

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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President's Message

The Surratt Society's conference this past April featured presentations by Dr. Kate Larson on Mary Surratt and by Julian Sher on the Confederate government's operations in Canada. In the May/June 2023 issue of the *Courier*, Mr. Sher wrote an article based on his recently published book, *The North Star—Canada and the Civil War Plots Against Lincoln*. The other article in that issue was reprinted from the December 7, 1870, edition of *The [Washington] Evening Star*, featuring John Surratt's Rockville, Maryland, lecture on his connection with John Wilkes Booth, the Lincoln assassination, and his escape to Canada.

There wasn't room for the following article from the December 10, 1870, edition of *The New York Herald*, regarding New York's response to John Surratt's speech.

ASSASSINATION OF LINCOLN John H. Surratt at Cooper Institute

An audience numbering 300 people assembled last night last evening at Cooper Institute to hear John H. Surratt lecture on his trial for and subsequent acquittal [sic] of the assassination of President Lincoln.

So small a number gathered together in so large a hall reminded us of Captain Mayne Reid's oft repeated descriptions of an oasis in a prairie. [Editor's Note: Fellow writer and drinking companion, Edgar Allan Poe, called Reid "a colossal but most picturesque liar. He fibs on a surprising scale but with the finish of an artist, and that

is why I listen to him attentively."'] Whether they were the wonted "deadheads" that appertain to newly started lecturers who embrace their calling from "pecuniary motives solely" rather than possessing any fitness for their business, it is difficult to say; but, with some few exceptions, they (the audience) were undoubtedly enthusiastic admirers of John H. Surratt or John H. Surratt's lecture.

As Mr. Surratt's lecture, by him at Rockville, Maryland, has been already given at length in these columns, it need not here be repeated. Suffice it to say that it was dull, stupid and uninteresting to a degree.

It reminded one more of a schoolboy repeating his lesson, rather imperfectly committed to memory, than will, perhaps, even the irrepressible George Francis Train. [Editor's Note: Train organized the Pacific Union Railroad and his world travels are believed to be the inspiration for Jules Verne's character, Phineas Fogg.]

Of interruptions there were not a few. The lecturer becoming very severe on

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Mr. Louis Weichmann, a bald-headed gentleman rose from his seat and, in a very excited manner and with a very gruff voice, professed himself entirely anxious to know who the said Louis J. Weichmann was, where he resided, &c. Of course the impatient audience called him to order, and called on Mr. Surratt to proceed.

“Go on! Go on!” was the cry from the two hundred and fifty [sic] “deadheads,” and go on Mr. Surratt did, until he arrived at the last page and line of the manuscript on the desk before him. Some two or three others, no doubt emulous of the “bald-headed,” who hungered for information made feeble inquiries; and although they failed to elicit anything that was not shown on the manuscript, they managed to relieve somewhat the monotony of the lecture, or explanation, or whatever Mr. Surratt chooses to call this trash of his, on what is to all a disagreeable and painful subject.

I couldn't resist sharing this article. I'm not sure how many of you caught the use of the term “deadhead,” but it certainly caught my attention. For a moment, my brain went from Lincoln assassination to 20th century rock bands. However, a quick internet search revealed that the following uses/definitions of the word:

- Person who is boring or stupid
- Non-enterprising person who is not paying their way
- Vehicle travelling without passenger or goods
- Removing dead flowers from plants
- Fan of the American rock band the Grateful Dead

I have a feeling that the author of this article may have been using the first two definitions in reference to John Surratt and his lecture.

Louise Oertly, President

The John Wilkes Booth Escape Route Tours have been cancelled for September 2023.

Mrs. Surratt: Did She or Didn't She?

By Laurie Verge

Laurie Verge was the Director of the Surratt House Museum for 45 years, until her death in 2020. She gave the following presentation at the Surratt Society's 2003 conference:

I was lying in a hospital bed being threatened with a blood transfusion. The guilt or innocence of Mary Surratt was not foremost on my mind. Luckily, I had already done about 75% of this talk, so I figured I just had to put an ending to it. However, your personal health can also make you do strange things. The more I thought about it, the more I decided I was going to say what I really thought—so here goes...

“She wasn’t the gentle lady they portrayed her as.”

“She used to come down to T.B. to use the blacksmith, and she would be cursing and damning the black-hearted Lincoln.”

“You don’t need to offer your sympathies. She got exactly what she deserved.”

Such were the statements I heard as a child growing up in the family home in T.B. [a town about five miles south of Clinton, formerly Surrattsville, Maryland] from a grandmother, born in 1874, who had heard them from her father and mother. My uncle, born in 1902, reiterated that he had heard the same things at his grandmother’s knee. In regards to the last quote, it supposedly came from Mary Surratt’s younger brother, James Archibald Jenkins, when my great-grandfather offered his condolences upon the death of Mrs. Surratt.

Needless to say, I was raised with a slightly jaded opinion of Mrs. Surratt. However, as I got really interested in the Lincoln assassination as a teenager, I realized that authors on the subject sort of danced around the issue. Some were very sympathetic to the lady, and others fell back to the old line that her guilt or innocence was still under debate. Over the years, I have come to understand why everyone danced around. Mrs. Surratt is not as easy case to solve.

We are very precise at the Surratt House Museum to advise our volunteers that we do not take a stand one way or the other as to the lady’s guilt or innocence. Volunteers can express personal opinions within reason, as long as they are clearly saying that it is their opinion. Well, that’s what I’m doing today. This is my personal interpretation of the guilt or innocence of Mary Elizabeth Jenkins Surratt.

I think in order to understand the situation that Mrs. Surratt found herself in, one has to look to her roots. As we all know, the Lincoln assassination conspiracy did not happen in a vacuum. If we were to trace its roots completely back, we would have to go to the year 1619 and trace the slavery issue in America. Of course, we won’t [have time to] do that. But let’s start at the year 1823. That is the year that Mary Jenkins was born into a family with close ties to the soil. Her family were farmers. Her maternal grandfather an overseer on one of the great Calvert plantations, and when her father died—when she was just two years old—his estate consisted of eleven enslaved persons. His widow never remarried, which was rare in those days, and managed to acquire more enslaved and to increase the family’s land holdings.

