

# The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I was looking through past Surratt Society newsletters for inspiration for this issue, when an article in the March 1981 *Surratt Society News* caught my attention. It was about a dedication that the Surratt Society was invited to attend. First, here is the article:

### **Surratt Boardinghouse Plaque Unveiled**

“Amid a cold and drenching rain on Sunday, February 8, 1981, a large turn-out from the [Surratt] Society participated in the unveiling of a bronze plaque at 604 H Street in Washington, D.C.—Mrs. Surratt’s boardinghouse. The plaque has been donated by the Chi-Am Lions Club of Washington as a historical service project.

“The unveiling occurred as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations since the little house is now located in the heart of the city—Chinatown. At the invitation of the Lions Club, members of the Society began the festivities at a luncheon in Chinatown before crossing the street to watch the traditional parades. As we all know, the visitation of the traditional dragons ensures good luck and so the dragons performed the unveiling task of the handsome plaque, which identifies the Surratt boardinghouse as a part of the events surrounding the Lincoln conspiracy.

“The Surratt Society extends a large thank you to the Chi-Am Lions Club for

their contribution in identifying this historical site.”

I remember the event well, as it was the first time I had attended Chinatown’s New Year celebration and seen the dragons in person. I also remember the drenching rain. Fortunately, we had decided not to wear our 19<sup>th</sup> Century costumes. I know firsthand that walking in a soaking wet hoopskirt (think at least five yards of wet cotton in the topmost skirt alone) is not fun!

After reading the article, I started wondering what other articles on the boardinghouse have been published over the years, so I started searching the index and hit the jackpot. There were a few with the basic information about Mrs. Surratt’s move to D.C. and Booth’s visitations to the boardinghouse, but there were other topics as well. I hope you enjoy reading about the strange happenings at the Surratt boardinghouse at 514 (now 604) H Street.

Stay safe.

Louise Oertly, President

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*This newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the Surratt Society, a non-profit volunteer affiliate of the Surratt House Museum, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 9118 Brandywine Road, Clinton, MD 20735. Museum phone number is (301) 868-1121. Visit our website at [surrattmuseum.org](http://surrattmuseum.org) or contact us at [surratt.society@gmail.com](mailto:surratt.society@gmail.com).*

*The Surratt Society’s mailing address is: 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791. Annual Surratt Society membership dues are \$10.*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Articles Wanted

I know everyone is enjoying the articles reprinted from past issues, but it's always nice to read something new, so we are looking for new material to use in future issues of *The Surratt Courier*. It can be articles from our experts or even questions you would like answered, which we will try do so to the best of our ability. You can send them to [surrattsociety@gmail.com](mailto:surrattsociety@gmail.com) for our consideration. I can't guarantee that everything sent will be used, but I will do my best. The topics can range from the assassination and its cast of characters to social history of the times.

### Surratt Society's New Address

If you are sending mail to the Surratt Society, it will no longer go to the museum. We now have a Post Office box for our mail.

The new address is:

Surratt Society  
9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853  
Capitol Heights, MD 20791

Of course, you can also contact us at our email address:

[surrattsociety@gmail.com](mailto:surrattsociety@gmail.com)

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## WHO LIVED ON H STREET?

by Helen Thomson

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, January 1986

In the autumn of 1864, Mary Surratt moved to Washington, D.C., to open a boardinghouse at 541 H Street. She must have found it hard to join the ranks of the motley crowd of boardinghouse keepers in the dirty crime-ridden city that was the nation's capital during the Civil War. Mrs. Surratt was a poised, gracious woman, who valued social status. When she was interrogated on April 17, 1865, the night of her arrest for complicity in President Lincoln's assassination, she answered repeatedly that she spoke the truth "on the honor of a lady." And when she was questioned about her son's association with a man as illustrious as John Wilkes Booth, she replied that considering John's rearing, it was understandable that he should have friends "in the best society."

Feeling as she did about status, Mrs. Surratt must have had mixed feelings about living on the lower end of a street that many people in Washington considered the best address in town. Within ten blocks of her modest home were the residences of some of the most important people in the city.

H Street formed the north side of Lafayette Square and on that side of the square, at 304, lived the tall, dignified Senator from Iowa, James B. Harlan, President Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior. His mother, like Mrs. Surratt, was a native of Maryland. Next door to Senator Harlan was the residence of Hugh McCulloch, the genial banker from Indiana whom President Lincoln appointed Secretary of the Treasury, when Salmon P. Chase moved up to the Supreme Court.

Number 312 was the home of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, an old man with a bushy white beard and a trenchant pen. Doubtless, Mrs. Surratt knew that the controversial General George B. McClellan, former commander of the Army of the Potomac, had once lived at 334 H Street. His headquarters had been at the southeast corner of H Street and Madison Place in an old house that was once the home of President Madison's widow, Dolley. Number 357 H Street was the residence of Senator Zachariah Chandler, a wealthy dry goods merchant from Detroit, who was a member of the Senate's very important Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. And on H Street at Vermont lived the very elegant and very able Senator from Massachusetts, Charles Sumner.

Elsewhere on H Street were the homes of a number of other people who, in one way or another, figured in Mrs. Surratt's life. David Herold was born in a house at the corner of H and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets. He was with John Wilkes Booth during the 12 days between the murder of President Lincoln and Booth's death in Garrett's barn. Herold died on the scaffold along with Mary Surratt on the hot afternoon of July 7, 1865.

