in 1803, George Calvert finished the construction.

Baron Stier’s home near Antwerp was an imposing place, *Chateau de Cleydael*. His granddaughter, Julia Calvert, married Dr. Richard Stuart on May 6, 1833, and went to live at her husband’s home, *Cedar Grove*. A few years later, Dr. Stuart built a summer home back from the Potomac River. Undoubtedly Julia remembered her grandfather’s home, *Chateau de Cleydael*. With a touch of nostalgia, the summer home was called *Cleydael*.

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## **Eyewitness Accounts of the Lincoln Assassination**

President’s Message

*The Surratt Courier*, March and April 1989 issues

By Joan Chaconas

April 14<sup>th</sup> is the anniversary of the assassination of President Lincoln at Ford’s Theatre. I am devoting my March and April messages to eyewitness accounts of the awful goings on that fateful day in 1865. I found these interviews fascinating to read, and I know in some cases their reminiscences may be a little colored as many were written decades [NOTE: Some written as late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century] after Lincoln’s assassination; but imagine being in Ford’s Theatre that night! Would not that event be etched in your mind forever?

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Let’s start with the year 1892 and a down-and-out actress named Mary Murat. She was not at Ford’s that night, but her statement is interesting. At the time of her interview in *The Washington Post*, Mary was 57 years of age and living in one of Washington’s alley dwellings at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Maine Streets, SW. She was being supported by a dutiful son. In 1865, however, Mary was 27 years old and, supposedly, knew Booth intimately. Here is what was printed in the *Post*:

Mary Murat enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with J. Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln. She still speaks of him endearingly and calls him “Wilky.” She maintains with earnestness that Booth is still alive, and that the man who was shot by Boston Corbett was some other person.

“Wilky was in my room only a few minutes before he shot the President,” she said. “He came in hurriedly and was much excited. I asked him what the trouble was and he replied: ‘Oh nothing; I am not feeling well.’ He then asked me if I had any liquor in my room. I replied yes, and produced a bottle of cognac. I noticed that he was shaking like an aspen as he poured out a goblet, brimming full of the liquor. I said: ‘Why Wilky, you must be trying to get drunk.’ ‘Oh no,’ said he, ‘this won’t hurt me.’ We had a few moments conversation, when he arose and went

out. It was not long after he left that I heard people on the street shouting, ‘The President’s shot.’ I did not dream for an instant that he had committed the act, and didn’t learn the truth until the following morning.”

At the time of the assassination, Mary Murat had rooms on F Street, between Ninth and Tenth Streets, and they could be reached from the alley in the rear of the old Ford’s Theatre. Her apartments were then the resort of many leading actors and actresses. She was acquainted with the elder Booth, and referred to him as “Pap Booth.”

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Now we’ll hear from another actress, Mrs. Katherine M. Evans. On the evening of April 14, she was 20 years old and was appearing as “Sharpe” in the Tom Taylor play, *Our American Cousin*. This account appeared in the *New York Tribune* in April 1915:

“I was in the green room, says Mrs. Evans, chatting with “Maggie” Gourlay, the “Skillet” of the play, and waiting for my cue, when I heard a shot ring out. I was dressed in my stage gown—the crinoline of the period. Miss Gourlay was making a tidy. I had just said, using a stage expression, “Wake me up when Kirby dies.” Hawk had the scene to himself, and the other players were grouped at the entrances ready for their turns. I knew when I heard that the shot that it couldn’t be a part of the play. We dropped our work and ran to the first entrance, where there was a good deal of excitement.

“A moment before young Booth had leaped to the stage and had caught his spur, as you remember, on one of the flags that draped the Presidential box. In falling he had broken a small bone in his leg, a wound that during his fight must have given him excruciating torture. I heard somebody shout, “Stop that man!” I learned later that it was Major Lovejoy.

