

The Surratt Courier

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

While giving a tour at the Surratt House last year, I was asked by a visitor if I knew where the term "Underground Railroad" originated. Fortunately, both the visitor and I knew what the term was – a network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to freedom – and that it wasn't an actual railroad that was underground. (Yes, there are those who think that.) I admitted that I didn't know when nor how the term originated, so naturally I had to find out to satisfy my own curiosity.

One of the articles I found was entitled "Who Really Ran the Underground Railroad?" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. In it, he offered two possible stories/legends for the term's origin. The first happened in 1831, when Tice Davids, a Kentucky slave, swam across the Ohio River to escape his master, who was in hot pursuit. However, when his owner reached the other side of the river in Ohio, he lost Davids's trail. He claimed that Davids disappeared as if he "had gone off on an underground railroad." An unusual choice of words, as in 1831 rail travel was still in its infancy. The second explanation comes from an 1839 story about a fugitive slave from Washington, D.C. He was captured and, when tortured, he confessed that he had been sent north, where "the railroad ran underground all the way to Boston."

The first time the term "railroad" appeared in print connecting it with fugitive slaves was on October 11, 1839, in the *Liberator* newspaper. An editorial by Hiram Wilson from Toronto called for the creation of "a great republican railroad...constructed from Mason and Dixon's to the Canada line, upon which fugitives from

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Surratt House is open for guided tours on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 11 am to 3 pm and on Saturdays and Sundays from 12 noon to 4 pm, with the last tours beginning one-half hour before closing. Society members and active military receive free admission by showing current membership/ID cards.

Saturday, February 15, 4 pm – **The Road to Freedom: From Maryland Slavery to Queen Victoria's Court.** Dr. Edna Troiano on the life of Josiah Henson from his birth to freedom in Canada, his abolitionist work, and his recognition by Queen Victoria. Henson is believed to have been the inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. FREE

Saturday, Feb. 29 – **Black History on Wheels.** Join us on a bus trip to neighboring Montgomery County for visits to a black history museum, lunch, and a restored 19th-century black schoolhouse. Contact the museum for further details.

Saturday, March 28, 4 pm – **Anna Ella Carroll: Fact or Fiction?** How influential was this Maryland woman in the field of 1800s politics? Did she advise President Lincoln and Gen. Grant on political and military strategies? Mary Margaret Revel Goodwin on the Maryland Museum of Women's History sorts facts and folklore. FREE

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President's Message —con't.

slavery might come pouring into the province." It was in the October 14, 1842, edition of the *Liberator* that the actual term "Underground Railroad" was used. It is also said the abolitionist Charles T. Torrey coined the phrase that same year. However, it was in the mid-1840s that the term was more commonly used.

Once that term "Underground Railroad" was used, it was only natural that other railroad terms would be used as code words. *Tracks* were routes fixed by abolitionist sympathizers. *Stations or depots* were hiding places. *Conductors* were guides along the routes. *Agents* were sympathizers who helped the slaves connect to the Railroad. *Station masters* were those who hid slaves in their homes. *Passengers, cargo, fleece, or freight* were escaped slaves, and *tickets* indicated that they were traveling on the Railroad. *Stockholders* were financial supporters who donated to the Railroad. *Freedom Trails* were routes on the system, and *Terminal, heaven, or Promised Land* referred to Canada or the northern free states.

Although not a railroad term, *Drinking Gourd* was another name for the Big Dipper constellation, which would lead to the North Star. Nighttime was the safest time to travel. One family story passed down through the generations tells of the advice John Freeman Wells's father gave him. "If you remember nothing else that I tell you, John, remember 'the side of the tree that the moss grows on and the light of the North Star is the way to Canada and freedom...'" John must have followed his father's advice. In 1846, he traveled the Underground Railroad to freedom from North Carolina to Ontario, Canada.

One more interesting fact I discovered: This network of people helping slaves escape to freedom was in existence as early as the late-1700s. In 1786, a slave owner complained about a "society of Quakers, formed for such purposes," helped one of his runaway slaves. That owner's name was George Washington.

Finally, we hope that our members will take advantage of the opportunity to see the recent movie, *Harriet*, that spotlights the remarkable work of Maryland native, Harriet Tubman, an icon of the Underground Railroad and the fight for freedom.

LOUISE OERTLY, President

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OF NOTE...

The nation may celebrate Thanksgiving in November, before Christmas, but the Surratt Society and museum staff have their own thanksgivings in January each year as they recognize the wonderful volunteers who serve as docents, visitors' center staff, and research center aides throughout the year. A second thanksgiving is held in January to thank the workers in other divisions who assist with a variety of museum projects from maintenance of HVAC systems, electrical and plumbing needs, landscaping, lawn mowing, exhibit experts, Park Rangers, and more.

