

# The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In my March 2020 President's Message, I quoted a sentence that grabbed my attention. To refresh your memory, it was from the October 13, 1912, issue of *The [Washington] Evening Star*. The sentence was: "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." It raised several questions, of which I already shared the answers in the March 2020 *Courier*. However, there was one more question that I had to find the answer to, which was much more personal.

Now this is where the story gets interesting. My dad's early years were spent in Congress Heights, living near his favorite cousin, Willie Hoyle. Willie's father was always referred to by Dad, as Uncle Harry. You can see why the name Hoyle and Congress Heights caught my attention. Was there a connection? But to answer this last question, it first required a call to my brother, the family genealogist, and some more research. By the way, his comment was that, if you live in an area long enough and have a big family, you are related to everyone. He might be right.

Further research showed that Mary Surratt's cousin Thomas Jenkins and his wife Charity Ann had a daughter, also called Charity Ann. She was born in 1847 and was known as Annie. In 1878, Annie married a man 30 years her senior named Henry J.

Hoyle. A year later, their son Henry, better known as Harry, was born. In 1912, Harry married Mary Poschl, my grandmother's youngest sister. Yes, Annie Jenkins Hoyle was my Great Uncle Harry's mother. I may not be related to Mary Surratt, but my cousins certainly are!

As Annie Hoyle died in 1922 and my dad was born in 1916, he probably had little memory of her. His cousin Willie was killed during World War II, so I never met him. The ones I did know were my dad's generation, and they have been gone for decades. Unfortunately, my family lost touch with the younger generation of Hoyle's relatives, so there is no one I could ask if any stories had been handed down.

If anyone had asked me what the chances were on having a Surratt connection on both sides of my dad's family, I would have said slim to none—but I would have been wrong. I've known for decades that in 1895 my grandfather's oldest sister married the son of Mrs. Surratt's neighbor and fellow boarding house proprietor, Margaret Wise Ridgely (yes, those Virginia Wises). Her son Clarence watched Booth, Surratt,

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and others target practice in the Surratt's backyard. I also knew that my grandmother's youngest sister married Henry "Harry" M. Hoyle. The fact that he is a cousin several times removed to Mary Surratt is new information to me.

I sure am finding a lot of Confederate family connections to the Lincoln assassination story, considering at the time of the assassination my great-

grandfather Oertly and my great-great-grandfather Lincoln were political appointees in the Lincoln administration.

Did I ever mention that my mom's cousin married a Gardiner from Charles County, Maryland? Gwynn's grandfather's name was Benjamin.

Stay safe.

Louise Oertly, President

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## **The Autopsy of Abraham Lincoln, Part 2**

### **Being a Brief Description of the Path of the Bullet and the Ensuing Damage**

by Paul T. Fisher, D.D.S.

In my previous article, which was published in the March 2020 issue of the *Courier*, we discussed the findings of the autopsy of Lincoln. As was covered before, Doctors Woodward and Curtis performed the autopsy with Doctors Barnes, Stone, Crane, Notson and Taft looking on. There was no disagreement as to what killed the President. What has caused controversy, however, is the course that the bullet took through Lincoln's brain once it entered his skull. What follows is a discussion of that controversy.

Both Doctors Woodward and Curtis state in their reports on the autopsy that the bullet entered on the left side and stayed on the left side. Dr. Woodward's report related that the bullet "passed through the left posterior lobe of the cerebrum, entered the left lateral ventricle and lodged in the white matter of the cerebrum just above the anterior portion of the left corpus striatum."<sup>1</sup> For reference, the corpus striatum is a part of the brain that can be found at about the junction of the middle and anterior thirds of the brain. Dr. Stone, Lincoln's family physician, testified to the same at the trial of the conspirators.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Taft, who observed the autopsy but did not participate in its execution, states that the bullet crossed obliquely from left to right and came to rest behind the right eye. Surgeon General Barnes stated the same at the 1867 trial of John H. Surratt, Jr.<sup>3</sup>

Why the very stark contrast in the reports of these different physicians? A few possibilities exist. A very simple explanation could be that they were simply mistaken, as can occur when multiple people are involved in an operation. Anyone who has had surgery can attest to the fact that the doctors mark the area to be worked on very clearly (such as writing "YES" on the limb needing surgery and "NO" on the other) to avoid the mistake of operating on the wrong area! As a practicing dentist, this author has found that it pays to check and then check again, when receiving a referral or instructions from another office, as discrepancies can

occur that result in mistakes. So it's reasonable to believe that one doctor could be mistaken as to the track of the ball.