Mrs. Rose Greenhow, the vivacious and imperious Confederate spy, had a house near H Street and 15<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Greenhow's Washington friends had included not only President Buchanan, but also a number of high ranking government officials. The latter inadvertently (we assume) supplied her with information she managed to get to Confederate General Pierre Beauregard, information that resulted in the defeat of the Union forces at the first battle of Bull Run. Like Mrs. Surratt, Mrs. Greenhow spent time in the Old Capitol Prison. Unlike Mary Surratt, Rose Greenhow was well-acquainted with the Old Capitol before she set foot in that building as a prisoner. Years earlier her aunt had operated a boardinghouse there. Mrs. Greenhow herself was the aunt of the beautiful Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas. Of the people who tried to see President Johnson to plead for Mary Surratt on the morning of July 7, 1865, only Mrs. Douglas was successful. She got to the President's office by pushing her way through the bayonets of the soldiers who guarded the stairway to the second floor of the White House. But to no avail; President Johnson refused to listen to her.

Not only Rose Greenhow lived on H Street near 15<sup>th</sup>, but so did Senator Ira Harris of New York. At about 8:15 on the evening of April 14, 1865, President and Mrs. Lincoln's carriage stopped at Senator Harris' residence to pick up the Senator's daughter, Clara, and Major Henry Rathbone, who was Miss Harris' fiancé as well as her step-brother. The Lincolns had invited the two young people to accompany them to Ford's Theatre to see Laura Keane in *Our American Cousin*.

Three blocks farther on H Street at 18<sup>th</sup> lived Judge David K. Cartter, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. Judge Cartter, too, was to see President and Mrs. Lincoln on the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>, but under tragic circumstances. President Lincoln lay dying in a back bedroom of the Petersen house across 10<sup>th</sup> Street from Ford's Theatre, when Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent for Judge Cartter. Judge Cartter's responsibility was to begin the questioning of witnesses and suspects, an investigation that was to culminate in the arrest of Mary Surratt and seven others—all charged with complicity in the assassination of President Lincoln.

So for Mary Surratt's story, H Street has significance far beyond the fact that it was where her house was located. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to go further and say that, where the Civil War is concerned, the "H" in H Street could stand for "history."

Sources:

Mrs. Surratt's references to "the word of a lady" and John's upbringing:  
*From War Department Files* by Surratt Society, 1980, pp. 39, 45-46.

H Street addresses of cabinet members and senators:

*The Sights and Secrets of the Nation Capital* by John B. Ellis, 1869, p. 437.

H Street the finest address:

*Mr. Lincoln's City* by Richard M. Lee, 1981, pp. 19 & 136.

Davy Herold's birthplace:

*Surratt Society News*, November 1981.

Rose Greenhow:

*Lincoln and Episodes of the Civil War* by William E. Doster, 1915, p. 81.

*Reveille in Washington*, by Margaret Leech, 1941, pp. 19, 20, 96, & 134.

Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas, only person to see President Johnson on Mrs. Surratt's behalf on July 7, 1865:

*The Alabama Lawyer*, "The Trial of Mrs. Surratt and the Lincoln Assassination Plot." Vol. 25, 1964, p. 30.

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## THE SURRATT BOARDINGHOUSE

by Joan Chaconas

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, July 1988

Early Washington City [better known today as Washington, D.C.] was a sleepy southern village, a place full of dusty roads, roaming livestock, and reluctant Congressmen—reluctant because of the weather and poor housing they had to contend with in the city, as they attempted to run the country. Because Washington City was created first for the government, making it a place for comfortable living came second.

Eventually the city became a place full of hotels and boardinghouses to accommodate the transient elected officials, contractors, lobbyists, agents of all kinds, and visitors. I use the term "transient," because no one wanted to live here permanently quite yet. [2021 Editor's Note: In fact, foreign diplomats were encouraged to leave their families at home, as it was considered a hazardous location to live. Malaria was prevalent during the summer and autumn months.]



In 1843, one such boardinghouse, valued at \$2,800, was built on H Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets. Architecturally, it was a simple, three-bay, federal style townhouse, 2½ stories high, with ten rooms, and a basement floor at street level. Historically, its description is far from simple.

It was to 541 H Street [numbered 604 today] that the widow, Mary E. Surratt, moved with her family during October and November of 1864. [Note: Her husband had died in 1862.] H

Street was a quiet, tree-lined, residential area up until the Civil War; and it is probably safe to say the street was much the same when the Surratts moved there in late 1864.

It should be stated here that the Surratt family had acquired the downtown boardinghouse on December 6, 1853, through a rather complicated business transaction acted out [think shell game] by a Washington banker, Hugh B. Sweeny. It involved Captain Augustus Gibson, then owner of 541 H Street, and John H. Surratt, Sr. The final outcome of this convoluted deal was that Mr. Surratt was able to wipe out his current debts. He walked away owning the house on H Street and with \$1,000 cash in hand.

During the time the Surratts owned the H Street house, it continued to be operated as a boardinghouse. In 1855, a Patent Office clerk named Daniel J. Brown(e) lived there. Alfred L. Tredway, a lawyer, and William H. Tredway, another Patent Office clerk, lived there in 1862 and 1863. Also living there in 1863 were Mrs. Mary E. Brainard, who worked for the Michigan Soldiers' Relief Association, and James F. Drake, a music teacher. After that, the trail grows cold on who lived there until the Surratts' [101]move in the autumn of 1864. A question that comes immediately to mind: If this was an active rooming house prior to 1864, how was it that Mrs. Surratt could move in and take over the whole house? What happened to the boarders? Did she ask them to move? Was the house sitting empty? This question has not been satisfactorily answered to date.