On January 11, we gathered in our meeting room at the James O. Hall Research Center for a catered luncheon to show our appreciation to our volunteers and to recognize various levels of award hours. Congratulations to Linda Foltyn and Sandra Stephon who received 100-hour awards for their work in our visitors' center and to Rebecca Morris for 200 hours of service in that facility. A 100-hour award also went to docent Susan Higginbotham (who travels for over an hour each way commuting to the museum).

On January 14, nearly 50 workers from other divisions gathered in the same room for the annual Lasagna Luncheon, which we have held for over ten years. Good food, good friendship, and good reasons to be thankful all year...

Coming Soon: The 21st Annual Surratt Conference on the weekend of April 3-5. Have you registered yet?

THE OTHER HENRY AND CLARA: HENRY RITTER AND CLARA PIX

by Susan Higginbotham

Among its other consequences, Abraham Lincoln's assassination would upend the lives of not one, but two young couples named Henry and Clara. The first—Henry Rathbone and his stepsister/fiancée, Clara Harris—are well known; the second, Henry Ritter and his new bride, Clara Pix, are much less so. While April 14, 1865, did not have the devastating long-term effect upon the Ritters that it would upon the couple who accompanied the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre, it would earn the newlyweds a stay in Old Capitol Prison.

Clara Pix was born around 1838 to Christopher Hodgson Pix and his wife, Matilda Gould, in Newcastle upon Tyne in the north of England. Soon after that, the family—Christopher, Matilda, and their three children, Charles, Clara, and Fanny—made the transatlantic journey to the United States, where a fourth child, Vincent, was born in the then-Republic of Texas.¹ The family settled in Galveston, where Christopher Pix worked as a merchant and later invested in real estate. Galveston's Pix Building, a three-story brick building on Postoffice Street, is a reminder of his importance in the city's history.²

Before the Civil War broke out, Clara's brother Charles made a marriage that would earn him a footnote in Texas history: to Sarah "Sallie" Ridge, a full-blooded Cherokee. It was her second marriage; the previous one, to George Washington Paschal, had ended in divorce. Forty-one-year-old Sarah brought a house and six slaves to the marriage, which took place in 1856 at the home of former Texas Republic President Mirabeau Lamar; nineteen-year-old Charles is said to have brought nineteen dollars to it. Sarah traded her house for five hundred acres at Smith Point, where the couple ran a cattle ranch. By 1880, however, the marriage had broken down and Sarah sued for divorce. After a judgment that gave her impecunious husband half the marital property, Sarah, with the help of her daughter, was able to persuade the judge to allow her to keep her ranch—a rare outcome at a time when married women had few property rights.³

Charles and Sarah Pix's marital troubles were far from being the first in the Pix family, and by no means would be the last. By 1859, Christopher and Matilda Pix had separated, and Matilda took her younger children, Clara, Fanny, and Vincent, up north. At the time of the 1860 census, they were living in Springfield, Massachusetts, and would spend the next few years flitting between there, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., where Clara had an uncle, John Gould, working as a government clerk. This was almost certainly John A. Gould, an Englishman who in 1860 was sixty-five and had been living in Washington, D.C., for decades. While an investigator combing through Gould's letters five years later would conclude that Gould was probably a young man, his age is consistent with Clara's description of him as having worked for the government "for many years."⁴ The 1860 census shows that Gould had a household of young children, so someone reading his letters might well have assumed that he was a young family man.

At some point, Clara made the acquaintance of two men, Louis Weichmann and John Surratt. Where and how she met them is unknown. Because Weichmann, like John Gould, was a War Department employee, it seems most likely that Clara's uncle introduced her to Weichmann, who in turn introduced her to John Surratt. Alternatively, Clara could have met Weichmann, whose family lived in Philadelphia, during her residence in that city, or she could have somehow met John Surratt during his travels to New York on behalf of the Confederacy. Yet another possibility is that Gould, who can be assumed from his burial in Washington's Mount Olivet Cemetery to have been at least a nominal Catholic, met Weichmann or someone in the Surratt family through church, leading to an introduction to Gould's niece.

In any case, Clara seems to have hit it off with both men. Weichmann appears to have confided to her his romantic interest in his landlady's pretty, accomplished daughter, Anna—an awkward state of affairs given the fact that Weichmann was ostensibly preparing to be ordained as a Catholic priest. For his part, John Surratt, having apparently discovered that Clara's political leanings were with her former state of Texas and the South, likely recruited her as an agent through which correspondence could be sent under cover.