When Mary married John Harrison Surratt in 1840 [she was 17; he was 27], she married into another family of enslavers. As each of her three children was born, they received an enslaved personal servant from their paternal grandmother. And, we know from census records that the Surratts owned as many as seven enslaved a one time. [Keep in mind that until 1864, Maryland was a slave state.] This was a fairly large holding for a small southern Maryland farmer of the time. As we tell our visitors at the Museum, the Surratts were enslavers, as were most of their neighbors. It was a way of life that they were born into, and when the slavery issue divided the nation, it did the same to the State of Maryland. Mr. Lincoln received only one vote from the men of Prince George’s County [and less than 2.5% of the popular vote in the entire state of Maryland] in the election of 1860. Over 40% of the men in the county were slaveholders, the largest percentage of any of Maryland’s counties. While many wished to support the Union, there was virtually no support for the abolitionist movement. To keep the critical border state passive, the new administration indicated that Marylanders could keep their enslaved and that they would not be forced to take up arms against the South. That situation was changing by 1864.

The Surratts' oldest son, Isaac, left home on Lincoln's Inauguration Day in 1861. He headed west and soon joined a Texas cavalry unit, fighting for the Confederacy throughout the war. While Isaac headed to war, his father was holding down a tavern that was a hotbed of secessionism. The Federal government maintained lists of people suspected of secessionist activities in the county. If Mr. Surratt's name did not appear at the top of those local lists, he was usually number 2. In a letter written by his daughter, Anna, following his sudden death in the summer of 1862, we learn that he had entertained "a gentleman from across the river" (an obvious reference to a Confederate agent) the night before his death and was excited about the southern victories and the prospect that the confederate flag might be planted on Maryland soil.

We know that the family home was also a safe house on the Confederate underground. Interestingly, it was listed specifically on Confederate intelligence reports as late as the last quarter of 1864 (two years after Mr. Surratt's death), and Confederate agent Augustus Howell was arrested at the tavern in the spring of 1865. And, of course, the younger Surratt son, John, was a Confederate courier. In his 1870 lecture at Rockville, Maryland, he said that he came home from college in July of 1861 and became involved in sending secret messages while barely 18. Other operatives such as Sarah Slater, a favorite subject of James O. Hall, are known to have visited the Surratts' Washington boardinghouse and home after the family's move there in 1864. Given all this southern feeling surrounding her, how can anyone assume that Mary Surratt was oblivious to it and a loyal supporter of the Federal Government?

However, if the authorities were to use only this background as evidence of conspiracy to murder the President of the United States, they would have to indict many thousands of people. Mary Surratt and her family were not unique.

So, when did fate step in and decide to put Mary Surratt's name in the history books? The downward spiral started in mid-November of 1864, when Dr. Samuel A. Mudd went to a church outside his own parish [St. Mary's Catholic Church in Bryantown, Maryland] and was introduced to John Wilkes Booth. Mrs. Surratt's fate was sealed a month later when her youngest son was introduced to Booth by Dr. Mudd in the middle of Seventh Street in Washington, D.C. This introduction came on December 23, 1864, and Surratt and his companion, Louis Weichmann, a school chum and boarder at the H Street home, went back to Booth's hotel room with Mudd for a meeting. From that point on, young John was obviously a part of the kidnap plot that Booth had been brewing. Within ten days, he had deeded over to his mother all of his share in existing family properties and made it known that he might be unavailable. If something went wrong, he could be accused of being a traitor and the property could be seized. His deeding it over to his mother assured its protection. Surely, she had to have a feeling that he was up to something a little more involved than his usual courier activities. But, did it mean that she had knowledge of what was really going on?

I contend that most mothers have an inkling of what's going on. Her suspicions must have been aroused when John Wilkes Booth began visiting her H Street boardinghouse. If Tom Cruise showed up on my doorstep today, I would want to know why. Booth visited frequently and had private conversations with Mrs. Surratt, if her son were not at home. Granted, the actor was smooth, polished, and perfectly capable of fooling people, but what reason did he have for striking up an acquaintance with the lady—if she could not be of use to him. His mind was on bigger things than befriending a simple boardinghouse matron. Louis Weichmann supposedly suspected things. He later contended that he reported his suspicions to others at his work in the War Department's Commissary Office for Prisoners by late March.

And there were others showing up also. George Atzerodt was brought there by John Surratt to board. That only lasted one day. Momma Surratt found liquor bottles in the room and out he went—as a boarder, not as a visitor. Even though young Anna complained about having “such a stick” around, Atzerodt was a frequent visitor and often was in the company of Louis Weichmann.

Near the end of February 1865, a tall, good-looking lad calling himself “Wood” appeared at the door and asked for John Surratt. John wasn’t home, so Weichmann took him to Mrs. Surratt. After a chat, Mrs. Surratt sent him up to Weichmann’s room and arranged for a meal to be sent to him. He stayed only one night that time, but Mrs. Surratt would have further contact with him—both on and off her property.

Powell returned to the Surratt boardinghouse on the evening of March 14. This time, he posed as a Baptist preacher, the Reverend Mr. Paine. He joined with Anna, Mrs. Surratt, and other boarders in a little parlor musicale before retiring to the attic room, where he had previously stayed. [2023 Editor’s Note: Did no one in the boardinghouse notice the change of Powell’s alias to Paine from the previously used Woods?] The following day, John Surratt returned and met with Powell. The attempt to kidnap President Lincoln occurred just two days later.

The beginning of the end for Mrs. Surratt came on March 17. This was the date of the failed kidnap attempt against the President. Weichmann later said that he came home that evening to find Mrs. Surratt in tears, crying that “John has gone away.” John had gone away on Confederate business quite often in the past. Why would this particular departure upset her so, if she didn’t know that something much bigger was afoot? But John didn’t go away that day. He soon returned, as did Booth and Powell—and all were in a foul humor. Their kidnap plan had failed. I think the events of that day led to the execution of Mrs. Surratt.

As part of the well-known kidnap attempt against President Lincoln, David Herold was sent ahead to Surrattsville in Booth’s buggy with rifles, ammunition, rope, and a monkey wrench. He stayed there for a while and then told the tavern’s tenant, John M. Lloyd, that he had to go down the road to T.B. He stayed at the hotel there all night, but his cohorts failed to show up with the captured President. Herold started back to Washington the next morning. Between Surrattsville and T.B., he was met by Surratt and Atzerodt. It was decided to return to the tavern at Surrattsville to hide the rifles and other items in an attic area accessed over the present day kitchen. The rope began to close around Mrs. Surratt’s neck.