On November 30, 1864, however, Mrs. Surratt advertised for boarders in *The Evening Star* newspaper. She listed "two furnished rooms on the second floor, suitable for two or four gentlemen, in a pleasant locality. Terms moderate." Where this ad refers to the second floor as being available for rent, it must have meant the third floor, as we view the house today.

An outside entrance to the ground level English basement led into the kitchen and dining room area, and an inside stairway led to the upper floors. Another outside entrance, reached by climbing a flight of stairs that hugged the front of the house, led to the first floor parlor and bedroom area used by Mrs. Surratt and probably where ten-year-old Mary Apollonia Dean stayed as a boarder.

Anna Surratt and Honora Fitzpatrick shared a bedroom in the attic, while the Holohan family and Louis J. Weichmann rented rooms on the second floor, under the attic. When John Surratt, Jr., was in town, he stayed with Weichmann in his room. George Atzerodt and Lewis Powell, disguised as the Reverend Wood, also stayed at the boardinghouse briefly. John Wilkes Booth visited the house frequently to see John, Jr.; and when John wasn't there, he visited with Mrs. Surratt. [Note: At the trial, witnesses placed Atzerodt at the boardinghouse at least 20 times between January and April 14, 1865. Davy Herold only visited 541 H Street on one occasion, so far as can be determined.]

How much did it cost to stay at the Surratt boardinghouse? According to Louis Weichmann, he paid \$35 a month. One Washington City writer in 1869 stated that the cost of full board in rooming houses, that is with meals, cost from \$5 to \$25 per week. Weichmann's rent works out to a little more than \$7 per week.

The same writer mentioned above wrote that, if you boarded with a private family, you were "made to feel at home" and were privy to all the goings on in the family and house. "The landlady patronizes you in a most motherly way, and the children regard you as a brother...the young ladies are devoted to you and expect you to take them around, and spend your spare cash on them in the most liberal manner." Was Mrs. Surratt doing what all other landladies were doing, just being motherly to all her boarders and visitors? Perhaps that is all the lady was guilty of—being too friendly and motherly! Weichmann is also criticized for his damaging testimony against

Mrs. Surratt. How could he speak of Mrs. Surratt, as he did, when she treated him as a son? All questions for which we will never know the answer.

And then came the fateful year of 1865. Heavy debts incurred by her husband for over a decade had forced Mrs. Surratt into moving to the city. Her lot did not improve, and her death on the gallows only transferred the debts to her heirs. An auction of the property was the only way out. The house on H Street was sold to John C. McKelden at auction on June 26, 1866, to cover the family debts. The sale realized \$4,600 on a property that Mr. Surratt had paid \$4,000 for in 1853.

Of all the creditors to whom the Surratts owed money, only John Purdy; Thomas Bayne; Thomas Young; J.T. Walker; A.P. Hoover; Young, Simpson and Company; and Jackson and Brother proved their claims. After the above-mentioned creditors were paid and the various charges for auctioning the house settled, there remained \$2,950.95. This amount was to be divided between the three heirs: Anna, Isaac, and John, Jr. Anna's and John's shares were lessened by \$1,100 (\$550 each), as they had to pay off a \$1,000 trust, plus interest, that Mrs. Surratt had procured against the H Street home from J.T. Given on January 18, 1865. [Note: Isaac had been in the Confederate Army and was not a party to this transaction. Therefore, he was not liable for the debt.]

Thus the final distribution of money to the Surratt children was to be \$433.65 each to Anna and John, and \$983.65 to Isaac. Or was it? At this point, auditor W. Redkin stated the balance of the money would be turned over to the Prince George's County Administrator, William A. Jarboe, and he would use the money to pay off debts owed by the Surratts in Maryland. If any money was left, then the heirs would get their shares.

Here the money, \$1,850.95 to be exact, seems to disappear. In both 1876 and 1877, District Judge of the Orphans Court of Prince George's County, Edward W. Belt, ordered William A. Jarboe to come before him and explain what happened to the money. The case was never resolved. Records show that Belt received \$192.93 on January 14, 1867, "on acct. being bal. of first deferred payment." The remaining \$1,658.02 is still mysteriously lodged in the Prince George's municipal system. [Note: The Surrattsville home was also sold at public auction to Robert W. Hunter, Esq., for \$3,500 on or about March 11, 1869. By June 5, 1973, there remained \$239.28½ after various creditors had been paid. Records show no amount designated to any of the three children.]

Back to the boardinghouse: According to an article written in November of 1933 in the *American Motorist Magazine*, the new owner of the H Street boardinghouse began to immediately experience seeing Mrs. Surratt's ghost walking about the house at night. The hauntings seemed for a while to make renting the house difficult. The new owner is said to have sold the house at a loss very shortly after moving in. [2021 Editor's Note: Perhaps the article on page 14 explains that haunting?]

In 1960, John McKelway, who wrote for *The Evening Star* under the name "The Rambler," visited the H Street house. At that time, it was owned by Ng Hop. He, too, was having trouble renting rooms in the H Street house. When asked about the story that the house was haunted, he smiled and said it wasn't ghosts that kept roomers away, it was the high rent.

A Chinese grocery store was operating on the ground floor at this time, and it seems the store was a place where the older men gathered and relaxed. Mr. Hop took the Rambler into the house, up the old narrow staircase, and into what was once Mrs. Surratt's bedroom and parlor area. The Rambler noted that the house was quiet and the woodwork looked to be original.