Another possibility exists as well. A cursory examination of the reports of the physicians present at the deathbed of Lincoln will reveal all the procedures performed on the President up to his death. A common theme is found with respect to the head wound. Different doctors, with their fingers or a Nelaton probe, repeatedly probed it. All of this manipulation of the wound had the effect of widening or even changing the track made by the bullet, resulting in possible difficulty tracing the course of the ball. It was reported that when using the Nelaton probe, if an obstacle was encountered, it was pushed past or the direction was changed and probing continued.<sup>4</sup> Remember as well that the ball fell from the brain before the exact location could be noted. All these things can certainly confound any efforts to precisely locate the final position of the ball. At least two authors I consulted list that the ball crossed the midline, with one going so far to say that Dr. Barnes's view of the final resting place of the ball was confirmed by a recent study (unfortunately, no citation is given to verify this). I personally believe the reports of Curtis and Woodward, as they were the ones performing the autopsy, while the other physicians were merely onlookers. I tend to give credence to firsthand information versus secondhand. Bear in mind that Barnes's recollection comes nearly two years after the assassination at the trial of John Surratt.

In the end, it doesn't really matter which side of the brain the bullet ended up in. Neither would result in a more favorable outcome in 1865. Whether the bullet stayed on the left or crossed to the right side, the damage was done. When Booth fired his shot, the ball crashed into the back of Lincoln's skull. When the lead bullet came into contact with Lincoln's occipital bone, it punched a plug of bone and multiple fragments into his brain, causing further damage. A piece of the ball that was sheared off was also found near the external orifice.<sup>5</sup> Woodward described the brain in the track of the ball as "pultaceous" and "livid" from capillary hemorrhage. The ventricles of the brain were also filled with blood. In short, massive brain damage. Also of note, the orbital plates of the frontal bone were fractured. Dr. Abel discussed this phenomenon in his book *A Finger in Lincoln's Brain*. When a bullet enters the brain, it creates a momentary channel (known as cavitation) that then collapses, creating a slight vacuum. It is this vacuum that displaces the orbital plates since they are thinner bones to begin with.

In conclusion, President Lincoln suffered a catastrophic injury at the hands of John Wilkes Booth. In 1865, his case was simply hopeless. To repeat Dr. Barnes's words at the deathbed:

"He is gone. He is dead."

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> John J. Woodward, Autopsy Report, 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](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/lincoln.html).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Steers, *The Trial* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 82

<sup>3</sup> *Trial of John H. Surratt in the Criminal Court for the District of Columbia, Hon. George P. Fisher Presiding Vol. 1* (Andesite Press 2015), 121

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Temple, *Lincoln's Surgeons at His Assassination* (Mayhaven Publishing, Inc. 2015), 28-30

<sup>5</sup> John J. Woodward, Autopsy Report, 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](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/lincoln.html).

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## THE HOOKTOWN CONSPIRATOR, SAMUEL BLAND ARNOLD

I stumbled across *Real Stories from Baltimore County History* in Google Books, while researching the 1904 Baltimore fire. [My great-grandfather, with my 12 year-old grandmother's help, kept his bakery open, so he could feed the firemen.] This book was published in 1917 by Isobel Davidson, the Supervisor of Primary Grades for the Baltimore County Schools. She used "data obtained from the teachers and children of Baltimore County (Maryland) schools."

Since Baltimore plays a part in the assassination story, I got curious and searched the name "Lincoln," which gave me the idea for this *Courier* issue. The subject is Samuel Bland Arnold. Except for the excerpts from *Real Stories from Baltimore County History*, the rest of the articles were published in *The Surratt Courier* in the 1980s. For those of you who remember Art Linkletter, one of his famous sayings was "kids say the darnedest thing." In one excerpt, that was evidently just as true in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it is today.

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### Excerpts from *Real Stories from Baltimore County History*

Revised and adapted by Isobel Davidson  
(Baltimore: Warwick & York, Inc., 1917)

#### Schools (page 172)

"Catonsville has always been a noted educational center. St. Timothy's Hall for boys was founded by Rev. La Burtus Van Bokkelen, in 1845, being the first church military school in the United States. Though beginning with nothing, great success was achieved. Soon the buildings were enlarged to accommodate the large number of students, no less than 150. The pupils were organized as an infantry battalion and an artillery corps, for which the State provided the muskets and cannon and other equipment.

"When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the school was most prosperous, but when the call to arms came most of the boys enlisted, taking their guns with them, which were soon put to the stern use of real war.

"A few years later fire destroyed St. Timothy's Hall, but the old armory is still standing as a memorial of the past. Three years later the number of pupils had fallen off so considerably on account of the war that Rev. Bokkelen decided to turn to other means of earning a livelihood. Just about this time President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a former pupil of the school, and this turned the attention of the United States military authorities to it, and General Lew Wallace, who was in command of the department, issued a strict order regulating the uniforms worn by the pupils of St. Timothy's Hall, then known as Catonsville Military Institute. A little later the school was taken over by the Misses Carter, of Carter's Bridge, Va., as a girls' school, which, too, has almost worldwide fame. Girls from Maine to the Hawaiian Islands, and from Canada to Mexico have been educated here, enjoying the simple home life of the school. While St. Timothy's Hall was in its prime the Misses Gibson conducted a school for young ladies at Ingleside, which ranked in those days with the St. Timothy's of today. Another well-known school is Mt. De Sales, conducted by the Sisters of the Visitation Convent, opened in 1854.