That same day, March 18, Powell headed to Baltimore and then to New York. There is even some speculation that Powell went with Booth to Canada to meet with operatives there. By March 27, though, Powell was back in Washington. This time a room was reserved for him—by a young Surratt friend—at the Herndon House at Ninth and F Streets, just a few blocks from the Surratt boardinghouse. John Surratt double-checked to confirm the reservation. It was while Powell was staying there that Mrs. Surratt did something suspicious. Louis Weichmann would later remember that sometime during Lent, he had been at church with Mrs. Surratt, daughter Anna, niece Olivia Jenkins, and boarder Nora Fitzpatrick. They had attended St. Patrick’s at the corner of Tenth and F Streets. On the way home, he claimed that Mrs. Surratt stopped in front of the Herndon House and announced that she was going in to see Paine. She went in alone while the others walked around the square. When they returned, she was descending the front steps. Nora Fitzpatrick confirmed the visit under oath, but said that Mrs. Surratt did not specify who she was going to see. Who else could it be, and how did Mrs. Surratt know that he was back in town? This has always been a nagging little question in the back of my mind.

There are other little things that won’t go away. Booth arrived back in Washington on March 25, and Mrs. Surratt sent Weichmann to the National Hotel to ask the actor to call on her.

He did so on March 26, the day after Mrs. Surratt and her son had escorted Confederate agent Sarah Slater to the tavern at Surrattsville. John had continued on to Richmond with the lady, but Mrs. Surratt returned to the city and immediately wanted to see Booth. This appears to be more than just a casual friendship. She beckons and Booth comes? If his business were with her son, why is he coming at the lady's bidding? Both Booth and Atzerodt showed up on that afternoon of March 26. Weichmann saw them, as did a family friend, David Barry. It appears that Mrs. Surratt needed to alert Booth that John had taken Mrs. Slater to Richmond because the usual escort, Augustus Howell, had been arrested in a cavalry raid at the Surrattsville tavern during the night of March 24.

John Surratt and Sarah Slater returned from Richmond together on the afternoon of April 3. They headed out the next morning for New York City. Mrs. Slater stopped there, but John went on to Montreal with secret dispatches from Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin to Jacob Thompson and General Edwin Lee. By all evidence, John Surratt was now out of the thick of things in Washington, and yet there was still a tie between Booth and the Surratt family.

On April 10, Booth came to Mrs. Surratt's home again at her bidding. Weichmann arrived that evening to find Booth and Miss Annie Ward, a family friend and young teacher (the same lady who had reserved the room for Powell at the Herndon House), visiting with Mrs. Surratt in the parlor. Miss Ward displayed a letter from John Surratt, postmarked in Canada. Booth read it and then departed.

That evening, Mary Surratt asked Weichmann to take her to her country home the next morning. She said that they would use Booth's horse and buggy. When Weichmann called upon Booth, he found that the actor had sold his horse and buggy, but he gave Weichmann \$10 to rent one. Was he just being generous, or did he really need Mrs. Surratt to get out to the tavern? Did the letter from Canada contain instructions for furthering a plot against the President?

The trip to Surrattsville on April 11 became one of the nails in Mrs. Surratt's coffin. On the way out of the city, they happened to meet tenant Lloyd and his sister-in-law [Emma Offutt] on their way into town. Weichmann testified to a whispered conversation; however, parts of it pertained to the spy Howell having been arrested at the tavern and, more importantly, to the rifles and supplies that had been hidden at the home in March. Lloyd testified later that Mrs. Surratt told him those things would be needed soon. How did she know this if Booth hadn't alerted her? Or if her son had not sent instructions in his letter from Canada.

Mrs. Surratt did meet with John Nothey at the tavern that day. Witnesses saw her conferring with him regarding a 13-year-old debt. Nothey promised to pay, but he had been promising that for over a decade. The government would later insinuate that Nothey was only a ruse for going to the tavern to alert John Lloyd to something coming up—to tell him to have the rifles ready.

And it was on the night of April 11 that Booth and Powell heard President Lincoln give a speech in which he proposed enfranchising the "colored" man. They left the scene with Booth vowing that that would be the last speech the President would ever make.

At that point, Mrs. Surratt had pressing business also. On April 14, she received a letter from George H. Calvert. The Surratt family owed his family a debt for the land in Surrattsville since 1852. It was time to pay up. Calvert mentioned that Nothey was ready to pay Mrs. Surratt, so she could collect and pay her debt to him. Wouldn't it have been nice if the influential Mr. Calvert had just collected Nothey's money and applied it to the Surratt debt? He certainly had the power and the means to do this.

April 14, 1865, was Good Friday and Louis Weichmann was off work that afternoon. At her bidding, he went to rent a horse and rig. As he was leaving the boardinghouse, in came Mr. Booth. They shook hands and Weichmann left to mail a letter at the post office and to pick up the horse and buggy. When he got back, Booth was still visiting with Mrs. Surratt. The actor soon left, and Mrs. Surratt went out to the buggy. She remembered a package that Booth had left, went back into the house, and returned with a small package tied in paper. She told Weichmann that the package was fragile, that it contained glass. Off she went on Booth's business, as well as her own. It wasn't just a package that she was delivering to the tavern. There was also a message involved. That message would apparently seal her fate.

Nothey was not at the tavern. He likely did not even know she was coming. He lived only a short distance away; why didn't she go to his home to discuss their money problems? It would seem to be the more proper thing to do—rather than continuously meeting in a public tavern. Perhaps, however, Victorian culture would have frowned upon a lady knocking upon a door and demanding payment. Who knows? That's a question that has never been answered, but it scored heavily against her at the trial.

Lloyd was not there when she arrives either. It was about 4:30 in the afternoon. Mrs. Surratt talked with Emma Offutt, Lloyd's sister-in-law, and continued to wait. As darkness approached, Mrs. Surratt and Weichmann must have gotten nervous. The Navy Yard Bridge that was their route back to the city closed at 9 p.m. Weichmann also said that Mrs. Surratt was expecting a visitor at 9 p.m. If they didn't leave soon, they might not make it in time. Weichmann always thought the 9 o'clock visitor was John Wilkes Booth, but there are other explanations. The most logical being a man who lived nearby bringing some mail that had been misdelivered to him—although, I don't understand why he needed to make an appointment to drop off mail. [2023 Editor's Note: See the Addendum for another possibility.]

Lloyd finally arrived about 6 p.m. Weichmann and Mrs. Surratt were preparing to leave. Lloyd was handed the package, which contained Booth's field glasses, and was told to have some whiskey and the shooting irons ready for parties that would call that night. Can you hear the trap springing on the scaffold?