“Booth, being an actor, was familiar with the stage. He ran between Hawk and Billy Ferguson, struck at Withers, our orchestra leader, with his knife, and made his way out through the stage door into the alley where “Peanut Johnnie,” the boy who sold peanuts in the gallery was holding his horse.

“I looked and saw President Lincoln unconscious, his head dropping on his breast, his eyes closed, but with a smile still on his face. Mrs. Lincoln had risen from her seat beside him and was stroking his cheeks.

“She wore an old-fashioned black coal scuttle bonnet, the chin bow of which had become untied. She did not wear a wreath of red flowers and a low-necked gown, as many people believe.

“Miss Clara Harris, Senator Harris’ daughter, and her fiancé, the young Major Henry Rathbone, who had accompanied President and Mrs. Lincoln, stood beside them. Miss Harris was as pale as a sheet. The Major, breathing heavily from his struggle with the assassin, was trying frantically to open the door which Booth, as you remember, had closed with a block of wood.

“In an instant the theater was in an uproar. I was crowded to the top-most gallery, and everyone had risen in his seat. Men were shouting and climbing out into the aisles. Miss Keene was making her way up to where the President lay wounded, and several doctors from the audience were trying to force a passage through the crowd. Dr. Charles Taft was lifted up into the box from the stage, while many persons, some of them physicians, were crowding into the narrow aisle which led into the box and were pounding on the door, demanding admission.

“Lincoln lay back in a rocking chair. Dr. Taft had torn open his shirt and was looking for the wound. He found it finally behind the left ear. Then they laid the President on the shutter and

carried him out of the theater to the house across the street where he died at 7:30 o'clock the next morning.

"After the tragedy, I ran upstairs into the dressing room. The stage was filled with secret service men, who seemed to have gone crazy. They had arrested "Peanut Johnnie" as an accomplice. Poor "Peanut!" He did nothing more than hold Booth's horse. They were looking for Ned Spangler, our stage carpenter, who had innocently held the door open for the assassin. My husband also was under suspicion.

"I rubbed my makeup off and thought that any moment a detective would rap at the door and place me under arrest. Finally, "Jimmie" Mattox, our property man, called me."

"What are you doing up there?" he asked.

"I'm waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"To be arrested."

"He assured me that everything was all right, and I ventured down. The theater was empty by that time. The last audience it was ever to see had departed after witnessing a scene more tragic than ever was played behind the footlights."

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On June 10, 1915, the Sioux City, Iowa, *Journal* printed the following interview with J.F. Troutner, age 74. Mr. Troutner not only attended the play at Ford's Theatre but also witnessed the hanging of the Lincoln conspirators the following July. As if that were not enough, he also knew Lincoln in that he had had several conversations with the President in the White House. He would have been a 23-year-old soldier in the 14<sup>th</sup> U.S. Veteran Volunteers, working in the regimental commissary department in Washington at the time of Lincoln's assassination. The following is his interview. [NOTE: with many of his facts wrong]:

"On the night of April 14, 1865, I went to the Ford Theatre, where the President was to be. The title of the play presented that night was *Our American Cousin*, and many soldiers were present. I was seated in the family circle about five or six rows from the stage.

"Lincoln and a party of his friends were seated in a box not far from me. Everyone seemed to be interested in the play. After the conclusion of the first act—it was customary for us to do so—we left our seats to take some refreshments. Shortly after I returned to my seat, I saw Booth edging near the President's box. He paused there for a moment and then leaned toward his victim. The second act had not yet started and Booth's presence caused no interest, as he was often seen at the theater. Having seen him in plays a number of times I recognized him.

"While waiting for the second act to start, the report of a pistol was heard, but this was nothing unusual. It was shortly after the close of the war and shooting in the city still was common. It appeared as though someone in the rear of the theater might have fired, but the audience exhibited no interest. [NOTE: Actually, actor Harry Hawk had just said his famous line, "Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out old gal—you sockdologizomg old mantrap." And the audience was roaring with laughter.]