In early 1865, however, Clara had other things to occupy her mind besides her clandestine activities. In the fall or winter of 1864-65, she had started working as a governess for the Ritter family, and she soon found a suitor in the person of Henry Theodore Ritter, a young stockbroker. Born on July 27, 1842, Henry was the only surviving son of Dr. Washington T. Ritter, a wealthy physician, and his wife, Mary Post Ritter. In 1860, he and his two younger sisters, Catherine and Agnes, were living in their parents' house in the Morrisiana section of the Bronx. Two servants attended to the family's needs. It was a comfortable home in which to live—and in which to marry into.

Like many other enthusiastic young men, Henry Ritter had enlisted in the Union army after the attack on Fort Sumter. Signing up for three months, on April 20, 1861, he joined the 71st New York Infantry.⁵ His unit, Company F, fought in the First Battle of Manassas, an encounter which Ritter described in vivid detail in a letter to his uncle dated July 23, 1861. Writing from the safety of the Washington Navy Yard, Ritter recalled:

The Alabama regt. were opposed to us & the Georgia Regt. had attempted to take us in flank but were met by the First Rhode Island. Wheeling to face them during the action I saw one our Regt. fall without his head his canteen falling off him with the sound of water in it. I threw mine away & took his.⁶

Understandably, after this taste of battle, Ritter, his three months' enlistment ending on July 30, 1861, was content to return to New York and to his desk job. As the war dragged to a conclusion, therefore, he was not slogging through fields in the South but courting the family's new governess, undeterred by her Southern proclivities and the fact that she was about four years his senior.

As the Union veteran and the Confederate sympathizer prepared for their wedding, Clara wrote a breezy letter on February 15, 1865, to her old friend in Washington, Louis Weichmann, to inform him that she and "Dr. & Mrs. R." would be coming to Washington on February 23 or 24. Requesting that her impending visit be kept a secret, Clara inquired about her uncle and his family and added that she and Weichmann would talk over "surprising" her uncle. She asked Weichmann about a trip he had made to Baltimore in January, asked why "Mr. S." had not been to New York or whether he was still at home, and referred to unexplained "annoyances" that had caused Weichmann to make a trip to Philadelphia. Clara devoted much of the letter, however, to hinting none-too-subtly at Weichmann's interest in a "Miss S__tt," writing, "You see I understood your affectionate remark about Mr. S__tt & the conclusion, 'I love him, indeed I do, & his ___ too.'" Insisting that she could love "dear Miss S.," undoubtedly Anna Surratt, "for yr sake & her brother's; two of my best kindest, and most sincere W.C. Friends," Clara suggested that he bring Anna to call upon her. Rather dramatically, she added, "The distance that will separate us after our possible interview on the '23rd' or '24th' will be far greater than ever . . . we shall no longer be able to correspond, though the ties of friendship will ever remain unchanged."⁷

The "Clara letter," as assassination researchers call it, has proved a bit of a red herring. While Elizabeth Steger Trindall, a proponent of the theory that Mary Surratt was wrongfully convicted, identified Clara Pix as the author of the letter early on, and saw nothing in it other than corroboration of Weichmann's purported interest in Anna Surratt, others have found in it something more sinister. Michael W. Kauffman, who suggested that the letter was penned by the Confederate courier Sarah Slater, regarded it as a deeply compromising document that could have destroyed Weichmann as a defense witness: "Certainly 'Clara' was privy to some personal secrets, such as Weichmann's bisexuality

and his unrequited love for Anna Surratt. More to the point, though, she was a Confederate insider, and her letter strongly implies that the prosecution's star witness was one as well." William C. Edwards and Edward Steers, Jr., wrote, "The letter reads like a loosely coded message dealing with John Surratt."⁸ Yet given the tendency of nineteenth-century men to express their feelings for their male friends more floridly than would be conventional among heterosexual men today, it seems an enormous stretch of the imagination to see in the letter a hint of bisexuality on Weichmann's part, and his romantic interest in Anna Surratt could have been used by the government to cast him sympathetically as a reluctant witness just as it could have been used by the defense to cast him as a vengeful one. While Clara's interest in John Surratt's whereabouts could certainly connect her with John's covert activities, nothing in the letter suggests that Weichmann knew more about his comings and goings than would be expected of Surratt's close friend and roommate. Finally, the coy hints and references in the letter all make perfect sense when one considers what was to take place shortly: Clara's marriage to Henry Ritter, which was evidently to be kept secret from her uncle and perhaps other members of her family until she and Henry's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Ritter, arrived in Washington. The "distance" that would separate Clara from Weichmann after February 23 or 24 was presumably the impropriety of a newly married woman continuing to write to a bachelor friend.