Weichmann testified that they arrived back in the city about 8:30 p.m. and that he returned the horse and rig to Howard's Stable around the corner. When he got back to the boardinghouse, Mrs. Surratt invited him to have some dinner with her. He later testified that she was "wrapped in gloom" that evening and invited him to join her in prayer "for her intentions." Other people in the house, however, did not notice anything strange about her demeanor—except that she hustled the ladies of the house upstairs shortly before 10 p.m. and went around shutting down the oil lamps. This was the earliest that anyone remembered retiring. Shortly thereafter, the city exploded in chaos.

By 2 a.m. on April 15, the boardinghouse was raided by the Metropolitan Police. Booth was easily identified as the assassin of Lincoln, and it was fairly easy to find out with whom he traveled while in Washington. John Surratt's name was part of the puzzle. At that time, Mrs. Surratt was not under suspicion. Oddly, however, the Holohan family who had boarded there since early February moved out by Easter Sunday. Did they suspect something?

The situation changed rapidly. A servant girl confused the comings and goings at the H Street boardinghouse, and rumors reached the ears of Colonel H. H. Wells, the Provost Marshal. He ordered a raid on the boardinghouse on the night of April 17 at about 11 p.m. It was during this raid that the worst case of bad timing occurred.

Assistant Judge Advocate General John Bingham would later summarize for the prosecution in closing arguments in the case of Mrs. Surratt. He placed the proof of guilt squarely on the fact that Lewis Thornton Powell, alias Paine, showed up on Mrs. Surratt's doorstep near midnight, just as the house's residents were getting ready to be taken in for questioning. The would-be assassin of Secretary of State William H. Seward had been hiding out for three days, but managed to find his way to the Surratt boardinghouse at the worst possible time. The biographer of Powell, Betty Ownsbey, thinks that Powell realized what was going on at the house as he approached, but made his entrance anyway in an effort to protect the ladies. It had the opposite effect. He was admitted and quickly cornered in the hallway by armed men. Muddy and disheveled, wearing a sleeve of his undershirt fashioned as a skullcap on his head, and with a pick-ax over his shoulder, he wasn't exactly what one would expect to find paying a visit to a respectable boardinghouse late at night. He tried to cover himself with a story about being hired to do some work on the gutters in the morning. However, even today we don't expect to negotiate with a workman close to midnight. The authorities weren't buying his story. Mrs. Surratt wasn't buying it either. She immediately declared that she did not know him and had not hired him. He was bundled up along with the others and taken to General Augur's headquarters for questioning. It was there that Powell was identified as the man who had done the butchery at the Seward home. Not a good sign for Mary Surratt. Why would such a man be visiting her?

The lady was questioned closely at Augur's headquarters and then transferred to the Carroll Annex of the Old Capitol Prison, where she made another statement. About 1978, those statements caused me further doubts about Mary Surratt. James O. Hall decided that we should take the statements made by the various conspirators and compile them in a single book in order to aid future researchers. After all, they are the only attempts at defense that the conspirators themselves were able to make. [Editor's Note: In 1865, to protect their 5th Amendment rights, defendants were not permitted to testify at trial in criminal proceedings, except in the state of Maine.]

Mr. Hall supplied me with copies of the handwritten transcripts of those statements. Luckily, my years as a teacher blessed me with the ability to decipher handwriting, so I dragged out my handy-dandy Royal electric typewriter (remember those artifacts?) and began to type at my kitchen table. When I got to Mrs. Surratt's segment of the papers, I came to realize something. This was no shrinking violet making these statements. If I get stopped for a speeding ticket today (and I occasionally do), I immediately become a nervous wreck. And, I consider myself a worldly woman. As I read Mrs. Surratt's responses to the questions put to her, however, I saw a woman who almost anticipated what they were going to ask and had a ready answer. She appeared strong, haughty, and composed—frequently invoking her veracity based on “her honor as a lady.” She was good! I was impressed. I even at one point envisioned her as cool as Mrs. Rose Greenhow. I was also increasingly skeptical about her innocence.

Of course, we know of no further statements made by Mrs. Surratt after these initial ones. After an imprisonment of two weeks at the Carroll Annex of the Old Capitol Prison, she was transferred by carriage to the Penitentiary at the Washington Arsenal in southwest Washington. She was put into cell 153 on the first floor. One of her counsel said the cell was 2½ by 8 feet with a straw pallet and a bucket. That soon changed. She was treated better than the male conspirators. There is no evidence that she was hooded as they were, and soon, she was supplied with a chair to sit in (the men had a box or stool). She was given medical attention because of her female problems. A Dr. Gray examined her and reported to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Stanton then sent a letter to General Hancock, who was in charge of the prison, to do anything for Mrs. Surratt's comfort “consistent with her secure detention” and “to allow her to be furnished with any

food or necessaries she may desire....Such changes or additions to her furniture as may add to her comfort are also authorized.” This included a rocking chair from home.

There continues to be a debate as to whether or not she was placed in irons like the men. Reports conflict among eyewitnesses ranging from reporters to defense counsel. I think it is likely that she wore light ones at first and that they were then removed as her health deteriorated and as the press made note of a woman in chains.

She was removed later to a larger cell on the third floor that was airy, and her daughter, Anna, was permitted to be with her. A prisoner in an adjacent cell, Henry Kyd Douglas, who later wrote *I Rode with Stonewall*, stated that Mrs. Surratt was supposed to be fed on prisoners’ rations, but General Hartranft, who was in charge of the prisoners, sent her food from his own table—not just the basics, but also delicacies. Whether because of her health or because of her stubbornness, we do know that at one point Mrs. Surratt refused to eat and was force-fed beef tea for nourishment.

And then came her trial. On May 10, the military court assembled and the charge and specification were read against each prisoner. As with others, Mrs. Surratt basically was charged with *maliciously, unlawfully, and traitorously, and in aid of the existing armed rebellion against the United States of America...to kill and murder...Abraham Lincoln...Andrew Johnson...William H. Seward...and Ulysses S. Grant*. The key words here are *traitorously* and *existing armed rebellion*. Remember that treason is punishable by death and that the words “existing armed rebellion” meant that it became a war crime. [2023 Editor’s Note: Mrs. Surratt and the other conspirators were NOT charged with treason, which is a crime which requires specific evidence. “Treason” is a noun. Mrs. Surratt and the other conspirators were charge with activity that was “traitorously,” an adverb, used to modify the verbs “to kill and murder.”]