As a result of the Rambler's story in 1960, he was contacted by a woman who told him she had once dined in the H Street house in the early 1900s. She was just a little girl at the time, but

she remembered that during that dinner the figure of a young girl passed through the room and walked upstairs. She said it was the ghost of Mrs. Surratt's daughter. The Rambler wanted to interview the lady further, but she said no and would not give her name. [Note: Anna turned 19 years old, just after the family moved to the boardinghouse.]

At one time, I was contacted by a lady who claimed to be descended from the McKelden family who had bought the house at auction. In regard to this family, there is this mysterious story. A member of the family was being interviewed; and an aunt, who was ill, complained of a loose board upstairs annoying her. A carpenter was called to nail the board down, and he discovered a bundle of papers under the loose board. The lady of the house issued an order to burn these paper, as the poor Surratts had already suffered enough adverse publicity!

Another undated article from *The Boston Post* has Mrs. Surratt "treading the halls and perambulating the premises, in the dead of night, clad in those self-same robes of serge in which she suffered the penalty of the law." [See page 15 for full article.]

Today the H Street house still stands, but it is no longer a Chinese grocery store. The first and second floors have been torn out, and the plans are for a fancy restaurant to be housed there. [2021 Editor's Note: Since 1988, it has been the location of two Chinese restaurants: Go Lo's and currently the Wok and Roll.] The house is part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor in Washington that has been designated as a historic landmark area. In conjunction with this, the Historic American Building Survey has photographed the interior as it now is. The woodwork, floors, door frames, and window frames are indeed original to the house. I have been told the flooring will be saved. There is an attempt to get the present owner to reconsider his action and to keep the historic integrity of the house intact. The exterior of the house will, undoubtedly, undergo change if the restaurant plan is carried through. Perhaps all that will remain for the curious to see will be the brass plaque placed on the house by the Chinese American Lions Club a few years ago.

Still, I feel these changes won't discourage those of us who have gotten to "know" the Surratt family and who will still go downtown to 604 H Street and gaze at the boardinghouse of Mary Surratt.

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Many of our Lincoln assassination enthusiasts would dearly love to have a tour of the inside of the famous Surratt boardinghouse, which still stands on H Street in Washington, D.C. To date, however, we know of only one of our members, who has been afforded that privilege, Mr. Harold Wang. Mr. Wang was kind enough to share his early 1980s tour with us on paper.

## **A VISIT TO THE SURRETT BOARDINGHOUSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

by Harold Wang

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News* August 1982

In the days when the various conspiracies to abduct the Civil War President were gaining momentum in the Surratt house, there was a long white wooden stairway rising along the outside front wall to the second level. Here Mrs. Surratt had her private sitting room, just off the

passageway inside the front door. She entertained many guests there. The fact that she entertained guests indiscriminately, from both the North and the South, during a time of War between the States, never appeared to be of marked importance to her.

The ground floor, in Mrs. Surratt's time, was a daylight or English basement. There was a public sitting room in front, a dining room in the middle, and a kitchen—tended by a cook, maid, and butler—in the rear. Persons could enter this dining room from the street through a door under the outside stairs. A corridor inside led to the dining room on the left and to a staircase on the right, which went to the upper levels of the house.

Behind Mrs. Surratt's second floor sitting room was a parlor, with an entrance off the staircase. When members of the Surratt household, or their guests, were in need of company, they would come to this parlor. To the rear of the back parlor were two rooms, which Mrs. Surratt used as double bedrooms for herself and a young female boarder, Mary Apollonia Dean.

Mrs. Surratt's only daughter, Anna, and Honora Fitzpatrick, who would later—though quite innocently—support the prosecution in Mrs. Surratt's trial, shared the suite in the attic. [Editor's Note: On the night of the April 17<sup>th</sup> police raid, Honora Fitzpatrick was sharing the second floor room with Mrs. Surratt, as Apollonia Dean was away visiting her mother. Anna Surratt was sharing her bedroom in the attic with her visiting cousin, Olivia Jenkins.]

The attic today is much as it was over 100 years ago. The two rooms are under the two dormers facing H Street. A small alcove with a doorless closet leads from these rooms to the stairs in the hallway along the west wall.

In the attic area, the original doors still hang on their ancient hinges. They are painted dark brown, much as they would have been in their earliest days. Most of the doors have brown speckled marble knobs and old-fashioned box locks fitted with a skeleton key. The floors, originally bare, are now covered with linoleum, but the old thresholds are still there. One can easily imagine the two girls stumbling over them in the dark of their ill-lit quarters. The original wallpaper has unfortunately been removed, and the walls are now plaster-patched and painted a dull grey.

There has been an unfortunate removal of the fireplace mantels on the second and third floors, the openings of which have been sealed. One mantel, Mrs. Surratt's, figured strongly in the evidence against the house. On it, the military detectives found a picture, "Morning, Noon, and Night," which had been a gift from Louis Weichmann, the boarder turned informer. Behind this, young Anna had secreted a photo of John Wilkes Booth, together with some others of famous Civil War generals, from both the North and the South. Anna had said she treasured them because they had belonged to her dead father. However, she could not explain away her regard for the new arch-criminal, Booth.