“The old Ingleside School for Boys, conducted by Dr. Ebeling, where many noted Marylanders received their education, among them Isidor Rayner [United States Senator from 1905 to 1912], is worthy of much praise and honorable mention.

“All this story of the schools of other days helps us to know that public schools were slow in development. At first the school was attached to the church—a church school—or if not that—directed by the minister of the parish. From this beginning grew the large fashionable private schools for boys and girls, which flourished until after the war, and even until later days...”

Data obtained by M. Molesworth and Marjorie Hoffman

### **Churches of Catonsville and Vicinity: St. Timothy’s (page 173)**

“The history of any community is centered about the village church. One of the earliest churches in the community was St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church, established in 1844. A few people of the neighborhood, among them Judge John Glenn, the Gibsons, and John K. Smith and family, met at the home of Rev. G.F. Worthington and elected the first vestry. Here was held the first service also, with about twenty-five present. A New York architect designed the church edifice, Gothic in style, and the corner stone was laid in the autumn of 1844. Two additions have been made since that time and a rectory has been added. The ground, one acre, was given by Rev. Bokklen, and the rest purchased from Rev. Worthington, the blind preacher, making four acres in all. Standing as it does in a grove of handsome trees it is a place of unusual interest.”

Data obtained by Seventh Grade Children, Catonsville

[Editor’s Note: The church was the baptismal site of John Wilkes Booth. The church still stands, but closed in 2013 when the majority of the parishioners voted to switch from Episcopalian to Roman Catholic.]

### **A True Story of Hookstown (page 280)**

“Round about Hookstown there were many large estates, and in the early days the sons of these rich owners were gay young sports, who spent many hours riding in tournaments or hunts or lounging in the tap-room of the Hammett House. Among these young sportsmen was Samuel B. Arnold, whose father owned a large estate where Mr. Trainor now has his home on Park Heights Avenue. He had been to college where he met Wilkes Booth and Dr. Mudd. These chums were seen often in this neighborhood riding together after the hounds.

“When Lincoln was president, he set every slave free and this made the three chums very angry; they said that Lincoln ought to be killed. One night Wilkes Booth was acting in a theatre in Washington when he spied Lincoln in a box. He went up there between the acts and shot the president. He made his way to Virginia, but sprained his ankle in making good his escape. Dr. Mudd and Sam. B. Arnold were arrested as conspirators and sent to Dry Tortugas near Florida where they stayed eight years. Old Mr. Arnold spent all his money trying to buy his son’s freedom, but he could not get it until John T. Ford helped him. Then Samuel returned to Hookstown, but he was broken in health and spirit and soon died from the effects of his imprisonment on the lonely island.”

As told by Rosalie Rhodes, Age 9

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## THE HOOKSTOWN CONNECTION

by Percy E. Martin

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, July 1980

When Samuel Bland Arnold wrote the oft-quoted "Sam letter" to John Wilkes Booth that is reported in its entirety in many of the books written about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, it was his intention to reaffirm his decision to quit the group that was planning to kidnap the President. This letter, found in Booth's trunk a few hours after the President was shot, began with this heading and date: "Hookstown, Baltimore County, March 27, 1865." That this letter served to incriminate Arnold is well known to all students of the assassination.

History buffs looking for Hookstown, Maryland, today will be sorely disappointed, because there is no longer such a place. The name doesn't show on today's maps and hasn't been used in over a hundred years. All of Hookstown and the surrounding farm lands have become completely urbanized. If Arnold could return to these parts today, there is little (with one notable exception explained below) that he would recognize. (As a point of reference, the Arnolds and their relatives, the Blands, were located near present-day Park Heights Avenue and North Parkway in northwestern Baltimore City.)