Summarized, the specifications against Mrs. Surratt contended that she did *receive, entertain, harbor, conceal, aid, and assist John Wilkes Booth, David E. Herold, Lewis Payne [Powell], John H. Surratt, Michael O’Laughlin, George Atzerodt, Samuel Arnold and their confederates, with the knowledge of the murderous and traitorous conspiracy...with the intent to aid, abet, and assist them in the execution thereof, and in escaping from justice*. There is one part of that specification that sticks in my craw, however—*knowledge of the murderous conspiracy*.

I have no intention of discussing the legality of the military court. I’m one of those who sees why the government chose that route. If for no other reason, they would never have found an impartial jury in Washington, D.C., in 1865. The tribunal may not have been impartial, but a civil jury would not have been either. I can also see why the Confederate States of America were on trial as a whole also. Our country had just endured the worst four years of its short life. It’s human nature to blame everyone who is against us.

I think a serious setback for Mrs. Surratt came when her primary counsel, the distinguished Reverdy Johnson [a U.S. Senator from Maryland], was made suspect in the eyes of the court by General Thomas M. Harris objecting to him on the grounds that he had previously in the war argued against the moral obligation of an oath of allegiance being used as a test of loyalty. Johnson stepped back from the forefront at that point and seemingly hurt his client. William E. Doster, defense counsel for Atzerodt, thought many drew the conclusion that Johnson had given up her case. Another counsel, Frederick Stone, later said that Johnson “*came forward and made an argument against the jurisdiction of the military court to be read and applauded by the people, and then abandoned the woman*.” Johnson did work behind the scenes with the remaining two counsels, young and inexperienced lawyers, Frederick Aiken and John Clappitt.

As to the evidence against Mrs. Surratt in relation to the changes: In aiding the armed rebellion, she had to be involved in or have knowledge of Confederate espionage activities that went on around her.

She did receive, entertain, harbor, aid, and assist Booth, Atzerodt, Powell, and her son, John. Herold was also there on at least one occasion. There is no evidence, however, that she ever was involved with Arnold, O’Laughlin, or Spangler. But of those who did come to the boardinghouse—Booth, Atzerodt, and Powell—would be knowledgeable of and active in the assassination plot.

As for aiding, abetting, and assisting, her rather constant communication with Booth and her trips to Surrattsville with messages and field glasses could certainly be construed as aiding, abetting, and assisting. Boarder Louis Weichmann’s testimony as to her meetings with Booth, his paying for her transportation to the tavern and the things that transpired during these visits was certainly powerful in this respect. As sniveling a character as I think Weichmann was, I think that he knew quite a bit about what was going on and cut a deal with the government to save his neck. Imagine such a thing happening in a court today! His detractors have him building a false case against Mrs. Surratt in order to stop Secretary of War Stanton from going after him. That may be so, but I have never understood why Stanton would want to go after an innocent, if there were really no solid evidence against her. He had to know the backlash that would occur. Stanton was a smart man. [2023 Editor’s Note: There was also Stanton’s order regarding Mrs. Surratt’s comfort while in her prison cell. See page 8.]

The testimony of her Surrattsville tenant, John Lloyd, put the rope around her neck. He was called to testify on May 13. He was basically questioned about the escape and pursuit of Booth and Herold. However, in this testimony, he outlined the hiding of the rifles and supplies at the tavern in March of 1865. He spoke in detail of the subsequent April 11 meeting on the road with Mrs. Surratt, where the weapons were discussed and of the fateful visit by the lady on April 14, when she brought the field glasses and instructions to “have the shooting irons ready for parties that will call” that night. His testimony implied that Mrs. Surratt had an active role in the assassination within hours of its being carried out.

Just to make sure that the rope was tight enough, members of the arrest party gave critical testimony about Powell arriving at the boardinghouse disguised as a laborer and being taken into custody. They told of Mrs. Surratt denying that she knew the man, but the prosecution was able to confirm that Powell had been at the boardinghouse on other occasions, some lasting more than one day. They also told of Confederate pictures, including Booth’s, being found at the home.

What could her defense offer? They had to discredit both Weichmann and Lloyd. They had to show that Mary Surratt was loyal to the Union, and that she was merely attempting to collect a debt when she went to Surrattsville on the two occasions.

Thirty-one defense witnesses were called. Testimony by George Calvert covered the fact that he was insisting on payment of a long-standing debt. Neighbor Bennett Gwynn testified to having received a letter from her and delivering and reading it for John Nothey about paying what he owed to the Surratts. Nothey testified that he received the letter. The lady was in Surrattsville on a business trip—pure and simple.

Lloyd’s proclivity for drink was brought to the court’s attention. Several people described his being intoxicated the day of the assassination. The prosecution countered that he was sober enough to assist with fixing Mrs. Surratt’s buggy when a problem was discovered as she was getting ready to return to the city.

Augustus Howell, the Confederate agent who had been arrested at the tavern, was a defense witness. Much to the consternation of Mrs. Surratt's lawyer, Frederick Aiken, Howell carefully insinuated his activities with the underground and admitted to knowing Mrs. Surratt and John for over a year. He was also able to testify to her poor eyesight, which prevented her from recognizing Powell when seen in the dim light of her hallway on April 17. More importantly, however, he spoke of teaching Louis Weichmann a secret cipher and having conversations with the young man that led him to believe that Weichmann wanted to go south. He went so far as to say that Weichmann had "expressed himself as a friend of the South, as a Southern man, or as secesh sympathizer would." One of the prosecution's star witnesses was now being painted with the brush of disloyalty.

I just have to throw in a little personal "aside" here. If I had more respect for Weichmann's character, I might infer that he was acting as a government spy. He said he reported his suspicions to his superiors at the War Department shortly after the failed kidnap attempt. In a good melodrama, he would have been sent back to keep an eye out and report other suspicious behavior. Could this account for his conversations with Howell? Just a thought....

The Confederate pictures issue was cleared up by Anna Surratt, who testified that they belonged to her. She had purchased Mr. Booth's, and the others had been given to her by her father. She also had pictures of Union Generals Grant, McClellan, and Hooker.

The final strategy by the defense was to show that Mrs. Surratt was a loyal and deeply religious woman. Numerous neighbors and Roman Catholic priests attested to these admirable qualities. Even Rachel Semus and Henry Hawkins, formerly enslaved by the Surratts, testified to receiving kind treatment from Mrs. Surratt.

