

The Surratt Courier

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

While confirming information for my September message, I stumbled across an article that appeared in the October 13, 1912, issue of *The Evening Star*. In rather flowery language, it describes the terrain along the roads that lead to John and Mary Surratt's first home. The little frame house was close to the mill that John Surratt operated. Later in the article, it mentions the family's move to the Surratt Tavern. It also describes the current (1912) fate of both the mill and tavern properties. By then, the mill property had been sold several times, and the mill had long since ceased operation. As for the Surratt Tavern, it was once again being operated as an inn. (See page 4 for full article.)

When I read the article, there was one sentence that really got my attention. "The miller's home burned down and the family took refuge in a house still standing at Congress Heights and still occupied by the lady who received the Surratts after their misfortune—Mrs. Annie Hoyle." Why did this get my attention? There were several reasons. First, I thought that the Surratts were living on the "Pasture and Gleaning" property by 1851. Second, I thought it was Mary's cousin Thomas Jenkins (they shared great grandparents), who took her family in after the fire. Third, I thought Thomas Jenkins house was torn down by Union troops. Further research was needed. Here is what I found:

1) John Surratt may have operated a mill in the early years of their marriage. However, by 1845, they were living on the "Pasture and Gleaning" property to be close to Sarah Neale. Richard Neale had died in 1843, and Sarah's health was failing and she needed

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.**

March 28, 2020 – **Anna Ella Carroll: Fact or Fiction?** Mary Margaret Revel Goodwin of the Maryland Museum of Women's History introduces us to this controversial Maryland woman, who some historians believed was an advisor to President Lincoln and General Grant on military strategy. Free at 4 pm.

April 3-5, 2020 – **21st Annual Symposium Lincoln Assassination Studies: Snapshots from the Big Picture.** This weekend conference includes off-site bus tours, Authors' Hour, and a dinner program. Registration and payment required in advance. Visit surrattmuseum.org for details.

April 11, 18, and 25, 2020 – **John Wilkes Booth Escape Route Tours.** Narrated bus tour from 7 am to 7 pm. Reservation and payment required in advance. Call 301-868-1121 to check on space availability.

This newsletter is a monthly publication of The Surratt Society, a non-profit volunteer affiliate of Surratt House Museum a historic property of The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission, 9118 Brandywine Road, Clinton, MD 20735. 301-868-1121. Visit surrattmuseum.org. Annual membership is \$10.

President's Message –con't

help. Before her death in August of 1845, Sarah would turn over the remainder of the Neale property to John Surratt. It was around 1851 that the house they were living in burned down.

Arson was suspected.

2) Thomas Jenkins and his wife Charity Ann sheltered Mary and her children for over a year. In the meantime, John was elsewhere. He had formed a contracting company with his friend, David Barry, to work on the extension of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The project ended in December of 1851. By January 1852, John had purchased land at the intersection of Marlboro-Piscataway and New Cut Roads from Charles Calvert. The perfect location for a tavern. By the end of 1852, the tavern/house was completed, but for some unknown reason Mary and the children moved to a house on the "Pasture and Gleaning" property. However, by the end of 1853, Mary and the children would finally be in their new home in what would become known as Surrattsville. John's selling the "Pasture and Gleaning" property in May of 1853 may have had something to do with this move.

3) As for the question about Thomas Jenkins' house, according to Betty Trindal's book, *Mary Surratt An American Tragedy*, the house was torn down by Union troops. Her source was another "Rambler" article from *The Evening Star* dated November 3, 1912. According to the article, "A long forgotten burial plot and the foundation of an old house have been unearthed on the rifle range of the National Guard of the District of Columbia. What was a mystery at the time of the discovery has been cleared away by inquiry.