Hookstown in 1865 was a minor village on Hookstown Pike (Reisterstown Road) consisting of a few houses, including a post office near the "Three-Mile House," an old stage coach stop and tavern on the road from Baltimore to Reisterstown.<sup>1</sup> The Arnolds' name first appeared in the records of this area in the 1848, when Sam Arnold's father, George William Arnold, a prominent baker-confectioner in Baltimore, purchased a large 118-acre farm one-half mile east of the town, which he deeded over to his wife's brother, William J. Bland.<sup>2</sup> Mary Jane Arnold, wife of George, bought back 25 acres, which she held in abeyance for her youngest son and daughter, William and Oreon.<sup>3</sup>

George W. Arnold's bakery and confectionery, which was also his home, was located on Fayette Street in Baltimore City. Sam's youngest brother, William, was apparently the agriculturist in the family and operated the Arnolds' farm, while living in a small log house on the premises.<sup>4</sup>

William was 18 when his 29 year-old brother, Sam, returned from three years of service to the Southern armies, as a soldier and civilian, in February of 1864.<sup>5</sup> Sam alternated his residence between his brother's farm and his parent's home in Baltimore. He found himself spending more and more time at his brother's in an effort to escape some of the bitterness and scorn meted out to him from former friends in the city, whose politics had taken a "loyal" turn.

The lonely rural life seems to have been just the tonic needed to refresh the sagging spirits of this confused and unhappy young returnee from war. For a while, all was well, but the excitement of recent years had established a pattern that he found hard to ignore. He was, therefore, visibly elated one day to hear from a long-departed friend of his school days, John Wilkes Booth. This news arrived in the form of a letter delivered by William while Sam was helping to harvest grain at a neighboring farm. The letter contained an invitation for Sam to meet Booth at the Barnum Hotel in Baltimore and a twenty-dollar note.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent visit with Booth constituted his initiation into the actor's intrigues.

The progression of events caused Sam to spend much time in Washington in early 1865, where he participated in all the kidnap scheming against the President. By the twentieth of March, Arnold had become convinced that the plans could not succeed, and he severed his connection with the conspirators and returned to Hookstown. Visiting his parents' home in the city, he found a note from Booth requesting that yet another attempt be made. Instead of complying with Booth's request, Arnold returned to Hookstown and wrote two fateful letters. One, of course, was the all-important "Sam letter"; the other was sent to a storekeeper at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, requesting employment as a clerk and bookkeeper.

History well records the main events that followed: Booth slew the President; and Arnold, principally because of the discovery of the "Sam letter," became a prime suspect in the assassination.

Hookstown suddenly became immersed in the sensational notoriety brought on by the foul deed of Booth and Arnold's association with him. War Department detectives first converged on the quiet farmlands of the Arnolds and Blands on Sunday, April 16, 1865. They rode up to the old Arnold log house, seeking information as to Sam's whereabouts. A servant of the family, who was the only person at home, told them that Arnold had gone to Fortress Monroe; and they hastily left, armed with the information they were seeking.<sup>7</sup> The next investigator to arrive on the scene was an unofficial one, a citizen by the name of Robert G. Mowry, who was employed by the Ambulance Department, 18<sup>th</sup> and M Streets, Washington, D.C. Mowry recognized Arnold as the "Sam" who signed the letter, as it was reported in the Washington papers on April 16. After being shown the actual letter from Arnold, he correctly identified its author. He then went to Hookstown on a snooping expedition of his own. He questioned various persons about Arnold and his association with Booth. Later, he rode over to the Bland family's farmhouse and questioned Sam's uncle, William J. Bland. Mr. Bland informed him that there were no pictures or letters of Sam in the house and even invited him to search the place, if he desired.<sup>8</sup>

After Sam went away to prison, things returned to normal, except for the gossip and finger-pointing that must have occurred from time to time. William never forgave his older brother for his involvement with the conspiracy, even though he testified brilliantly on Sam's behalf at the Conspiracy Trial.

After Arnold was released from prison in 1869, he lived in various places other than Hookstown. William and Oreon eventually sold their holdings and moved away. Only the Blands stayed on. In 1870, the character of the entire community was merged into the larger fortunes of the Pimlico Race Track that opened nearby. Hookstown changed its name to Arlington and, gradually, the city expansion encompassed the area.

Though the Arnold log house was demolished (on what became Park Heights Avenue) in 1910, there is still extant one architectural relic of those exciting times. The Bland family's farmhouse, by a miracle of happenstance, still stands on the same spot, one-third of a mile east of the vanished Arnold log house, though completely surrounded by modern streets and houses. A cousin of Samuel Bland Arnold, Edward L. Bland, still lived in the house as late as 1943.<sup>9</sup>

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#### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Isobel Davidson, *Real Stories from Baltimore History* (Hatsboro, Pennsylvania: Tradition Press, 1967) p. 117-f.

<sup>2</sup> Land records of Baltimore County, Liber ABW #395, Folio 31 - February 3, 1848, and Liber AG#6 Folio 411 - October 16, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Wills, Baltimore County - Liber JLR#3, Folio 65 - November 29, 1865.

<sup>4</sup> *Baltimore Sun* article, March 10, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> *Baltimore American* article (Arnold's Story of the Lincoln Assassination), December 7-19, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> Deposition of LPD Newman, National Archives, War Department Records, File N, DOC 209, JAO.