Much of the closing arguments in the case were devoted to the legality of the military court. Reverdy Johnson gave the address here. If the court were not legal, its decisions were not binding. After attacking the principles of the court on a point-by-point basis, Johnson concluded his argument by stating that the civil courts of the District of Columbia had ample jurisdiction and would faithfully exercise it if the cases were remitted to them. He saw Mary Surratt as a symbol of every citizen who could be denied a fair turn in court. In closing, he portrayed her as *a woman, well-educated, and, as far as we can judge from all her past life, as we have it in evidence, a devout Christian, ever kind, affectionate, and charitable, with no motive disclosed to us that could have caused a total change in her very nature...* He then pointed the finger of doubt towards Weichmann and Lloyd.

Frederick Aiken continued the argument, again questioning the legality of the court, reiterating the major points that had been brought out by the defense, and challenging Weichmann and Lloyd and the provability of their testimony. However, when you read his rambling, florid, prose-filled speech, you tend to discredit his ability to handle the case. He's like some of those 8th grade students I used to have who used every big word and run-on sentence they could think of in order to answer a simple question, when they really didn't know the answer.

For the prosecution, Special Judge Advocate John A. Bingham reiterated the scope of the crime: He stated that it was not just a simple killing of a human being, but a murder committed within the military district of Washington, under martial law, during the war and against the Commander-in-Chief and other officials in furtherance of a treasonable conspiracy. To argue against the jurisdiction of the court would be to assume that, even in time of insurrection and civil war, no crimes are recognized as or punishable by military courts when called into actual service of the United States. He gave quite a lengthy and impressive discourse upholding the tenets of the military trial as seated and then approached the evidence against each of the defendants.

In the case of Mrs. Surratt, he cited her boardinghouse as “headquarters” and pointed to her being called on by conspirators Booth, Atzerodt, and Powell. He pointed out that Booth paid for her buggy to make the trips to Surrattsville in April—implying that the trips were necessary to the plans. He portrayed Lloyd as dependent upon her in a tenant relationship and explained his first concealing the fact that the weapons were hidden at the tavern as an act of self-preservation, not complicity. Bingham further stated that Lloyd’s testimony had been corroborated by other witnesses and had not been successfully impeached.

And then he lowered the boom. In reference to Powell returning to the boardinghouse and being seized, Bingham was very specific in its implications. He cited this incident as *putting forever at rest the question of the guilty participation of... Mrs. Surratt*. In final arguments, John Bingham stressed the major point that would indicate guilt on the part of all the accused: *It is not material what the nature of the indictment is, provided the offense involves a conspiracy. Upon indictment for murder, for instance, if it appears that others, together with the prisoner, conspired to perpetrate the crime, the act of one, done in pursuance of that intention, would be evidence against the rest*. In other words, if one enters into a conspiracy, one is responsible for what any member of that conspiracy might do. As we preach at the museum, this is an English common law principle termed “vicarious liability.” It’s the same principle used to get Charles Manson in the Sharon Tate murders. He wasn’t at the scene of the crime, but he masterminded the conspiracy to commit murder.

Viewed in this perspective, the actions of Mary Surratt in assisting Booth provided rather solid evidence to the military court of her role in his plotting. She was found guilty of all specifications except *receiving, harboring, and concealing Samuel Arnold and Michael O’Laughlin* and except as to *combining, confederating, and conspiring with Edman Spangler*.

Now, that I have climbed the tree and I’m out on the limb, here comes the saw. Do I think Mrs. Surratt was guilty? Yes. I think that she was well aware of the kidnap plot and probably an active participant in it—if for no other reason than as to protect her son. Did the government prove it? I think so. Did she know that the plot had turned to assassination? I have a hard time with this one and tend to say no. Did the government prove that she did know about the assassination: I don’t think so. Did they have to prove it? Not if the tenet of vicarious liability and the laws of conspiracy hold true. In for one—in for all.

Over the years, many people have expressed their opinion of Mrs. Surratt’s guilt. If you want to read a flaming denunciation of the government and a rigorous defense of her, delve into former Congressman David Miller DeWitt’s book, *The Judicial Murder of Mary E. Surratt*. David Herold said she was in as deeply as the rest. Lewis Powell would say that she was innocent; that she might have known something was going on, but did not know what. The lost confession of George Atzerodt that Joan Chaconas retrieved from Doster relatives back in 1977 says that Booth told him that Mrs. Surratt went to Surrattsville to get out the guns. Weichmann continued to contend that she was involved until the day he died. John T. Ford, owner of the theater, felt that she was innocent, but President Andrew Johnson stated she owned the nest where the egg was hatched. Her confessor, Father Jacob Walter said that no one could convince him that a good Catholic like her could go to communion on Holy Thursday and be involved in a murder plot on Good Friday.

In closing, I’m going to stick with General Benjamin Butler’s assessment of the situation. He’s not favorably looked upon, but I think he hit the nail on the head in reference to Mrs. Surratt. In 1867, John A. Bingham, the Special Judge Advocate at the Conspiracy Trial now turned Congressman, attacked Butler on his military record. Butler replied by accusing Bingham and the

court of hanging an innocent woman. When Bingham challenged him, Butler replied that it had been Bingham's duty to present the court with all the evidence, but that he had not. Butler was referring to Booth's diary, which was not entered into evidence in 1865. Butler contended that the diary proved that up to a certain hour Booth contemplated only capture and abduction. Mrs. Surratt may or may not have known that he changed the abduction plot to assassination. If Mrs. Surratt did not know of the change, and there was no evidence to indicate that she did, then she was innocent according to General Butler. He clearly saw the kidnap plot and the assassination as two separate crimes. Unfortunately for Mrs. Surratt, the 1865 tribunal judges did not.

As for the clemency plea, a majority of the court voted for clemency based on her age and sex—not the fact that they thought she was innocent or only slightly involved. As to my personal opinion on the clemency plea issue—I think Judge Advocate Holt is the culprit here for failing to bring it to President Johnson's attention. But that's the topic of another discussion and one that I'm not going to get suckered into!

ADDENDUM

There is one reference I failed to include in the above speech in the interest of time, but am inserting now—Laurie Verge

In 1908, a gentleman by the name of Richard Mitchell Smoot published a tiny booklet, *The Unwritten History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. In it, he told of being part of the Confederate underground that ferried goods and passengers across the Potomac River into the Northern Neck of Virginia. In early 1865 (about the time that Surratt was first introduced to Booth), Smoot was approached by John Surratt, Jr., and offered \$250 for his "large and stout" boat, which Smoot had been using to run the Potomac blockade in Charles County, Maryland. If Surratt purchased the boat, it was to be moved to a point up King's Creek, a branch of the Potomac River about ten miles from Port Tobacco, where it was to be held ready for instant use. Surratt was also interested in securing two other boats to be held at other points in contingency. Smoot said that he was still using his boat, could the deal wait? Surratt wanted immediate possession, *as the need of the boat would be the consequence of an event of unprecedented magnitude in the history of the country, which would startle and astound the entire world*. Smoot said that he had no idea that Lincoln's fate was involved.