On February 20, 1865, Clara and Henry married at Manhattan's Church of the Ascension, in a service officiated by Rev. J. Cotton Smith.⁹ Whether they traveled to Washington afterward, much less had the promised meeting with the hapless Weichmann, is unknown, but their honeymoon, figuratively speaking, would be brief. In a mere matter of weeks, the newlyweds would find themselves in a heap of trouble.

Following President Lincoln's assassination, John Surratt, learning that he was a suspect, fled to Canada, pursued by Washington detectives and a reluctant Louis Weichmann. In Montreal, Officer James McDevitt intercepted a letter requesting someone at St. Lawrence Hall, a hotel popular with the Confederate underground, to forward any correspondence addressed to John Harrison to a Captain Navarro of New York City. "John Harrison" was the alias of John Surratt, and the name he had used to register when he checked into the hotel on April 18. Upon returning to the United States without John Surratt, McDevitt handed the matter of the mysterious Navarro to Officer G. Walling of the New York Police Department.¹⁰

On May 3, an excited Walling wrote to McDevitt to inform him that a couple had come to the New York post office inquiring for letters to Navarro. When the clerk said there were none, and that in any case an order would be required for a third party to receive the letter, the lady explained that Captain Navarro was dead and that she wished to forward his letters to his widow. The man, giving a card identifying himself as H. T. Ritter, then requested that any letters be sent to his office, and the couple left. Tailed by a clerk, the pair walked to Ritter's office at 80 Beaver Street, where, Walling reported, "They parted . . . and the clerk tried to pipe her off but she beat him." Walling recommended the couple's arrest. The matter passed to D. R. P. Bigley, who on May 6, 1865, wrote to Lafayette Baker at the War Department. Presently, Major General John A. Dix ordered that the Ritters be brought in for questioning, a task that fell to Major Charles O. Joline.

Joline found Henry Ritter to be cooperative. He readily declared that Clara had told him that her mother, Matilda Pix of Philadelphia, had asked her to call for letters to Captain Navarro and that he had come along, leaving his business card under the circumstances described above. Clara, called in afterward, was another matter, as Joline wrote: "I found it very difficult indeed to get any answers or explanations from her which appeared at all reasonable or coherent."

Clara stated that around April 3 or 4, a lady, signing herself "Navarro" and claiming to be the mother of the deceased Captain Navarro, had written to her in Philadelphia, addressing her by her

maiden name, and asked her to call for letters to Captain Navarro, to be delivered to the captain's widow, but had not told her where she was to send the letters. Someone, perhaps Clara's mother, had forwarded the letter to Clara, who had waited a month before calling for the letters, due to the distance of the post office, the bad weather, and a spell of ill health. Asked by Joline why someone from Philadelphia would want her to get letters from New York, Clara responded that she had been given instructions to call for letters at both cities, presumably because she had formerly traveled between them very frequently. She stated that she did not know either a Captain nor a Mrs. Navarro, but thought that the captain was a Union officer. At about that point Henry, good citizen that he was, piped up to remind his bride that she had sent a newspaper to a Eugene Navarro. Clara then admitted to sending Navarro a newspaper, but said that she did not know him but had been told by a person whose name she could not recall that Navarro was a prisoner at Johnson's Island in Ohio and that she had sent the paper because he was a fellow Texan. When Joline suggested that Navarro might have escaped and written to her himself, Clara exclaimed that he "was too good a Christian to do that." Asked how she knew that this stranger was a Christian, Clara said that in Washington City, she had been told that he had sent for sermons, tracts, and newspapers. She had not heard this through her uncle, John Gould, but thought someone in the Lincoln Hospital in Washington had told her about Navarro's reading tastes.

An exasperated Joline wrote, "Not the least remarkable part of the statement is the fact stated by her that she received a letter of the king mentioned, from one stranger to another, about the letters of another stranger to be called for in two cities & that she did not show the letter to her husband, or tell him that she had received it; that she kept it a month before she called for letters as directed; & that she did not request her husband who passes the Post Office at least twice a day to call for them for her." Adding that Henry had not heard of Clara's wish to call for the letters until the pair were riding an omnibus downtown the morning of May 3, Joline concluded that Henry was innocent of all involvement in the matter.