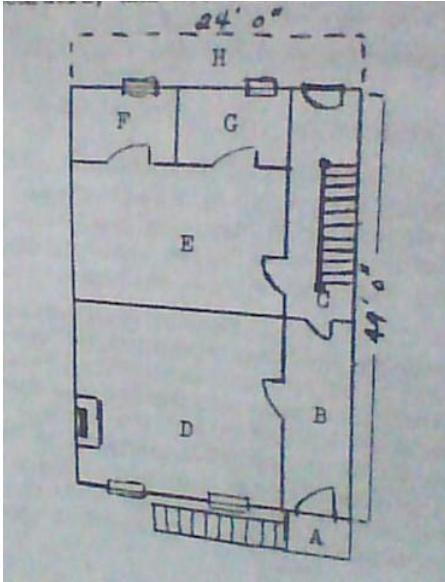
The front rooms and foyer of the third level, beneath the attic were occupied in 1865 by John Holohan and his wife and daughter. Holohan was so naïve as to claim he was unaware of what Louis Weichmann, John Surratt's friend from college days, early deduced were "strange goings on" in the Surratt house. [Note: In Holohan's defense, John Jr. was Weichmann's roommate, so he would have been more aware of John's activities.]

A breath of the old conspiracy seems still to pervade the present house. As each room, known to have been inhabited by one or another of the conspirators or family is gazed upon, the feeling of "presence" is there. A hand on the stair rail seems to quiver slightly with the thought that the hand of John Wilkes Booth passed along this glossed surface—or that of John Surratt, George Atzerodt, and (horrors) that strong and murderous hand of Lewis Thornton Powell (alias



Paine, alias Wood)! And then, there are the others—members of the household—including Anna Surratt, Louis Weichmann, and Mary Surratt herself!

With each footstep in the old house, the time of the conspirators comes back with sharp impact; it is easy to realize that such people as Mary Surratt and her unfortunate coterie inhabited this place.



### General Plan of the Second Floor

Measured and drawn by Mr. Wang using a walking tape to arrive at dimensions.

**KEY:**

- A – Small front porch to main entrance door
- B – Passage
- C – Back hall with stairs
- D – Mrs. Surratt's private sitting room (20' x 20')
- E – Back parlor (16' x 20')
- F & G – Bedrooms used by Mrs. Surratt and Honora Fitzpatrick (both 10' x 10')
- H – Original rear porch roof area

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## WHY WAS MRS. SURRATT'S HOME RAIDED ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 14-15, 1865?

by James O. Hall

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, July 1983

It would appear that the raid was set up on the basis of "information received," to use a police term. Just where the information came from is a bit murky.

On April 14, 1894, *The Evening Star* carried a story about "Tragic Memories." Former District of Columbia detective James A. McDevitt was interviewed. After Lincoln was shot, McDevitt was out on one of his "scouting expeditions," as he put it, and met a man he thought was the actor, John McCullough. As he recalled it, this man told him "to keep an eye on Mrs. Surratt's house on H Street." Based on this, the raid was set up.

McDevitt's memory could not be right as to McCullough. According to G.W. Bunker of the National Hotel, McCullough left Washington on March 26, 1865, and did not return to the hotel, where he regularly stayed. (See Poore, Vol. III, p. 60) Growing out of Weichmann's testimony, the question arose as to when McCullough actually left town. The defense tried to get McCullough's testimony (a sworn statement made to the Consul in Montreal) into evidence and this was refused. Later, with Holt's permission, McCullough's telegram to J.T. Ford was

permitted. This was dated June 2, 1865, and said that he had left Washington City on March 26, 1865, and had not been back. (See Pitman, p. 243) This hassle was started up again at the trial of John H. Surratt, Jr., in 1867. (See Vol. I, p. 412)

So, McCullough could not have been the source of the tip to McDevitt. Perhaps it was an actor, but not McCullough. Or, maybe after thirty years, McDevitt simply could not recall with precision exactly who had given him the tip.

Then, when Floyd Risvold edited and published the manuscript by prosecution witness Louis Weichmann, he included a series of letters sent to Weichmann from 1898-1901 by A.C. Richards, who was Superintendent of Police on April 14, 1865, in Washington, D.C. And here we get a slightly different slant, although it is the same idea: "Information received."

In his April 29, 1898, letter to Weichmann, Richards says the first information connecting Paine, Herold, and Atzerodt with Booth came from "a saloon keeper under or near the theatre named Ferguson, I think. We soon thereafter obtained information that John H. Surratt was often in company with these men and then that Booth had often visited or called at Mrs. Surratt's house. These facts led me to pay that house a visit that night at about one o'clock."

This caused a controversy with McDevitt, who (as indicated in Richards' subsequent letters) denied that Richards was along. He wrote to Richards, apparently, and told him that.

From other information, the raid was conducted by McDevitt, Clarvoe, Bigley, and Kelly. At no time prior to Richards' letters over thirty years later was there any hint that Richards went along or that there were two raids, as Richards later suggested, and Weichmann wrote in his book after he got in touch with Richards.

I think Richards was confused, or dredged up things from a failing memory. I don't think he was along on the raid or that there were two raids. All this came along thirty years later.

Richards' memory of getting information from a man named "Ferguson" is probably correct, although it is doubtful if he got the information in person. More likely, it came through staff work by his detectives. James P. Ferguson operated a restaurant and bar next to Ford's. This is not the Star Saloon run by Taltavul. According to James P. Ferguson, he ran the establishment at 452 10<sup>th</sup> Street, adjoining and on the "upper side." (See testimony, Poore, beginning Volume I, p. 189) The Star Saloon, according to Taltavul (See Poore, Vol. I, p. 179), was next to Ford's and on "this side." He was then giving testimony at the Arsenal, so "this side" would be the side nearest to Pennsylvania Avenue.

Ferguson did not mention giving information when he was interviewed and a statement was taken on April 15<sup>th</sup>. (See M-599, reel 4, beginning at frame 0339) Nor was he asked about this when he testified.