"There stood the home of Phillip Evans and later of Thomas Jenkins of Thomas, men who owned large tracts of land in the Congress Heights region and to whom belonged the land on which District Guardsmen work with rifles and revolvers. When the civil war broke out, this house was owned and occupied by Thomas Jenkins of Thomas, "of Thomas" being added to

distinguish him from Thomas Jenkins, a kinsman, who owned land and lived in that neighborhood. Jenkins of Thomas lived there with his family. One of his daughters, Mrs. Annie Hoyle, is living on part of the Jenkins estate about three-quarters of a mile west of the rifle range. The old Jenkins house stood under the lea of the northward ridge and faced east. It was one of the large and fine homes of that neighborhood of planters.... In 1861, the house was torn down by order of Col. McCarthy, commanding a New York infantry regiment, and its lumber was used in the construction of officers' quarters between Fort Snyder, which stood on the crest of the ridge near the entrance to the rifle range, and Forts Wagner and Baker, near Good Hope."

This brings us to the question, who was Annie Hoyle? Thomas and Charity Ann Jenkins had a daughter, also called Charity Ann. She was born 1847 and was known as Annie. She would marry a man 30 years her senior named Henry J. Hoyle in 1878. Ironically, in 1861 Henry had served in Owens' Militia Calvary Company for the defense of the Capital.

Why did Annie Jenkins tell this tale? At this point, we will probably never know. As Annie was born around 1847, she would have been very young when fire happened in 1851. However, when her family home was torn down, she would be in her teens. Perhaps the house she was living in at the time of the "Rambler's" interview was the Jenkins' new home that replaced the destroyed house.

Now this is where the story gets interesting. I'll share what I found out next month.

Hope to see you at the conference.

LOUISE OERTLY, President

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The Autopsy of Abraham Lincoln, Part 1
Being a Brief Description of the Autopsy and the Participants
 by Paul T. Fisher, D.D.S.

“He is gone. He is dead.”

With those words, Surgeon General Joseph K. Barnes confirmed what every doctor in the room most likely already knew. The earthly life of the sixteenth president of the United States had come to its tragic end at 7:22 on the morning of April 15, 1865. Their work complete and with nothing left to do, the doctors and others present in the Petersen house made their way out into the Washington streets. Later that morning, Lincoln’s body was taken to the White House and prepared for an autopsy.

Typically, autopsies are performed when the cause or manner of death is not readily apparent and the death is unexplained or if more questions need to be answered following someone’s death. In the case of Abraham Lincoln, it certainly wouldn’t take a trained medical eye to ascertain that his death was due to a gunshot wound to the back of his head. Nevertheless, given the subject and the historical significance of the event resulting in the death of the president, it is not surprising that an autopsy would be obtained. This author has also seen before that the reasoning for the autopsy was that it wouldn’t be proper for the President of the United States to be buried with a bullet still lodged in his head! In a second floor guest room at the White House, an ad hoc table was made for the doctors to conduct a postmortem on Lincoln.¹ Two physician would be performing the autopsy, Dr. Edward Curtis and Dr. Joseph Woodward. Both obtained their M.D. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania (Woodward in 1853 and Curtis in 1864) and held the position of assistant surgeon in the Union army.²

Lincoln’s autopsy certainly had no shortage of physicians present. Doctors Barnes, Stone, Crane, Notson, and Taft were there in addition to Curtis and Woodward. Other non-physicians were also present as observers. Dr. Curtis was running late, but, once he arrived, the work began. Any postmortem begins with an examination of what is outside the body, i.e. external wounds or features. Dr. Woodward described the entry wound as entering the occipital bone, approximately one inch to the left of the median line and superior to the lateral sinus (and not behind the left ear, as is commonly reported). The scalp was opened and reflected to expose the underlying bone of the skull. To access the brain, the top of the skull or calvarium, was removed using a bone saw.

Once the bone had been separated from the rest of the skull, the tough covering of the brain, known as the dura mater (quite literally, “tough matter”) was removed. The doctors removed the brain and, in the process of lifting it from the skull, a clattering sound was heard. Dr. Curtis looked down and noticed “a little black mass no bigger than the end of my finger.”³ Dr. Stone reported at the trial of the conspirators that he took the bullet and inscribed the letters “AL” on it and sealed the lead ball in an envelope. (The bullet can be seen today at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Silver Spring, Maryland.)⁴ After the bullet was located, Woodward made sections to determine the track that the bullet took through the president’s brain. A full examination was not deemed necessary, as it was quite obvious to those present what had killed Lincoln. Some today would probably prefer to have had a more in-depth autopsy, as many researchers have questions about whether Lincoln suffered from a genetic condition known as Marfan syndrome or if he had a rare type of cancer called MEN2B (multiple endocrine neoplasia type 2b). Such questions may never have any answers, but that is a discussion for another time!