<sup>7</sup> H.B. Smith, *Between the Lines* (Booz Bros., New York, 1911) pages 292-293.

<sup>8</sup> Deposition of R.G. Mowry, National Archives, Microfilm M599, Roll 3-0507-0515.

<sup>9</sup> *Baltimore City Directory 1943*, also the deed of owner and resident of 5801 Winner Avenue (at the time the article was written).

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## ARNOLD LETTER REVISITED

In the October 1986 issue of *The Surratt Courier*, John C. Brennan provided an article called “New Light Cast on Two 1865 Letters.” The first letter was from Sam Arnold to his mother. The Arnold letter was too long to reproduce in full, so Mr. Brennan took excerpts from it, with the original explanation as to how it became available. They are included below. The second letter referred to in the original title was from William Spangler to his son, Ed.

General Hartranft’s report of July 6, 1865, (the day preceding the executions) shows that while the inspecting officers of the Arsenal Prison were making a visit to their charges “at 7 o’clock this morning,” a letter received from Samuel Bland Arnold at that time presumably was forwarded to headquarters for disposition.

### Letter from Arnold to his Mother

(from the Doylestown, Pennsylvania, *The Democrat*, July 27, 1867)

The following letter from Arnold, one of the conspirators sentenced to imprisonment for life, written to his mother the night before the execution of Harold [sic], Payne, Atzerodt, and Mrs. Surratt, has never been published. Its genuineness cannot be doubted. It was handed by Arnold to Colonel Fredericks, on duty at the Arsenal, to be given to his mother after his removal to the Dry Tortugas, which was done, but not until a copy had been made. The copy Colonel Fredericks gave to Dr. O’Neal of Gettysburg, which the latter loaned to the editor of *The Democrat*, on his late visit to that place, for the purpose of publication.

“My Dear, Dear Mother –

“For some time, perhaps forever, these are the last lines that ever the hand of your loved, and ever loving son shall be transcribed upon paper to you...my honored name sustains its former lustre; nor does any conscience unbraid me for any act ever committed against my fellow man...‘Nihil desperadum’ [There is no reason for despair.] While there’s life there’s hope. We may yet be united, if not on earth assuredly in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

“Even while connected with the abduction scheme, I was the most miserable being on earth. ‘Twas a cankering sore within my heart, and daily was consuming my vitals, to think that I, who was always open in my actions, was practicing deceit, especially towards those whose whole hearts would have gratified my every wish—my family. I shunned conversation, etc., kept aloof from you all, for I did not wish that the grief and marks of trouble depicted on my brow should give you a moment’s pain.

“...in an evil hour I was tempted from the path of virtue and rectitude, and by no act or knowledge (for which I was a party to, viz., abduction, was conceived and died unborn) of mine, but by the cowardly act of a dishonored wretch, coward at heart, who had no soul [John Wilkes



Booth], I am deemed to fill a place amid a throng of criminals...but his murderous intent was frustrated by my country.<sup>2</sup>

“Dear mother, God be my witness, I know nothing of the fact or act for which I suffer, and you, and whoever knew me I feel are satisfied of the fact.

“During my imprisonment I shall feel grateful for the kind treatment and many acts of kindness of those who have had me in charge. They shall be closeted with the many scenes of the happy past within my memory, from the highest command to the lowest, viz. – Gen. J.F. Hartranft, Col. W.H.H. McCall, Col. Fredericks, Col. Dodd...In this parting and writing to you, it causes my placid and resigned feelings to burst their cerements, and the tear starts unbidden from an overflowing heart. I am not lost. I still am human. Farewells where forever should be sudden. Goodbye. God bless you all, guide, instruct, and save you. Be not heartsick, we will meet again, if not on earth, in eternity.

“Your devoted and loving son, Samuel B. Arnold”

“N.B. Keep my dog till he dies. For my sake let him be treated well, and when dead...Erect a slab inscription ‘A true friend,’ for he would never forsake me should the whole world do so...Poor Dash! We have forever parted...”<sup>3</sup>

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Author’s Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Arnold’s father and other relatives visited him at the Arsenal prison, but there is no record of his mother having done so. On page 27 of his *Defence and Prison Experiences of a Lincoln Conspirator* (Hattiesburg, Miss.: The Book Farm, 1943), Arnold states that, “In January 1864, learning through a letter from home of the serious illness of my mother, I resigned my situation...in the Office of the [Confederate] Nitre and Mining Bureau at Augusta, Georgia, we started for home.” There are no individual grave markers in the Arnold lot in Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore, but the office records show that Mary L. Arnold, believed to be Sam’s mother, was buried on November 1, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> On page 4 of his *Courier* article of January 1983, Percy E. Martin indicates a belief that “my country” refers to the Confederate States of America and that there is a hint in the same sentence that Arnold was aware the Richmond government would not support a murder plot.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold’s letter of July 6, 1865, is included in the Lincoln Obsequies Scrapbook, Rare Book Room, Library of Congress.