Conclusion: We may never know exactly where the tip came from, but the raid came about because of "information received" by the police department in Washington through its detective force. And, it was set up because the information indicated that Booth and John H. Surratt, Jr., were known to be, or reported to be, intimates. The detectives went to the boardinghouse looking for one or both, or information about them. At some time during the night, the word went out to find Surratt. By morning, after Weichmann and boarder Holohan went to the police station on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, there was a strong belief in the police force that Surratt was somehow involved; but he was *non est* (in other words, absent). Almost immediately, it was thought that he had tried to do in Seward; even though the physical description of Seward's assailant was enough to squash that. [2021 Editor's Note: Another tip resulted in a raid on April 17. However, this tip proved false. Their target John Surratt, Jr., wasn't there, but another man arrived—Lewis Powell, alias Paine.]

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Mrs. Surratt's boardinghouse at 541 (now 604) H Street has had some bad luck over the years. The raid on the night of April 17, 1865, wasn't the last raid at this address. In 1928, the Surratt boardinghouse was in the news again. The following are three versions of the same raid.

According to the January 7, 1928, issue of *The Washington Star* (a recent find):

## **OLD SURRATT HOME HUGE LIQUOR JOINT**

### **Rum Outfit Found in Residence Raided Following Lincoln Assassination.**

The famous old house at 604 H Street, from which Mrs. Surratt was taken to the gallows 63 years ago for alleged complicity in a plot to assassinate President Lincoln, was again the scene of a police raid yesterday, but the police this time were on a far different mission.

Led by Sergt. George M. Little, they broke into the house in search of liquor and found it, and one of the largest and most complete establishments for the sale of seals, bottles and kegs and other articles used in the manufacture and sale of liquor that has been found in Washington.

The confiscation of the paraphernalia was halted, however, when Bert Emerson, attorney for one of the defendants and owners of the establishment, contended that the warrant was illegal as the "8" in the 1928 part of the date had been typed over a "7." [Editor's Note: It was the first week of the new year.]

### **Doors Padlocked by Police.**

The officers conferred and decided that perhaps the lawyer was right and that they had better consult United States Commissioner Needham C. Turnage before proceeding to dismantle the place as is their usual custom. In the meantime, they padlocked the doors after taking an inventory of the stock to assure themselves that nothing would mysteriously disappear.

Twenty pints of alleged gin, 5 pints of red liquor, 25 gallons of alcohol and a 5-gallon keg of liquor were found in the house.

### **Six Arrests Made.**

Six men were arrested and charged with a violation of the national prohibition act. They were: Solomon N. Chesivoir, 24 years old; Benjamin Chesivoir; Eugene P. Smith, 26 years old; Alfred G. Mendelson, 22 years old; Charles Ryan, 26 years old; and Albert B. Stewart, 19 years old. All are charged with illegal possession of liquor and in addition Smith is charged with sale.

Besides Sergt. Little, officers making the raid were: Revenue Agents Jim Shaw, Andrew Quinn, Schultz, Harkman, and R.F. Cornett and Policemen Leo Murray, T.O. Montgomery, R.J. Barrett, J.O. Boxwell, Michael Dowd, and G.C. Deyoe.

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Meanwhile, a second version of the events is offered in the January 7, 1928, issue of *The Washington Post* (reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, September 2004):

## **HISTORIC SURRATT HOUSE SCENE OF RAID BY POLICE**

The famous Surratt House, 604 H Street, northwest, where history records that the plot to assassinate President Lincoln was worked out in detail [sic], was the scene of a raid yesterday by the flying squadron in search of liquor violations

Sixty-three years ago, Washington police visited the house on a much different mission, arresting Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, who maintained a boardinghouse there. Mrs. Surratt was hanged after having been convicted of complicity in the plot.

Yesterday's raid was fraught with difficulties quite unlike those of the earlier one. Because the typist who filled out the search warrant had a lapse of memory and wrote 1927 on the date line and then went back and made it 1928, the police flying squadron suffered an hour's delay at the place. The proprietor of the bottling company occupying the house examined the warrant and discovered the corrected error and announced that he would attack the legality of the warrant.

After a conference, the police decided not to dismantle the place, as is their custom, but instead placed revenue seals on the stock of corks, bottles, and labels, which they charged bore the names of famed liquor brands.

[Editor's Note: The article then goes on to name the six who were arrested and charged with violations of the prohibition law. All were charged with illegal possession of intoxicants and some were charged with sale and the possession of articles designed for the illegal sale of liquor.

We seem to recall that, within the past thirty years [1970s], the home was also raided for running an illegal numbers racket. Talk about a black cloud...]

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This third article was located and sent to us by member Ed Steers and is believed to have be from the February 12, 1928, edition of *The Chicago Tribune*. (Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, February 1999)

## **AND NOW IT'S PADLOCKED**

(Reported by W.R. Yahner)

### **Famous Surratt House in Washington Closed by Federal Agents**

The Surratt House on H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., where the conspirators ate, drank, and slept while they plotted the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Civil War President of the United States, has been padlocked for harboring violators of the national prohibition laws.

In that same gray, three-story brick dwelling where 63 years ago officers of the United States found the accomplices of J.W.B., murderer of the president, prohibition officials only a few

weeks ago found huge stocks of bottles, labels and corks that were being used in the illicit liquor traffic.

Today, the doors of the home of Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, which always were open to J.W.B., Lewis Payne [sic.], George Atzerodt, David E. Herold, and John H. Surratt—the arch conspirators—are tightly closed by padlocks of the United States government.