Upon concluding their autopsy of President Lincoln (limited as it was), the doctors turned the body over to the morticians for preparation for the funeral. Although not specifically detailed, it is assumed that the brain of Lincoln was placed back into the cranial vault, the calvarium cap replaced, and

the scalp sutured back into place to restore Lincoln's appearance as much as possible. Since the brain had been removed, this meant that the blood vessels leading into and out of the brain had been severed. Embalming works by pumping preservative chemicals into the cardiovascular system and, thereby, to the rest of the body. The fluid would most likely not be able to properly fix the brain, resulting in rapid decay, as would be seen in a non-embalmed body. I think Dr. E. Lawrence Abel said it best in his book, *A Bullet in Lincoln's Brain*. He writes: "Ironically, this means that the brain that had kept the country together during the long-drawn-out war would decay while the tired body that had housed it was immortalized."⁵

¹ Edward Curtis, Letter, U.S. National Library of Medicine. "The Autopsy of President Abraham Lincoln," accessed January 29, 2020. www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/lincoln.html

² Wayne Temple, *Lincoln's Surgeons at his Assassination* (Mayhaven Publishing, Inc., 2015), 140-143

³ Edward Curtis, Letter, U.S. National Library of Medicine. "The Autopsy of President Abraham Lincoln," *ibid*.

⁴ Edward Steers, *The Trial* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 82

⁵ E. Lawrence Abel, *A Finger in Lincoln's Brain* (Praeger, 2015) 126-127

The Surratt Mill

(The following article was printed in the January 1979 issue of the *Surratt Courier*. Dr. Richard Mudd had loaned his Surratt family files to the Surratt Society. Among those papers was a newspaper article that Laurie Verge provided to the *Courier* with some additional information.)

Upon their marriage in 1840, John and Mary Surratt had settled on Neale family lands on what was then termed Oxon Hill Hundred. John Surratt had inherited these lands from his foster parents, and the young couple would see their three children born on this land before circumstances lead to their departure in 1852 for new lands in what become known as Surrattsville.

The October 13, 1912, issue of *The Evening Star* contains an article entitled "With the Rambler" with a subtitle of "In the Odd Nooks and Crannies about the City". One of the "odd nooks" is the Surratt Mill. Here is how the Rambler described that mill:

"Travel a mile south and west of Congress Heights along the main road that leads into Maryland. It is a smooth and oiled road and a large volume passes over it. When you have traveled the distance mentioned, you will come to a fork of the road. In the angle of the parting ways is a vegetable and flower garden with cosmos, dahlias and other autumn flowers. Turn to the left. You will then be on Livingston Road and in a few rods will begin the descent of Swallow Hill. Here the road passes down the east slope of the high and long ridge that rises to the eastward of the Eastern Branch, parallels the Potomac for about three miles and terminates opposite Alexandria. A third of a mile from the road-fork one will come to a stream swiftly flowing in its narrower reaches over a bed of pebbles and larger stones, but widening out in places and forming pools still enough to reflect the greenery growing on the banks. This is Oxon Run.

"The road crosses the stream in two ways by bridge and ford. At the south end of the bridge a sandy weed-grown road leads to the left and points the way to an old brick house on the northwest slope of the ridge easterly and southerly of Oxon Run. The valley of the run is broad and flat and, through it, the course of the stream is traced by a line of willows and birches. On the left of the sandy and weedy

road is a thicket of young silver poplars sprung from the roots of trees long fallen. All around this place the weeds are of riotous growth.