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**SAMUEL BLAND ARNOLD REVISITED**  
**Some notes upon a letter in the *Doylestown Democrat*, July 27, 1867**

by Percy E. Martin  
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, January 1983

Here are some impressions and further information pertaining to a letter alleged to have been written by Samuel Bland Arnold to his mother from the Arsenal Penitentiary on July 6, 1865,\* one day before Mrs. Mary Surratt and three others were hanged there, as participants in the Lincoln assassination.<sup>1</sup> The letter will not be reproduced here [as it is available elsewhere]. The writer’s purpose is simply to comment on some of its statements and persons mentioned and to express the opinion that it is completely authentic.

Arnold's opening lines constitute a heart-rending declaration of affection for a mother who was suffering great concern for her son, while she was wasting away in the last months of a terminal illness. Besides protestations of filial devotion, Arnold, above all, wanted to assure his mother of his innocence of any base or evil act. In his attempt to disassociate himself from John Wilkes Booth's dark deed, he makes some startling disclosures, over which historians and buffs can find much to ponder.

We learn from the letter that Arnold's mother was not aware of the real object of Samuel's frenzied activities with the actor Booth. He excuses his role in the aborted kidnap attempts by saying the endeavor "died unborn." He then characterizes Booth as "...a dishonorable wretch, coward at heart, who had no soul," strong words indeed for a former friend, boyhood school chum, and close partner in the abduction cabal. To understand his animosity towards Lincoln's murderer, who had himself only recently suffered a violent death, it must be understood that he had foolishly written Booth from Hookstown, Maryland, on March 27, 1865, begging off his obligations under the oath shared by the kidnap conspirators and, in a conciliatory tone, suggesting a delay until a "more propitious time."<sup>2</sup> Booth was asked to destroy this incriminating missive but, according to Arnold, purposely left it in his trunk to involve Arnold in the senseless and cold-blooded murder of Abraham Lincoln. Though Arnold could hardly have escaped suspicion, due to his former intimacy with Booth, it was the so-called "Sam" letter that had assured his conviction before the Military Commission.

Of possible importance, though of a puzzling nature, is this statement of "Arnold to his mother" letter: "That which all the vices of the world and mankind could not make, by one fell stroke, an assassin tried to make me; but his murderous intent was frustrated by my country; yet they have clothed me in a felon's garb...." If "my country" and "they" of that sentence are meant as the same thing, one must presume that Arnold was currying favor from his harsh and ungenerous captors (assuming that he was expecting his letter to first be read by them). It is the writer's opinion that, to the contrary, Arnold, who never renounced his devotion to the "lost cause" of the South, was expressing his loyalty though he was in the minority position—hence, "my country" rather than "our" country. Arnold, of course, knew that his mother would know what was meant by "my country." Certainly, she knew fully well that Arnold, with at least two of his brothers, had served actively in the Southern ranks and, when discharged for disability, had returned to the South for most of the remaining war years to work for the military as a civilian clerk. The Booth plan to kidnap Lincoln, of course, was conclusive evidence that Arnold, one of the first recruits, was loyal only to the South. That his mother knew of all this, excepting only the Booth plot, goes without saying.

If one, therefore, concludes that Arnold's country was the Confederacy, then the second part of the sentence quoted, contains a hint that Arnold had received notice that the Richmond government would not support a murder plot. (It must be remembered that Sam Arnold was the one who "broke up" the all-night meeting of the conspirators on March 15, 1865, when he objected to Booth's first hint that Lincoln might be murdered.) Unfortunately, due to the ambiguous language of Arnold's letter, no positive inference can be drawn.

Further on in the letter, some Arnold biographical information was gleaned as well as the letter's genuineness shown beyond doubt, by reference to a "Mrs. Garner" and "her son Bob." Arnold professes his affection for both and reveals an especial devotion to Mrs. Garner, who he describes as "...a second mother to me..."

The Arnold-Garner relationship probably commenced when Arnold attended St. Timothy's Hall in Catonsville, Maryland, in 1851-1852. Robert (Franklin) Garner was listed on

the roster in a different class during Arnold's enrollment, with his home noted as being at Friendship, Maryland.<sup>3</sup> (John Wilkes Booth was a year later.) It is likely that Arnold spent some time at the Garner farm in order to have time to become so fond of the widow, Mrs. Garner.

Mrs. Garner had been married to Robert Hanson MacPherson Garner, a prominent member of the Maryland legislature, representing both Calvert and, later, Anne Arundel Counties.<sup>4</sup> After the Civil War, during which the younger Robert Garner had also served in the ranks for the South,<sup>5</sup> little is known of the friendship of Arnold for the Garners. Arnold, of course, lost many contacts due to his years in prison and his attempts to avoid the public's curiosity were consistent in the years that followed. There is proof, however, that some contact between Arnold and "his second mother" continued.