[Editor's Note: Guess this reporter believed Mary Surratt to be guilty! These are just the first three paragraphs of a full-page story which goes on to give the routine story of Booth and the assassination of Lincoln. It seems that the H Street house was doomed to a life of crime.

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Evidently Surrattsville was also in the news, according to the December 20, 1929, issue of *The Evening Star* (another recent find):

## **LEAPS FROM RUM CAR**

Special Dispatch to the Star

### **Woman, Unhampered by Long Skirts, Escapes from Liquor Auto.**

Surrattsville, Md., December 20—Apparently unhampered by the now stylish long skirts, a woman last night jumped from a liquor-laden automobile on the Southern Maryland Pike and escaped into the woods near Surrattsville with a male companion before pursuing Prince George's County police could apprehend her.

The officers—Deputy Sheriffs Hepburn and Robinson and Policeman Nichols—had another car stopped by the side of the road when they saw the woman and man drive past at a high speed. Their suspicions aroused, the officers started pursuit. About a half mile down the road, they reported finding the car abandoned and 48 gallons of whisky in it. During a search of nearby woods, the officers recovered a woman's handkerchief in which 70 cents was tied, but found no other trace of the pair.

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## **“IS THE HOUSE HAUNTED?”**

This is one of the most popular questions asked by Surratt House Museum visitors. As I've been a docent there for over 40 years and been in the house at all hours of the day and night, I can honestly say that I've never seen a ghost. But what about the H Street boardinghouse? As this is the September/October issue and Halloween is just around the corner, I thought I'd share what some past articles have said on this topic.

## **Some Tidbits...**

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, April 1996

From time to time, we run across tidbits that make for interesting reading and expand our historical horizons. In this issue, we will share some of these with you. Our first piece comes from the December 26, 1926, edition of *The Washington Herald* newspaper and was found by Michael Kauffman during his research. It fills in some blanks about the ill-fated Surratt boardinghouse on H Street in Washington, D.C.

### **[Unknown Title]**

The old Surratt house at No. 604 H Street, northwest, linked forever with the assassination of President Lincoln, where Mrs. Surratt kept boarders before her arrest and execution, is being remodeled. A shop on the ground floor, with an altogether modern front, are contemplated.

The house is now the property of Irvin Swartzman of Alexandria. The house had fallen into dilapidation. Swartzman, who purchased it recently, determined upon repairs to preserve the house, but radically to change its appearance.

### **Interest Is Forgotten**

The sight-seeing busses long ago lost interest in the house, according to residents in the vicinity. Many neighbors did not know of the house's history

About two years ago, the steps which led up to the second story of the house fell down. Previous to that time, the building had preserved its original appearance.

It had been used as a rooming house since the Civil War. At first people bid high for the concession of running it, but it never proved profitable.

There was rumor that the place was haunted by the ghost of Mrs. Surratt. It was known that few families remained in the house for any long period.

One of the ancient ghosts proved to be only an old gilt-edged curtain on the third-story window. Instead of the tapping of a ghost, it was the tapping of a ring against the window pane when the curtain was blown by the wind.

There is a story that three men on a wager determined to sleep in the house about fifty years ago. [Note: That would be around 1876.] Two of the men slept in the house all night, but the third awoke in the middle of the night and ran out into the street in hysterics.

### **House of Conspiracy**

It was to this house, according to testimony produced at the trial of Mrs. Surratt, that John Wilkes Booth came on the afternoon before Lincoln's assassination and arranged with Mrs. Surratt to provide himself and another of the conspirators with horses and guns.

Mrs. Surratt left immediately and went by horse and buggy to Surrattsville, Md., to make the arrangements. She was accompanied by Lewis Weikman [sic.], one of her boarders whose testimony afterwards convicted her. All this we have from Colonel O.H. Oldroyd, who has written a book on the assassination.

Mrs. Surratt came to Washington in 1851, after the death of her husband in Surrattsville. She moved to the H Street house and started keeping boarders as a means of livelihood. [2021

Editor's Note: Technically part of the Neale property was in D.C., so she did live in D.C. in 1851. However, Mrs. Surratt didn't move into the boardinghouse until late 1864. Also, her husband died in 1862.]

A previous scheme was laid to Mrs. Surratt; her son, John Surratt, Jr.; and Booth—that was of kidnapping Lincoln—but the surrender of Lee on April 9 precluded such an action. Booth learned on the morning of April 14 that Lincoln was to be at Ford's that night and assassinated him in his box.

John Surratt escaped and was captured two years later in Egypt. He never suffered the fate of his mother. Four of the conspirators were hanged, four were sent to prison, and Booth was shot in a barn.

Both Mrs. Surratt and her daughter, who pleaded so hard for her, are now buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery.

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## **IS MRS. SURRETT'S HOUSE HAUNTED?**

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, April 1984

This undated newspaper article was found in the *Obsequies Scrapbook* in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress, marked "Washington Correspondence, *Boston Post*," and contributed by member Mike Kauffman.

### **[Title Unknown]**

There is a three-story brick tenement, in the middle of a block fronting upon one of Washington's lesser thoroughfares that is making itself peculiarly obnoxious to timid people, and ridiculous among the stouter hearted. The building in question is none other than that belonging to Mrs. Surratt. In the course of the settlement of her estate, the house was offered for sale, and even then the public seemed shy and indifferent to the purchase, and so it came that a property worth, by moderate comparison \$10,000, fell under the auctioneer's hammer at the insignificant sum of \$4,600. The new landlord, therefore, instituted such improvements as entirely changed the aspect of the property and all but transferred its site, and in course of time came a tenant, but not to remain. In less than six weeks the lessee had flown from beneath the roof, forfeiting his year's rental, and was ready to swear with chattering teeth, that his nervous system was shattered for a lifetime. Others succeeded to the occupancy of the house he had vacated, in turn, to make a shuddering exit. Mrs. Surratt's house is haunted. There can be no reasonable doubt upon the subject. She herself persists in treading its halls, and perambulating the premises, in the dead of night, clad in those self-same robes of serge in which she suffered the penalty of the law. In costume, she differs from the "women in white" unmistakable, but that the general effect is none the less thrilling and altogether fatal to the composure of the observer, is positively averred by each successive occupant of the mansion.