“In this tangle may be traced an old ditch and by the side of this ditch are several big stone discs with radiating channels. Once they were clean and gray, but now they are green and black with mold. They are mill stones and the ditch was a mill race fed by Oxon Run.

“Long before the Civil War, the mill that ground gran here was owned by John Surratt, who lived in a little frame house close to the mill with his wife Mary and three children, Annie, John, and Isaac.

“The miller’s home burned down and the family took refuge in a house still standing at Congress Heights and still occupied by the lady who received the Surratts after their misfortune—Mrs. Annie Hoyle. Soon after the fire, the Surratts moved away to keep a little tavern at a crossroads that came to be called after this family, Surrattsville. Now and for many years, this crossroads with its house of entertainment and blacksmith shop has been officially called Clinton. It is so set down in the Postal Guide and on the maps of the geological survey, but it is almost invariably spoken of by the people of the region as Surrattsville, or simply as Surratts. It has developed within recent time into a little village with two churches, a school, three stores, and a string of dwellings by the roadside. The Surratt house is still standing, remodeled, and is again an inn where wayfarer may find refreshment.

“The Surratt mill near Congress Heights passed into the possession of a newcomer about the time of the outbreak of the Civil War. His name was Condon and this name may be found on the engineers’ topographic map of defenses of Washington published in 1865. Condon built the brick house on the ridge to which the sandy and weedy little road leads. It is a two-story house with outside chimneys at the ends, a hip roof covered with moss-green shingles, a dormer window, and a collapsing porch. The mill decayed and passed away during the war and the property came into the use of a family named Wahler. New subdivisions are crowding it now.”

Note: To place the location of this original Surratt homestead more clearly, to those who are familiar with the Washington area, it would lie today in a triangle formed by Atlantic Street and Livingston Road behind Greater Southeast Hospital and near St. Elizabeths Hospital property.

***Maryland Lost and Found*, by Eugene L. Meyer: An Appreciation**
by Bob Allen

Ever since this book was published more than three decades ago, it has had an honored place on my living room shelves alongside some of my other favorite local history and Civil War tomes. Though, like most of my other books, it has at times gathered dust, it’s also served as a touchstone of sorts over the years. Whenever I need inspiration, or am in need of a refresher of what solid grassroots reportage and fine writing is all about, I’ll pull down *Maryland Lost and Found* and thumb through its 16 chapters.

Taken as a whole, *Maryland Lost and Found* offers a deep dive into some distinct and often eccentric subcultures, lifestyles, and professions that exist, or once existed, within the geographically diminutive state of Maryland. We get to read about them here from the perspective of hindsight afforded by the 30-plus years since Meyers wrote about them.

As the author explains in his introduction, “The subject is one state, but it’s broader than that, really. For to write about Maryland is, in a sense, to write about America. The late Governor Theodore

R. McKeldin aptly name it 'America in Miniature.' Indeed, within its borders is a generous slice of American pie: megalopolis, Appalachia, the Chesapeake Bay, the Deep South, the Industrial North, rich farmland, a major port, the nation's capital, and the primary car and rail routes carrying East Coast interstate traffic... If the state lacks coherence—and I contend it does—it is this fact that makes it so endlessly fascinating.”

There are three chapters in *Maryland Lost and Found* that are most likely to interest the *Surratt Courier*'s readers:

The chapter “Maryland, C.S.A.” deals with the Civil War. More specifically, it vividly recounts the ardent pro-Southern factions that existed in Montgomery County in that long-gone era when, as Meyer puts it, “the down-county suburbs of Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, Wheaton, and Bethesda didn't yet exist.” It's hard to imagine that Confederate militias once drilled and cavalry skirmishes were once fought in a Maryland county that many outsiders envision as nothing more than a bland, traffic-choked *suburbanopolis*. Meyer's recounts in this chapter, how scores of Montgomery Countians crossed the Potomac into Virginia and joined the Southern armies. Others stayed home and found their own ways to support the Confederate cause. One of them was Thomas Gott, who... “was held at Washington's Capitol Prison for erecting a cannon on his farm to shell the 8th Illinois Cavalry and was imprisoned at Point Lookout in St. Mary's County.”