"No one knew that Lincoln had been shot until Major Henry R. Rathbone, who had accompanied the President, arose and requested that some soldiers come to the box. He then announced that Lincoln had been shot. We rushed to the front, but Major Rathbone advised us that only six soldiers were wanted.

“Booth was observed climbing over the railing of the box near Lincoln. In an effort to hurry away and make his escape, he caught his left foot [spur] on a flag below the railing. Losing his balance, he fell to the stage eight or ten feet below, suffering a broken leg. In a desperate attempt to flee, he brushed the stage curtain aside and struggled out, running over the stage and escaping through the rear entrance.

“Having the murder well planned he mounted a horse in the rear of the theater and rode away. Edward [sic] Spangler, a supernumerary for the Ford Theatre, who later was sentenced to prison as an accomplice, was given \$10 for watching the animal during the absence of Booth, I am told.

“In the meantime, Lincoln, mortally wounded, was laid upon a window shutter and carried to a little lodging house across Tenth Street from the theater. The soldiers were ordered to form a guard so that the President might be carried away quickly to a place where medical aid could be administered.

“Citizens were excited. Pandemonium had broken loose. Hardly had we crossed the street when a throng of excited people came rushing down the street toward us, crying the news that an attempt to assassinate Secretary of State William H. Seward and his son, Frederick, had been made by Lewis Powell. All was not yet ended, for terror was added when another mob of persons came rushing from the Baltimore and Ohio station with information that Grant had been shot. Grant was to have been included in the President’s theater party and, had he arrived as he had planned, George A. Atzerodt probably would have killed him, for he was waiting at the station. Missing his connections at the Relay house probably saved Grant his life. [NOTE: Atzerodt’s target that night was supposed to be the Vice President.]

“Atzerodt had been stationed at the railway terminal [sic] to await the arrival of Grant and to assassinate him. With all this news coming in simultaneously, the inhabitants were wild with fear that the entire cabinet of the President was to be killed. Terror, sorrow, and anger prevailed for many days and the city was placed under guard, while the search for Booth and his accomplices went on. I was one of the guards who watched the city until July 15....

“...On July 7, 1865, I had the pleasure of being detailed as a guard at the hanging of Atzerodt, Mrs. Surratt, Herold, and Powell. I saw the death trap sprung, but was too far away to hear the prisoners speak.”

Mr. Troutner declared that after the hanging he came into possession of a piece of rope which was used as the noose for Mrs. Surratt. He kept it as a memento.

“I showed the piece of rope to my friends frequently afterwards, and when they so desired I used to cut off a little end for them,” he said. “By cutting off little strips the rope became so short that last year I lost it altogether.”

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On January 1, 1923, Andrew Jackson Huntoon was interviewed. Dr. Huntoon was an official with the U.S. Civil Service Commission. He lived on Capitol Hill. At the time of his interview, he was a spritely 92. The doctor attended the theater that night with his wife, and he claims they were seated in the box just opposite the Presidential box and, therefore, had a very good vantage point for seeing the activity that went on that night. Here is what the doctor had to say:

“...”I turned to my wife,” said Dr. Huntoon, “and told her that Lincoln was shot. When Booth reached the stage, I distinctly heard him say: ‘Sic Semper Tyrannis.’ I know, of course, that this has been denied, particularly by W.J. Ferguson, who was a member of the theatrical

company playing at Ford's that night, but they don't know what they are talking about. Booth positively did make that remark. I'll swear to it.

"When Booth leaped to the stage, he fell, but quickly recovered himself and, before the audience fully realized what had happened, he had disappeared back of the stage and escaped through the alley. I never witnessed such an exciting and distressing scene in all my life. All was in an uproar. Many men and women were crying like broken-hearted children. Several women fainted and determined men hurled strong words at the brute who had shot our beloved President. I observed several agile men climbing up over the stage lights in an effort to find the assassin.