While Joline sat writing his report on May 14, Officer Bigley paid a call, bearing the news that while he had been guarding the Ritter residence, Clara had at last admitted, under urging from Henry, that it was she who had written the letter to Canada instructing that John Harrison's letters be sent to Captain Navarro. Better yet, Clara confessed to knowing John Harrison and to knowing that he was John Surratt. With that, the couple soon found themselves bound for Old Capitol Prison in Washington, Clara as a prisoner "for holding communication with Surratt and acting as his agent" and Henry, whom Major Gen. John A. Dix believed to be "entirely innocent," as a witness.¹¹

Committed to prison on May 15, Clara was questioned again. An unsigned memorandum by her interrogator, hidden in the depths of the National Archives until it was discovered by Arnold Lee Gladwin in 1937,¹² reads as follows:

May 15, 1865

Memorandum: Mrs. Henry T. Ritter of New York. Formerly Miss Clara Pix probably of Texas. Appears to have come north before the War. Resided in Washington, Philadelphia & Springfield Mass. Went to New York last fall or winter as governess in family of Dr. Wm. Ritter and married a relative of his Feb. 20 1865. Letters written by herself to parties South but not sent for want of opportunity show that she is a thorough rebel but contain nothing to criminate further herself or anyone else. Pieces of rebel poetry, printed & manuscript show the same thing.

A number of letters from John Gould of Wash[ington], who signs himself her uncle; apparently a young man & occupying some situation under Govmt. Application from Gould to Adj. Genl Thomas, dated Ord. Office June 30 1862 request to be transferred from Or. to A.G. Dept. In one of Gould's letters

dated Aug. 20 64 he speaks of having returned to his desk and being embarrassed by the clerks inquiring after his niece & how he liked Phil[adelphia]. He says he had to cut their questions short to avoid telling "fibs" and "in fact I could not give any account of a place I never was at." Among friends of her mentioned by Gould is a Mr. Weichmann. A letter of Mrs. R. directs her correspondent to address her under cover to Major John Gould, who she says occupies the same position she once filled, and expects her correspondent to understand that as she does not wish to say what the position is. During her stay in Wash. she was connected with Rev. D. Hall's church & has a letter of introduction from D. H. S. Rev. W. McKnight of Springfield Mass dated Dec. 19, 1860. Her family appears to have been in very straitened circumstances.¹³

Henry, meanwhile, took the opportunity to write a note to Clara, which was apparently intercepted, as it was found with the memorandum of her interrogation. It reads simply, "Clara, I love you. Do you me. Henry T. Ritter."¹⁴

In the event, Clara's penchant for rebel poetry and her helpfulness to John Surratt were not enough to merit additional attention from the Government. She was released on May 16, with her husband giving his assurances that he would do all in his power to prevent her from holding further communications with rebels or their sympathizers and that Clara's conduct to the United States government would be good.¹⁵ Nothing further is heard of Clara in association with the assassination or with John Surratt; she did not appear at either the conspiracy trial or John Surratt's trial, and Louis Weichmann's posthumously published memoir has nothing to say of his old friend.

Back in New York, Henry and Clara settled back into normalcy and in due time had two children: Washington Ritter, born on November 7, 1866, and Agnes, born on March 6, 1868.¹⁶ In 1870, the United States census shows them living together in Morrisania along with an Irish servant. But all was not well in the Ritter house. In November 1873, or perhaps 1874, Henry and Clara went their separate ways.¹⁷

All we know of the couple's breakup comes from the divorce case filed by Henry in the Superior Court of Cook County, Illinois, in March 1880, alleging desertion. As Clara did not respond, we have only Henry's side of the story. At any rate, Henry, who stated that he had been residing in Chicago since January 1, 1879, and was employed as a clerk in the produce exchange, claimed that he was in the habit of leaving his house for three or four days and that when he returned from one such trip, he found that his furniture had been sold, the house closed, and his wife "cleared out." A witness, Walter Chisholm of New York City, indicated that this happened in November 1873 or 1874. Henry Nason of Montclair, New Jersey, recalled that the desertion occurred in November 1873. He added that Clara had deserted her two children as well, leaving them in the care of a justice of the peace. Henry Ritter testified that he had had no communication with Clara since and that he had received no reply to letters written to Clara, in places where he supposed she might be found, and to her brothers. He stated that he was supporting his children, who were living with his mother.