In 1894, Mrs. Garner (who had survived her son, Bob, by 12 years) died in Baltimore at her daughter's home.<sup>6</sup> Sam Arnold, who had had difficulties holding good clerk positions due to his past notoriety, was working as a butcher at Fells Point Market on lower Broadway in the same city.<sup>7</sup> Arnold then, shortly thereafter, disappeared from the public's scrutiny and lapsed into obscurity for some six years. And there he may have remained, except for a coincidence and a mistake.

In 1902, the Baltimore papers printed a story of the death of the last, but one, of the Lincoln conspirators. A Samuel Arnold had died in Anne Arundel County. [This was, of course, a different person than "our" Arnold, and a retraction was printed.] Realizing that the climate for a good story had been created, Edward Lollman of the *Baltimore American* staff journeyed the 38 miles to a remote Southern Maryland location,\*\* where he talked the reclusive Samuel Bland Arnold into an interview.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this, in December, Arnold's painfully recorded memories were printed in serial form for all the world to see. Arnold had emerged from his shell and even allowed himself to be photographed on the porch of the farmhouse and in other scenes around the farm, where dogs and chickens were much in evidence. No doubt, it is apparent from the above that this was indeed Mrs. Anne Garner's former residence through most of her adult life,<sup>9</sup> and it was here that Arnold, employed as a manager for one of Mrs. Garner's married daughters,<sup>10</sup> had at last found peace and freedom from the public stare, which he long sought.

There are other interesting references in the *Doylestown Democrat* letter that would make it worthwhile reading for all Lincoln assassination students, including the mention of a fond pet, a dog named "Dash." Perhaps Samuel still remembered this faithful friend of his youth, when in 1902 he posed for a news photographer on the farmhouse porch, while gently restraining his handsome canine companion.

[Author's Notes:

\*This letter (reprinted in part on page 8) is one of many fine assassination items copied from the files of the late Col. Julian C. Raymond at the Army History Museum, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, by Surratt Society member Joan Chaconas and Nancy Griffith. It was originally part of a Lincoln Obsequies Scrapbook at the Library of Congress.

\*\*The "Anne Garner" farmhouse, where Arnold posed for photographs in the rural setting, is about a mile from the Chesapeake Bay near Fairhaven, Maryland. It was still much the same (in 1983), when this article was written.]

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Sources:

Listed below are some sources of information not found in the general reference for this study, which is the newspaper series, *Baltimore American*, "Arnold's Story of the Lincoln Assassination", December 7-19, 1902.

<sup>1</sup> *The Doylestown Democrat* (Pennsylvania) received the Arnold letter from a Dr. O'Neal of Gettysburg. The doctor obtained it from Col. Frederick, who was on duty at the Arsenal Penitentiary. He had been asked by Arnold to mail it. Presumably, he did as asked, but first made a copy for himself.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Pitman, *The Assassination of Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* (New York, 1865) pg. 236.

<sup>3</sup> *Catalog of Students of St. Timothy's Hall, 1851-1852*, courtesy of Erick Davis.

<sup>4</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Anna Garner Dies", July 13, 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Records of the First Maryland Calvary Regiment, CSA, Co. B, Confederate Records, National Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Same as number 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Baltimore City Directories, 1883-1895*.

<sup>8</sup> *Baltimore News-Post*, "The Case of Samuel B. Arnold," March 2, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census 1860-1880, Anne Arundel County, 8<sup>th</sup> District; G.M. Hopkins Map, Anne Arundel County, 8<sup>th</sup> District, 1878; Land Records, Anne Arundel County, Liber WSG25, Folio 322, October 27, 1840.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census 1900, Anne Arundel County, 8<sup>th</sup> District.

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The connection made in the next article was one that I had forgotten about, but then I probably last read this article almost 40 year ago. It includes another facet—one of irony—in the Arnold story, so it seems appropriate that it's the last article in this issue.

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## **IN THE SHADOW OF DISHONOR**

by Percy E. Martin

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, April 1981

In our country's history, there are several who committed acts so atrocious to the minds of a majority of the people that the mere mention of their names would continually evoke the strongest demonstration of detestation. Though in recent times, some persons have deservedly received our national disapproval, there are two names that stand out from all the others and have received the timeless and universal scorn reserved for the least loved of our history. Few people would deny that this lowly distinction belongs to Benedict Arnold, traitor to the American Revolution, and the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth.

Unfortunately, there are others, of completely innocent relationships with the above-mentioned malefactors, who were also shoved into the dark world of public disdain. This article concerns one such person.