"I was nearby when the men carried Lincoln down. At first, they were carrying him headfirst, and then turned him the other way, and thus carried him across the street to the house where he passed to his reward the following morning. I stood close enough to the stricken leader, when they reversed the position of his body, to have laid my hand upon his head.

"Never has there been such a wildly exciting night in Washington. Soon all sorts of terrible rumors were in circulation on the streets and homes. It was claimed, by some, that Secretary of State Seward and General Grant had both been murdered. It was a sleepless night for the people of Washington. I can never, never forget the awfulness of it.

"I attended this trial of the conspirators who were arrested for the murder of Lincoln. I listened to the testimony that was presented. During the intervening years a great many people have made the claim that Mrs. Surratt, one of the most prominent defendants, was not guilty and should not have been hanged. In my opinion, she was absolutely guilty of complicity in the horrible crime, and the jury performed its clear duty in rendering such a verdict.

"I met Boston Corbett, the United States soldier who shot Booth while he was barricaded in the barn over in Virginia, and secured his autograph. Corbett was a spectacular figure in Washington during the investigation and trial....

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Another eyewitness to the April tragedy was Daniel H. Veader, who was interviewed in February of 1920. This interview took place in my hometown of New Haven, Connecticut. I'll bet my grandfather knew him as Mr. Veader worked at the Winchester works where Gramp also worked. My grandfather died a few years ago at age 107, and he sure could tell some great stories. Too bad I didn't know this earlier. Mr. Veader at the time of Lincoln's assassination was employed in Washington, D.C., as paymaster's clerk for the U.S. Army. Here is a story:

"... It was on the evening of Good Friday, April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre, and the house was packed. The majority had come to see the President who, although disinclined, had promised to appear so as not to disappoint those who had set their hearts on the event.

"Luckily, I had been able to procure seats in the third row of the orchestra and so found myself in an excellent position to view whatever happened in the President's box, which was located on the right side of the house and in the second tier. Just as the play was commenced Lincoln arrived, accompanied by three other persons whom I afterwards learned to be Mrs. Lincoln, Major Rathbone, USA, and his fiancée, a Miss Harris. There was no guard at the door at the President's box or even in the vicinity, or the tragedy that was soon to occur might never have taken place.

"Well, the play started on time and everything proceeded without a hitch until about 10:30 as near as I recall it. The scene had just been shifted and the curtain was up, when without warning a pistol shot rang out. Naturally, the audience thought that the next act had commenced and looked

toward the stage. But oddly, I had been gazing directly at Lincoln, as he leaned on his elbow over the rail of his box, and had seen a man, or a shadow, rush into the box, and then the President fell backward. Here was the tragedy which but a handful in the whole assembly had witnessed.

“But now the assassin called the attention of everyone to himself by jumping out of the box, scrambling somewhat as he did so, and brandishing a small dirk. There was but a second in which to notice an extraordinarily handsome young man, who faced the audience and uttered these famous words: ‘Sic semper tyrannis.’ Then, before even the actors realized what had happened, he crossed the deserted stage and was gone.

“Everything had been so sudden that hardly anyone had more than a lethargic understanding of what had transpired. At someone’s shouting, ‘The President’s shot,’ the theater was instantly in a state of commotion, and I was forced to seek safety on the stage itself. Many women fainted and above all there was a veritable babel of shouts and screams of excitement and fear.

“To add to the scene of confusion, the theater exits were ordered closed until the removal of the President. This suggested the possibilities of fire or hostile troops, or both, and the entire crowd, it might be said, went mad. Outside the theater, a rumor ran about that General Mosby and his Confederate troops had taken possession of the city.

“After leaving the theater, I learned that an attempt had been made on the lives of Seward, the Secretary of State, and Andrew Johnson, Vice President. And a hundred and one other exciting tales, both true and false, were started and died out. It was several days before order was again restored in Washington.”