The deal was agreed to, and the boat was turned over to George Atzerodt. Atzerodt then placed the boat in charge of George Bateman, a local farmer, who took it to King's Creek for hiding. However, Smoot was not to receive his money until the boat was put to use. A judge, Frederick Stone, in Port Tobacco was the third party in the deal. \$125 was placed with him in trust for Smoot, with the remaining to be paid when the boat was used.

According to Smoot, three months passed, and he did not receive any payment or word. He happened to see Atzerodt in Port Tobacco, and the conspirator told him that he had just come from Washington and that he thought the boat would be needed in a very short time. Atzerodt also remarked that a *desperate game was to be played, and that he had made arrangements with a man*

named Hunt to have in readiness three horses at T.B. [Guess what? The only Hunt(t) in T.B. in 1865 was my great-grandfather, Joseph Eli Huntt.]

Smoot was still not satisfied that he had received no payment. If he wasn't going to get paid, he wanted his boat back. Atzerodt told him to check with John Lloyd in Surrattsville to see how to contact Surratt. Lloyd referred him to Mrs. Surratt at the Washington boardinghouse. Here's how he describes that visit:

I went to the capital and called upon Mrs. Surratt at her home the Wednesday morning before the assassination. I was met at the door by Miss Annie Surratt, with whom I had a slight acquaintance, and she conducted me into the presence of her mother, who was seated in the parlor. I asked the old lady where I could see her son John. For a moment her face was a study. She really made me uneasy with her penetrating look of inquiry. She evidently was not satisfied with my appearance, for after a brief silence she informed me that she was unable to tell me of the exact whereabouts of her son, or when and where I could see him. I saw that I was under suspicion, and so told her the object of my visit. In an instant her whole demeanor changed. Her face brightened and she extended me a most cordial greeting. She eagerly inquired if the boat was in place and easily accessible as it might be called into requisition that night. I informed her what disposition had been made of the boat, and that Bateman was in charge of it. Then she assumed an anxious expression and hurriedly and earnestly importuned me to leave the city at once. She did not vouchsafe me any explanation of her sudden change of disposition, but I inferred that she feared that I had been followed, and that my presence in her house would lead to her arrest as well as my own. She whispered to me that if I would return to the house on Friday I would most likely see John and the boys....

Smoot went back home, but returned to Washington about 9:30 p.m. Friday night. He went directly to Mrs. Surratt's.

As I approached the house, I saw a woman standing on the porch. Her face was so hidden in the capacious depths of a huge sunbonnet that I could not see her features. As I started to ascend the steps the woman turned abruptly and went into the house, almost closing the door, and at the same time asking: "Who is it?" I gave my name. The door was quickly reopened, and I was admitted into the presence of Mrs. Surratt. She was in a state of feverish excitement. I asked her if John had returned, and she replied that he had not. She then informed me that she was positive that the boat would be used that night, and that I would get my money in a day or two. She most earnestly besought me to leave the city and not be seen at her house again. Her manner caused me alarm. I felt that a crisis was at hand, and that I was facing some unseen danger.

Smoot then recounts trying to get out of the city. The only means was via a stagecoach which left the Long Bridge at 10 p.m. By the time he got to the bridge, however, the stage had left. He decided to walk to Alexandria, where he took a room at the City Hotel. He says that he had not been in bed more than 15 minutes when he heard horses and low rumbling of voices. The excitement grew, he dressed and went out on the street, and learned that Lincoln had been shot by Booth. He then realized that he was on the fringes of the plot and that he might be associated with the Surratts. He had a difficult time getting out of the city because garrisons of soldiers were demanding passes. He was able to secure one through a friend who had ties to Secretary Stanton. All along his route, there were squads of men; however, he was not stopped until he neared home. He was cleared, went home, and stayed very close to it for about a month. However, near the end of the month, he was arrested, and taken to the Carroll Annex of the Old Capitol Prison. He remained there for ten days, but was never questioned. He had obtained the services of ex-Judge Crane from Charles County. The Judge later told him that the authorities suspected him of

knowing something concerning the whereabouts of Booth. Once they found that Booth had crossed the river about twenty miles from Smoot's place, he was let go.

Richard Smoot's contention was that the original plan was to have Booth, Herold, Atzerodt, and Powell ride from Washington to what was known as Lock Eleven Farm, located near where King's Creek crossed the public road in Charles County, there turn their horses loose, and walk to the point on the creek where the boat was concealed, get in and head to Virginia. However, when Booth broke his leg, he was forced to change plans and get to Dr. Mudd for immediate care. Mudd passed him on to others, who managed to get him across the river near Pope's Creek—miles from where Smoot's boat was hidden.

What became of the boat? Smoot did receive his payment about two months after the assassination. Judge Stone paid him—and also went on to be elected to Congress from the district in 1868. The tender of the boat, George Bateman, chopped the boat to pieces and then burned the wood.

Smoot would later move to Fort Smith, Arkansas, to assist his son in a business there. He died on May 8, 1906. Several years before his death, he shared his story with a writer who saw to it being published by the John Murphy Company of Baltimore. The first five copies were bound and sent to the author for copyright purposes. Two of them were forwarded to Washington for the Library of Congress. The other three were presented to personal friends. Before the others could be shipped, however, the great Baltimore fire of February 7, 1904, destroyed the Murphy plant and the remaining copies. No arrangements had been made in Smoot's estate for republishing. However, his daughter gave a copy of the manuscript to Orra L. Stone, who saw to it being reprinted without alteration in 1908, in the interest of serving students of Lincolniana.