The divorce was granted on May 22, 1880. Free to remarry, Henry wasted no time in doing so; by the time the census taker arrived in June, Henry was back in New York City, boarding on Tenth Avenue with a second wife, Mary Lewis. A decidedly hands-off father, Henry left his two children in the care of his sister, Catharine Appleton, and her husband, William, at their residence at Franklin Avenue in the Bronx. Henry and his second bride were not childless for long, however: their son, Henry Ludlow Ritter, was born in Manhattan on March 26, 1881.¹⁸

As for Clara, ironically enough given her supposed desertion of her children, the *Galveston Daily News* would later credit her with founding the city's orphanage. Around 1879, the paper explained, Clara began caring for orphans in her home, an endeavor that attracted the notice of prominent citizens, who began raising funds for a permanent orphans' home. Clara was selected as matron of the institution on

July 1, 1880.¹⁹ Indeed, the city directory for 1881-82 lists the "widowed" Clara as the matron of Galveston's Island City Orphan's Home, located at 17th street and Avenue F.²⁰ After that, however, Clara disappears from the city directory until 1888-89, when she is listed as residing with Charles S. Pix.²¹ She seems to have lived a peripatetic existence: in 1890, a family acquaintance told a newspaper reporter that she summered at Newburgh and Port Jervis in New York and wintered at Wilmington, North Carolina, as well as Galveston. The reporter was also informed that Clara was receiving \$1,800 per year in alimony from Henry Ritter.²²

How much contact Clara had with her children after she and her husband parted ways is unknown, but in 1890, there would be a family reunion of sorts when her son, Washington T. Ritter, paid a visit to Galveston. Unfortunately, the circumstances were less than ideal.

Like his father, Washington worked in the financial sector. On February 9, 1887, at age twenty, he had married seventeen-year-old Mary Florence Johnson, evidently with a sense of urgency, as their eldest son was born a few weeks later.²³ Two more children soon followed. Although family photographs posted on the Ancestry site show Mary to have been a pretty, slender young woman, Washington was not cut out for a life of quiet domesticity.

On September 27, 1890, the *New York Herald* proclaimed the perfidy of Young Ritter Thief and Wife Deserter. Washington Ritter, it turned out, had not only embezzled from his employer, he had taken off with a young lady named Mamie Zaun, a twenty-year-old blonde of "Teutonic lineage" whose parents lived on 26th Street. Needless to say, this tale involving sex, money, and an upper-class gent proved irresistible to the New York papers, and was picked up nationally. The Herald's reporter trooped around the New York metropolitan area, interviewing the wronged wife and her mother, Washington's business associates, Mamie's parents, and Henry Ritter. Depending on who told the story, either Mamie had corrupted Washington, or Washington had corrupted Mamie; in any case, Washington had moved his wife and children to a humble abode in Yonkers, New York, and shackled up with Mamie. An avid yachtsman, Washington on the eve of his disappearance had told his friends that he was going to take the train to Stamford, Connecticut, and board his yacht (aptly named the *Restless*), which had awaited his arrival to no avail.²⁴

Henry Ritter took all of this excitement with aristocratic detachment. Professing to be surprised by these goings-on, he told the Herald reporter, "I have been learning a good deal about my son in the last few months, but you know a good deal more about him than I. I really saw Washington very seldom."

Mrs. Johnson, Washington's mother, predicted that Washington and his paramour had fled to Galveston, and this suspicion proved correct: the couple was arrested while strolling down Church Street. They had been staying with Charles Pix, Clara's brother, whose divorce from Sarah Ridge, amid accusations of infidelity on his part, likely gave him a certain sympathy for his nephew's plight. With Mamie dramatically asserting she would stand by Washington, the couple agreed to return to New York, where Washington was locked up in the Tombs, New York City's jail.

What Clara, Washington's mother, thought of all this is unrecorded. According to Mary Florence Ritter, Washington's estranged wife, Washington had introduced Mamie to Clara as his wife during his brief sojourn in Galveston, but no reporter appears to have succeeded in interviewing Clara.

Although Mary Florence Ritter was unforgiving—the final straw seems to have been her discovery that Henry Ritter had two fine portraits on his wall of Washington and Mamie despite having professed to know little about his son—Lady Justice was more sympathetic. In November 1890, Washington was allowed to plead guilty to grand larceny for the theft of \$100. After a witness from the stock exchange testified that his character had been unblemished until he met Mamie, and his former employer testified that his uncle had agreed to give him employment, Washington was given a

suspended sentence and released. He obediently moved to Galveston, while Mamie appears to have vanished into obscurity.²⁵ In Texas, Washington worked with his uncle Charles Pix and, rather endearingly, served as vice president for the local chapter of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He died young, of an abscess of the liver, on November 12, 1896. His tombstone in Galveston's New City Cemetery, bears an anchor, presumably a tribute to his prowess as a yachtsman.²⁶