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As I said in the beginning, I found these interviews fascinating to read, and I know in some cases their reminiscences may be a little colored. But imagine being in Ford’s Theatre that night! Wouldn’t that event be etched in your mind forever?!!

By the way, here’s a teaser—when I first got into studying about the Lincoln assassination, I would discuss it with my father, who was also a history buff. Dad told me one time that a man he worked with had a rocking chair made from the gallows on which the conspirators were hanged. The man had retired and moved to Florida. That means that somewhere in that land of retirement, someone was rocking on a lot of history!

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## **An Eyewitness Account**

Courtesy of Joseph Hewgley

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The following article appeared in the December 8, 1927, edition of *The Evening Tennessean*

### **Many Thought Killing of Lincoln Part of Play Says Eyewitness Here**

Events of Assassination Live Vividly in Memory of John Russell  
Who Attended Ford’s Theatre as a Boy on that Fateful Night

John Russell, aged 82, and now a resident at the Home for the Aged, Little Sisters of the Poor, saw President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in the Ford Theatre in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865.

A newspaper story from Jackson, Tennessee, recounting the shooting as remembered by D.L. Richards, 78, who expressed the belief that he was the only eyewitness to the tragedy that now lives, brought to Mr. Russell's mind details of the fateful night.

"Mr. Richards certainly gave an accurate [account] of Lincoln's assassination. But he was wrong about being the only living witness, for I was there and saw the entire affair and remember it in detail much like Mr. Richards described it in the *Tennessean*," declared the aged and bent veteran.

Mr. Russell was "going on" 19 years of age at the time. He resided at Alexandria [Virginia] on the outskirts of Washington and near the United States hospitals for wounded Union soldiers. He had seen Lincoln on several visits to these hospitals and had shaken hands with him on several of these occasions.

Young Russell was in Washington on April 14, 1865, at the home of an uncle who had tickets for the performance of *Our American Cousin* at the Ford Theatre.

### **Shot Rang Out**

He and his uncle arrived at the theater late and had been there only about 30 minutes when a shot rang out. "Everyone in the theater thought it was something backstage, just a piece of scenery that fell or something of that kind and the theater was perfectly still.

"A hushed silence soon fell over the theater as it stilled suddenly by some intuition of something disastrous. Suddenly, John Wilkes Booth, whom I had seen on several occasions, leaped on the stage. He quickly arose and shouted, 'Sic Semper Tyrannis' and walked off the stage.

"Many thought it was part of the play and applauded, but a general muffled excitement started, and several people started running here and there just before someone shouted from the President's box: 'Watch that man—he has shot the President.'

"Mr. Ford, whom I had often seen, came out to the footlights and calmly announced that the President had been shot by John Wilkes Booth and requested that the audience now maintain order.

"I saw Mr. Lincoln carried out of the theater and followed them across the street to the home of a man named Patterson [Petersen owed house], where he died the next morning.

"Booth made his escape from the theater unmolested and mounted his horse awaiting nearby. He escaped into Maryland, visited a physician there to have his ankle injured in the jump to the stage treated before going into Virginia, where he was soon captured and killed according to stories of that time." declared Mr. Russell.

Mr. Russell and his uncle did not know that the President would be at the theater until told of the fact as they entered. They soon located him because of the draperies of flags around the box and the presence of Secret Service men [sic] nearby.

### **Knew Andrew Johnson**

Mr. Russell was born and reared in Alexandria. He did not see service in the Civil War because of his location. His sympathies were with the South, and he could not leave his home in Union territory to join a Confederate army and would not join the Federals. [Alexandria, Virginia,

lies just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., and was heavily occupied by federal troops from the very beginning of the Civil War.]

After the war, Mr. Russell moved to Johnson City, Tenn., and while there knew President Andrew Johnson personally. In later years he has been an inmate of the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged. He retains a vivid memory of the events around Washington during the Civil War, and particularly the facts surrounding the shooting of Abraham Lincoln.