Born in the state of New York<sup>1</sup> in the first decade of the nineteenth century<sup>2</sup> was a child who was christened "Benedict Arnold." At this time, the writer has no evidence to connect this young man with the treasonous general. Though this is true, one can readily understand that the scorn and derision thrust upon young Arnold was the same, whether descended of the traitor or not. Young Arnold bore his burden of the odious name as best he could and, for whatever reasons, migrated to Georgetown, near Washington, D.C., around 1830.<sup>3</sup> Here he evinced a desire to remain invisible, in a documentary sense. His name is not found on any of the records of the day, though the personal narrative of another family member clearly shows that he lived

there in the early 1830s.<sup>4</sup> Though he apparently fared well in his trade of baker, circumstances were such that he moved to another city, not far away, before 1840.

A reluctance to see his name in print was shown again by this cryptic listing in the 1840 U.S. Census for Baltimore, Maryland, “B. Arnold”; shown as head of household in the Fourth Ward. That this is our Arnold is corroborated by this listing in the *Baltimore Directory* for that year—“Benedict Arnold, baker, corner Fayette and Liberty Streets.” Here Arnold had opened a bakery business and lived above the store with his family. At this time, he could claim a wife, the former Mary Jane Bland, and three sons.

To clear the air and get the business off on the right foot, he petitioned the Maryland legislature and, in 1841, achieved the desired result.<sup>5</sup> His name was legally changed to George William Arnold. The curse of the traitor’s name was now in the past.

Proudly now, he displayed and advertised his new identity; and George W. Arnold Bakery-Confectionery became, for many years, a fixture in the downtown Baltimore community.<sup>6</sup> The halcyon days were now upon Arnold and his family. He and his wife happily raised a family that eventually numbered eight children. As the eldest sons matured, they were sent off to fine boarding schools and colleges.<sup>7</sup> Only minor problems developed, such as the time that the baker was called on to try to induce young Samuel, who joined a student rebellion at St. Timothy’s Hall, to come back to classes in order to help restore discipline in the school.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this would have been the extent of the Arnolds’ problems, if the Civil War had not commenced.

When war broke out in the spring of 1861, three, perhaps four, of the Arnold sons went South to join the Confederate struggle.<sup>9</sup> As was the case with many of the families in Maryland, divided sentiments became apparent with the father sticking by his boys in service, and Mrs. Arnold drawing her youngest son and daughter to her bosom in an effort to remain neutral.<sup>10</sup>

In 1864, clouds were gathering fast on the Arnold family’s horizon. With the decline of Southern fortunes on the field of battle, many former “secesh” neighbors and friends changed loyalties to the winning side and snubbed them.<sup>11</sup> It was about this time that Samuel returned from the South.

It is a familiar history of how Samuel Bland Arnold became involved with John Wilkes Booth in a quixotic plan to kidnap President Lincoln in hopes of reviving the nearly lost Southern cause.

The good baker became concerned for his son, as he eventually saw through the covering lies told by Samuel.<sup>12</sup> He saw serious trouble brewing and sought a position as a clerk at Old Point Comfort, Virginia, for his son.<sup>13</sup> Young Samuel quit Booth and traveled to Virginia to accept his new post.

On April 15, 1865, trouble of a kind that could not be changed, ignored, or ever lived down, descended on the Arnold family. Samuel Arnold was arrested and charged in the murder of President Lincoln.

In years to come, the good baker was never to abandon his son, Sam, who received an unduly harsh sentence from the Military Commission—that of a life in prison. In 1869, partially because of a petition gotten up by his father and signed by 200 prominent Marylanders, Samuel was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson.<sup>14</sup>

Sadly, the elder Arnold must have harkened back to his younger days and his efforts to “purify” the family name. It was apparent that young Sam’s association with the assassin, Booth, had done irreparable damage to the Arnold name for years to come.

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Death certificates of G.W. Arnold's sons: Charles, Samuel, and William, Records of Baltimore City and County.

<sup>2</sup> Obituary article, *The Baltimore Sun*, February 18, 1886.

<sup>3</sup> "Arnold's Story of the Lincoln Assassination", *Baltimore American*, December 7-19, 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit.

<sup>5</sup> Laws of Maryland for 1841, Chapter 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Baltimore City Directories*, 1840-1870.

<sup>7</sup> Same as number 3.

<sup>8</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, *The Unlocked Box*, page 154.

<sup>9</sup> Records of Confederate Veterans from Maryland, National Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Records of Wills for Baltimore City, 1864.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Story, *Baltimore American*, December 7-19, 1902.

<sup>12</sup> "Sam" letter, Pitman, page 236.

<sup>13</sup> John W. Wharton, *Trial of the Conspirators*, Pitman, page 241.

<sup>14</sup> Pardon File, Samuel Arnold, RG204, Case File B624, National Archives.