Like so many reminiscences of the Civil War, undertaken 30 years after the event, researchers can always question its accuracy and veracity. My question would be: Why would Smoot fabricate such a story relative to Mrs. Surratt so many years later, if there were not some basis of truth in it? John Surratt was still alive (for another eight years); did he ever comment on the

POSTSCRIPT

by William P. Binzel

Over the years, I was most fortunate to sit in Laurie Verge's office and discuss a number of topics with her, such as Mrs. Surratt's innocence or guilt. Laurie's wisdom (and wit!) lives on thanks to Roger Norton and his website, Lincoln Discussion Symposium, which Laurie loved and was a frequent contributor to its content. The website is:

<https://rogerjnorton.com/LincolnDiscussionSymposium/index.php>

As Laurie identified, as late as March 17, 1865, the plot was to capture Lincoln. However, within weeks after the abortive kidnaping plan, things changed drastically for the worse for the Confederacy. On April 2, the Confederate Government fled from Richmond. A week later, on April 9, Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant. As a result of those setbacks, the plan to kidnap Lincoln no longer made sense. If the effort to capture Lincoln was successful, what was Booth going to do with him? There was no longer a Confederate

Government, nor even a Confederate army in Virginia. In Booth's own words, something "decisive and great" had to be done. The one thing that the Confederacy needed more than anything else in mid-April 1865 was *time*. They needed time for the Confederate Government to get relocated and reestablished, and they needed time for remnants of Lee's army, who refused to surrender, to make their way south to North Carolina to join General Joe Johnston's Confederate army. How do you create time? You create time by creating chaos. In modern military terms, it is known as attacking command and control. In 1865 terms, it was by decapitating the Union government by assassinating President Abraham Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William Seward. That would have thrown the Union government into chaos and uncertainty at least for a time, which probably would not have saved the Confederacy, but certainly would have brought them one last chance of survival.

There is no question that on the afternoon of April 14, 1865, Mary Surratt made the 14-mile trip from her Washington boardinghouse on H Street to her former home in Prince George's County, Maryland, which she had leased to John M. Lloyd in the winter of 1864 for the sum of \$500 a year. Lloyd was a former Washington, D.C., policeman, and by all accounts, was his own best customer in Surratt's Tavern. When Mrs. Surratt (and her boarder, Louis Weichmann) arrived at Surratt's Tavern, approximately at 4:30 p.m., she had to wait for Lloyd to return from Upper Marlboro, Maryland, where he had been drinking and playing cards most of the day.

Several eyewitnesses, including Weichmann and Lloyd's sister-in-law Emma Offutt (with whom family history suggests that he had a closer "relationship") observed Mrs. Surratt and Lloyd having a conversation. However, none of the witnesses were within earshot to hear it.

Lloyd testified later that Mrs. Surratt told him "to have those shooting-irons ready that night, there would be some parties who would call for them." Now the fundamental question is, did Lloyd tell the truth, or was he just trying to save his own neck?

The most damning evidence against Mrs. Surratt was that when Booth and Herold arrived at Surratt's Tavern shortly after midnight on the morning of April 15, 1865, about two hours after Booth had put a bullet into the brain of President Lincoln, Lloyd had the Spencer rifles out of hiding and ready for them. Why would he have pulled the guns out of their hiding place from the rafters above the family dining room, if he had not been advised to do so? It was not illegal to own a Spencer carbine, but if you had one, much less two, you would have some explaining to do. Union patrols routinely searched the homes of suspected Confederate sympathizers in southern Maryland; no warrant or probable cause was needed, just brute force. After the failed attempt to kidnap the President in March 1865, Herold was likely unhappy about the prospect of being stopped by Union pickets on his way back to Washington and being questioned about the guns. On his way north, however, he was intercepted by John Surratt, Jr. Surratt knew that the guns had to be secured and secreted, and he knew of a place to hide them at his former home in Surrattsville.

If that is true, there is a more fundamental question about Mrs. Surratt's innocence or guilt. How did Mrs. Surratt know of the existence of the rifles/carbines and that they would need to be made "ready" (i.e., retrieved from the rafters above the family dining room) for those "who would call for them" that night? She was in Washington, and not in Surrattsville, when the guns were hidden there. The obvious answer is that John Surratt told Booth that the carbines were hidden at Surratt's Tavern, and Surratt informed his mother as well. If Mrs. Surratt was not involved in the conspiracy, regardless of whether she understood it to be to capture or kill Lincoln, why would a dedicated and experienced Confederate agent, which John Surratt was, have shared that information with her? As Laurie noted, history would add credence to the veracity of Lloyd's testimony when, in 1977, Joan Chaconas found the May 1, 1865 "Lost Confession" of conspirator

George Atzerodt. Atzerodt, who had no opportunity to speak with Mrs. Surratt after they were arrested, said: "Booth told me that Mrs. Surratt went to Surrattsville to get out the guns which had been taken to that place by Herold. This was on Friday."

In addition, as Laurie points out, there are two legal concepts that need to be considered. First, the conspirators were not tried as civilians; they were tried as "enemy combatants" operating in an area under martial law (i.e., it was not a "simple murder," assault, or conspiracy to commit murder, but a concerted effort to decapitate the Union government for military purposes). That was challenged in Federal court in 1867 in a case brought on behalf of Dr. Mudd, and the court ruled that a military tribunal, under those circumstances, was the correct venue. That case has never been overturned [and was decided **after** *Ex parte Milligan* (1866)], and has recently been cited as precedent for holding prisoners at Guantanamo. Second, as Laurie stated, is vicarious liability in a criminal conspiracy, which means that if you are part of a conspiracy, you can be charged with the most serious crime committed. Mrs. Surratt was found to be a part of the conspiracy that resulted in the death of the Commander-in-Chief of the Union Army, hence her hanging. Given her gender and advanced old age (she was 42), few thought that she would actually be hanged. Her daughter, Anna, went to President Andrew Johnson's office to plead for her life, but Johnson refused to see her, and ordered guards with fixed bayonets to be stationed outside of his office. Another visitor, Adele Douglas, correctly calculated that the soldiers were not about to shoot or bayonet the widow of Lincoln's former political rival, Senator Steven A. Douglas, and the great niece of Dolly Madison. Mrs. Douglas was able to burst into Johnson's office. However, she came out a short time later and told Anna that it was of no use. Johnson was not going to stop or delay the execution. And so, on the hot afternoon of July 7, 1865, Mary Surratt became the first woman to be executed by the Federal Government.

One Other Factoid

The farm owed by Mrs. Surratt's parents, Archibald and Elizabeth Jenkins, was on land that is now part of Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, and it is believed that the house in which Mary was born was on land that is today part of the Andrews golf course. The scaffold where Mary was hanged is outside of what is today the Officers' Club at Fort Leslie J. McNair in Washington, D.C., situated on the tennis courts. So, Mary Surratt, in addition to her most dubious distinction, began her life on what is today a golf course and ended it on what is today a tennis court. You can't make this stuff up....