Earlier in 1896, Clara's father had died in London, having gotten into the habit of spending his summers in England. He was 84, which had not deterred him from remarrying the year before his death. Whether he and Clara were close is unknown, but her son's death, at least, would have ended the year on a dismal note for her. She is reported to have been living in Washington, D.C., at the time her father died; one wonders if she ever looked up her old acquaintances John Surratt and Anna Surratt Tonry, both of whom were married and living in Baltimore.²⁷

Four years later, Galveston—at that time Texas's leading city—was devastated by the hurricane of 1900.²⁸ Whether Clara was present for the disaster, which killed anywhere from 6,000 to 12,000 people, is unknown, but her brother Charles was among the thousands killed.²⁹ Clara had stayed with Charles at times—the 1898 Galveston city directory, the last in which Clara appears before 1900, shows them each living at 1528 Avenue M—and he had helped her wayward son, so Clara must have keenly felt the loss.³⁰

Back in New York, Henry Ritter was having his own difficulties. His second marriage, to Mary Lewis, had not been a success, and the couple had separated. When Mary died in 1892, her son by Henry Ritter, Henry Ludlow Ritter (whom we may call by his nickname of "Harry" to minimize confusion), inherited her estate. He did not move in with his father, but stayed with the Van Orden family, who were cousins, and with guardians.³¹ As an adult, he worked for a few months as a bookkeeper, but his health broke down, and he died of consumption on August 27, 1900, only nineteen years of age. He appeared to be on friendly terms with his father and the latter's third wife, whom he visited occasionally at their Bronx residence. Thus, Henry Ritter was in for a surprise when he became aware of his son's will:

After all my lawful debts are paid I give, devise and bequeath unto my dear friend Martina Wilkins Van Orden, all my property of whatsoever kind and wheresoever situated and by whomsoever held of which I may die possessed in consideration of and compensation for the kind unselfish care and attention she has bestowed upon me during all the years since my mother died and previous thereto, I have left my property as above, remembering the fact that my father would be my natural representative, but he has done nothing for my support since my mother's death and his efforts have been directed to my detriment rather than to my benefit during these years.

A maiden lady some years Harry's senior, Martina, or "Tina" as Harry called her, wasted no time in probating the will, the contents of which were soon made public.³² But Henry Ritter was not one to take this dying insult, and the loss of Harry's tidy estate of between \$5,000 and \$5,500, quietly. He contested the will. Soon the story of Henry Ritter's disinheritance at the hands of his own son made the out-of-town papers. (One wonders if Clara saw the stories.) One of the witnesses in the court proceedings was Henry and Clara's widowed daughter, Agnes Deady, who testified to Harry's friendly relationship with his father. But Henry lost the will contest, and the decision was affirmed on appeal. He may have needed the money; the 1900 federal census indicates that he was working as a clerk for the health department. In the 1905 state census, he is listed as a "disinfecter."

Although Henry's third wife, the former Mary Adelaide Cook, was considerably his junior, she died in July 1905 at age forty-one. For once, Henry Ritter had no successor waiting in the wings. Instead of remarrying, he entered the New York State Soldiers and Sailors Home in Bath in June 1906. Opened on Christmas Day of 1878, the home boasted a bowling alley and operated its own farm, although Henry

was probably not in good enough shape to either bowl or farm. He was suffering from failing eyesight, a left inguinal hernia, heart and kidney disease, and rheumatism. Henry, who had been receiving a pension for his brief Civil War service, attributed the hernia to an injury he had received when jumping across a brook during Bull Run.³³

On April 17, 1908, Henry died at the home in Bath. He was buried in its cemetery.

As for Clara, little can be gleaned about her last years. She appears regularly in Galveston city directories from 1906 onward, suggesting that she was spending most of her time in that island city. Clara lived at several addresses in Galveston, finally settling at 1114 M 1/2 Street, where she died of "old age senility" on January 23, 1924. Like her only son, she was buried at New City Cemetery, far from where her married life began in Manhattan.³⁴ The hapless newlyweds who had been caught up in a conspiracy had long lived separate lives, but perhaps in their last years, each reflected on those strange days in 1865.

¹ Texas State Board of Health, death certificate for Clara Pix Ritter; 1850 U.S. census; obituary for Christopher S. Pix in the *Galveston Daily News*, June 28, 1896; <https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=118999>.

² <https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=118999>

³ *Bayton Sun*, July 21, 1985; <http://www.houstontimeportal.net/thalian-club.html>.