In the introduction to *Maryland Lost and Found*, Meyer recalls a run-in with the late Louise Mudd Arehardt, the youngest granddaughter of Dr. Samuel Mudd. Until shortly before her death in 2002 at age 84, she would greet visitors at the Mudd House Museum. Louise deserves everlasting credit for spearheading the effort to save her grandfather's home and establish it as an historic site. (She always claimed that her grandfather bestowed that mission upon her when he came to her one night in a dream.) Yet, as some of us old-timers remember, she did not brook dissension lightly. If you were insolent or heedless enough to challenge her iron-clad conviction that he infamous grandpa was anything other than a “good Union man,” who had absolutely no idea who John Wilkes Booth was when Mudd set his broken leg, you might get personally escorted off the premises. (James O. Hall had to stay on the bus when leading Booth Escape Route Tours.) Apparently, the Mudd House Docent-in-Chief made as big an impression on Meyer as the rest of us. He noted Louise's “palpable outrage [as she] described the depredations of Union troops around the family's homestead during the search for the assassin. She was born after Dr. Sam's death, but she spoke as if the events had taken place the day before.”

Meyer's chapter, “Life after Slots” paints a vivid and colorful portrait of the post-World War II era, when Maryland was the only state besides Nevada with legalized slot machine gambling and Southern Maryland was its epicenter. In fact, the region was often referred to as “Little Nevada.” Its taverns, grocery stores, drug stores, filling stations, and VFR and American Legion halls were home to nearly 5,000 “one-armed bandits” that sucked in as much as \$18 million a year. During the heyday of slots, license fees for the machines accounted for one-quarter of Charles County's annual budget. As Meyer recalls, with tongue-somewhat-in-cheek: “It sounded so quaint. Indeed, it's hard to imagine a time when 20 miles of U.S 301 from the Prince George's County line to the Potomac River were, as a 1955 pup publication put it, ‘a wide-open strip.’ B.W. Van Block, writing in *Man's Conquest*, also described it as ‘Felony Row...one of the most tawdry, squalid and sordid stretches of autobahn I've ever seen...razzle-dazzle neon squalor set in the middle of Maryland tobacco fields.”

In his chapter, “Pride in Tobacco,” Meyer reports on Southern Maryland's formidable tobacco-growing industry, which was endangered but still thriving in the 1980s. It has since almost vanished. As part of his research, the author attended a meeting of the Maryland Tobacco Growers Association in Waldorf, Maryland, which then represented the region's 2,500 or so tobacco farms. In addressing his “congregation,” the association's general manager proclaimed (once again, *my italics*): “No one has

established tobacco smoking is directly linked to cancer. The Tobacco Institute (a national trade organization) and all forces are enlisting support to spread the word and combat this American Cancer Society program....We're having enough problems with labor and weather. We don't need this harassment. If everyone would go home and write their opposition to the American Cancer Society, it would be a big help." [How times and research have changed minds.]

Recently, I happened across a mini-review of *Maryland Lost and Found* that I posted some time ago on Amazon books. I honestly don't remember writing it, much less when I wrote it. Yet I stand resolutely behind it: "I have lived in Maryland my entire life (with the exception of a few years between 1985 and 1994), and through the years I've done a lot of travel writing. This is an absolutely fabulous book: a must-read for anyone interested in the fascinating quirks and hidden stories in Maryland's geography and history. I think I'm familiar with just about every history/travel book that's been written on 'The Free State,' and this is certainly one of the best, and perhaps the best ever. Utterly fascinating and delightful reading."

Note: Eugene L. Meyer covered Maryland and the greater Mid-Atlantic region for the *Washington Post* for a number of years, and much of the material in *Maryland Lost and Found* was adapted from his articles. His books, *Maryland Lost and Found* (1986 edition) and *Maryland Lost and Found...Again* (more recent 2003 edition), are available online. Meyer's most recent book, *Five for Freedom: The African American Soldiers in John Brown's Army* (2018), won the 2019 Outstanding Biography/History Award from the National Society of Journalists and Authors.