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This last haunting tale about the Surratt boardinghouse is a bit more spirited and perhaps a premonition of the raids 60 years later.

## A FOLLOW-UP

Submitted by Joseph E. George  
Reprinted in *The Surratt Courier*, January 2005

The September 2004 issue of the *Courier* featured an article describing the humiliations visited upon the Surratt house in Washington following Mrs. Surratt's execution. *The Washington Post* of January 7, 1928, was quoted concerning a police raid on the building, which had presumably become an illegal establishment for the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in violation of the prohibition statute then in place. The final paragraph of the *Courier's* account expressed a belief that, more recently, police returned to that house, which had become a haven for Washingtonians addicted to the numbers racket. The *Courier* ended its article with the comment: "Talk about a black cloud..."

An unidentified newspaper clipping in the Brown University Lincoln Collection, probably printed in early 1925, noted that workmen had just begun to remodel the building for commercial purposes. "The entire appearance of the place will be changed," the newspaper explained. The ground floor was scheduled to become a "shop" and the other two floors were to be made into apartments. The article noted that up to that time the Surratt house had never been remodeled. It had been well-preserved and stayed much as it appeared during the closing days of the Civil War. The clipping ended with the comment that "since the execution of Mrs. Surratt the place has been called haunted."

We should not dismiss out of hand reports of extra-terrestrial appearances at that house on H Street. As the following article shows, reports of ghostly visitations there arose soon after its owner's death. Mrs. Surratt's immediate family must have found such reports cruelly tasteless, but 21<sup>st</sup> century readers will appreciate the humor in this account, which appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*, December 23, 1866:

### Mrs. Surratt's House in Washington

Mr. T.J. Mackey has written a letter to the *Hartford Press* in relation to the foolish statement which has been extensively published, that several families have occupied Mrs. Surratt's house in Washington since her execution, and that "none of them have been able to stay long, as she is a ghostly visitant there almost every night." Mr. Mackey says:

This statement is incorrect both in letter and in "spirit." The house referred to is, and has been for many months, the residence of Brevet Brig. Gen. Balloch, the worthy chief disbursing officer of the Freeman's Bureau. The General is a "bonny Scot," and as a true scion of the land of the thistle and heather, he allows none but good "spirits" to enter his house. Any spirit that enters his hospitable mansion must "down at his bidding," with many "punches," and the only "ghost" ever seen thus far, is that of the "bold John Barley Corn."

Yours in spirit,

T.J. Mackey



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**AND NOW FOR A TRIP INTO “THE X-FILES”  
LINCOLN SPEAKS FROM THE BEYOND!**

From the Nashville *Evening Tennessean*, January 21, 1927  
Reprinted in *The Surratt Courier*, April 1996

**LINCOLN SENDS U.S. WARNING**  
London Medium Claims to Have Received Messages.  
(by the United Press)

London. – Predictions that America is heading toward destruction as a result of a growing spirit of racial intolerance, and that women are eventually to dominate the world are contained in a series of spirit messages that Miss Margorie L. Rowe, one of England’s best known mediums, claims were dictated to her by the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. The text of these messages and the dates upon which they were received, and revealed to the United Press, as follows:

*May 18, 1926. A spirit having answered to Miss Rowe’s mediumistic call. Miss Rowe asked “Are you Abraham Lincoln?” She said the reply was “Yes, I am that Spirit. I wish a message sent to America, and I wish it sent while the American nation is contemplating its present position of racial strife and money madness and is being stripped of the ideals that I swore to uphold. I will come again soon. Good Night...Abraham Lincoln.*

Two days later came another message, says Miss Rowe, in which Lincoln’s spirit dictated:

*Merged in the class warfare of the American race is an idealism that has up to the present time saved America from another civil war. But the lessons of the past are gradually unlearned, and as I see it the American structure is verging on the downward plunge into the abyss of decadence.*

On May 27, says Miss Rowe, the spirit of Lincoln dictated another message amplifying the dangers now faced by the spirit of self-indulgence, pursuit of money, and religious intolerance. From then on nothing was heard from his spirit until November 13, when the transcript of his message reads:

*My friends, I wish to emphasize the need for a wider comprehension of my tenets to which I could when I was on the earth plane. Women in their newer outlook have ousted them from the ruts in which they were content to lie. Women as a sex are to dominate the world. Science, medicine, and the church have already welcomed her into their ranks. But as yet her influence is just beginning to be felt. It is womanhood who will rise above the Spirit of American racial hatreds and eventually save American civilization from the doom toward which it now seems to be headed. But of this I may have more to say later.*

*Abraham Lincoln*

Miss Rowe said that she did not actually hear the voice of the spirit of Lincoln, but that the processes were received telepathically and transcribed by her in the form of automatic writing.

Editor's Note: You can take your own views on the veracity of the medium, but re-read the date the article was originally published. This appeared in 1927, nearly 70 years ago [make that 94 years now]; yet its references to racial discord, money madness, and the rising feminism movement make it seem current.