⁴ District of Columbia Board of Health, death certificate of John A. Gould; Union Provost Marshal's File, 1861-1867, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109, Entry 465, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; William C. Edwards and Edward Steers, Jr., *The Lincoln Assassination: The Evidence* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 1105-06.

⁵ Record for Henry T. Ritter in Ancestry.com. U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007.

⁶ Transcription by National Park Service Ranger Chris Bryce found at <http://nps-vip.net/history/letters/ritter.htm>. While the website refers to Henry "F." Ritter, this appears to be a misreading, as Henry T. Ritter was the only person by that name in Company F at that time.

⁷ Edwards and Steers, pp. 1329-30. The editors state that the letter was found among Booth's papers at the National Hotel rather than among Weichmann's papers, but the basis for this statement is unclear. *Id.* at p. 1329 n.1.

⁸ Elizabeth Steger Trindall, *Mary Surratt: An American Tragedy* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), p. 255 n. 36; Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 362 & 469 n.24; Edwards and Steers, p. 1329 n.1.

⁹ *New York Times*, February 22, 1865; Edwards and Steers, p. 1106.

¹⁰ For this and what follows, see Edwards and Steers, pp. 1104-09.

¹¹ Lee A. Gladwin, "Clara Pix Ritter: Confederate Agent" in *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* (Fall 2007), p. 20.

¹² Gladwin, p. 23.

¹³ Union Provost Marshal's File, 1861-1867, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109, Entry 465, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The 1876 *Official Register of the United States*, p. 231, indicates that John A. Gould was still working in the Adjutant General's Office as of September 30, 1875. His death certificate indicates that he died on February 18, 1876, age 83.

¹⁴ Gladwin, p. 23.

¹⁵ Gladwin, p. 23; Clara Ritter and Henry T. Ritter Files, Union Provost Marshals' File Of Papers Relating To Individual Civilians, Record Group 109, NARA M-345, National Archives (retrieved from Fold3).

¹⁶ Tombstone of Washington Ritter, New City Cemetery, Galveston, TX; New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949, Family Search.

¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1880. For what follows see Superior Court of Cook County, Illinois, Chancery Division, Case No. S-75400.

¹⁸ New York City Bureau of Vital Statistics, Henry Ludlow Ritter birth certificate.

¹⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, November 13, 1921, and November 16, 1895.

²⁰ *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Galveston: 1881-1882*, pp. 80, 292.

²¹ *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Galveston: 1888-1889*, p. 330.

²² *New York Herald*, September 27, 1890; *Galveston Daily News*, June 28, 1896.

²³ New York City Marriage Records, 1829-1940, Family Search database; 1900 census entry for Mary Florence Johnson Ritter and her children in Yonkers, NY.

²⁴ For this and what follows see *New York Herald*, September 27, 1890; *New York Herald*, September 28, 1890; *Evening Telegram*, September 27, 1890; *New York Times*, September 28, 1890; *New York Herald*, October 1, 1890; *New York Herald*, October 10, 1890; *The Press*, October 16, 1890; *New York Tribune*, November 26, 1890.

²⁵ Henry Ritter told a reporter that he would support Mamie because her family had disowned her. If so, Eva Zaun, Mamie's mother, may have had a change of heart; her will, made in 1892, provides for the remainder of her estate to go to her children, without listing them by name or excluding any by name. Will of Eva Zaun, Ancestry.com, New York, Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999.

²⁶ *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Galveston*; 1893-94; *Galveston Daily News*, November 22, 1896.

²⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 28, 1896.

²⁸ John Burnett, "The Tempest at Galveston," NPR broadcast, November 30, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/30/566950355/the-tempest-at-galveston-we-knew-there-was-a-storm-coming-but-we-had-no-idea>

²⁹ <https://www.galvestonhistorycenter.org/research/list>

³⁰ Ancestry.com, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995.

³¹ For what follows see City of New York, Death Certificate No. 2013 for Mary C. Ritter; 1900 federal census; New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, First Department, *In the Matter of Proving the Last Will and Testament of Henry Ludlow Ritter*, Papers on Appeal, No. 506 (1901); *In re Ritter*, 1901 N.Y. App. Div. LEXIS 1384; 62 A.D. 618; 71 N.Y.S. 1147.

³² *New York Times*, August 30, 1900.

³³ Ancestry.com, U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938, Bath, Register p. 394/11200; Henry T. Ritter, pension application no. 1277371, certificate no. 1052726, Record Group 15, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; <https://www.nps.gov/places/bath-branch-bath-new-york.htm>.

³⁴ Ancestry.com, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995; Death certificate for Clara Pix Ritter.