

# *The Surratt Courier*

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## **A Letter of Note**

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, October 1984

Member John Brennan was kind enough to share the following June 8, 1984, letter with us.

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John,

How interesting to recall that this Fall will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “spark” that ignited the restoration of the Mary Surratt House.

B.K. Miller’s son and I were riding to a Lions Club meeting when he casually mentioned that his dad was going to tear down the old house, so that he could build a warehouse there. This rang a bell in my feeble mind, and I proceeded to ask an architect to examine the house with the thought of moving it to Cosca Park and relocating it on a five-acre tract. When it was established that the house could be restored, I asked Mr. Miller if he would donate it to the [Maryland-National Capital] Park and Planning Commission. He did this in February 1965. Then, when he died unexpectedly on Labor Day 1965, we urged his estate to sell us the site so that we could leave the house on the original spot. This they agreed to do.

Our Restoration Committee was organized. We met monthly, engaged the assistance of the Park and Planning Commission, and had the project dedication in September 1975 and the opening in May 1976. Once in operation, the Surratt Society members have provided untold service of tours, trips, etc. Over 48,000 people have been there.

I do believe, John, that this beginning of this fabulous project has been perhaps the most rewarding experience of the many activities, in a civic capacity, that engaged my energy and efforts.

Tommy Gwynn  
Chairman, Original Restoration Committee

**Happy 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the idea that sparked the formation of the Surratt Society.**

[Editor’s Note: Mr. Gwynn taught my mom’s high school senior year (1940-41) *Problems in Democracy* class and his future wife, who became a Surratt House docent, was her English teacher. I called them Tommy and Letitia. Mom called them Mr. and Mrs. Gwynn.]

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*This newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the Surratt Society. The Surratt Society’s website is [surrattmuseum.org](http://surrattmuseum.org)*

*Contact us at [surratt.society@gmail.com](mailto:surratt.society@gmail.com) or by mail at: Surratt Society, 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791-3853.*

*The Surratt House Museum, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt House Museum’s phone number is (301) 868-1121.*

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## **Wilkes Booth's Autopsy A Final Examination Reconsidered**

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

Given our recent discussion of Lincoln's autopsy a few issues ago, it would be appropriate to turn our attention to the other post-mortem performed in connection with the Lincoln assassination. As all of us who are enthralled with the story of the assassination of the 16<sup>th</sup> president know, John Wilkes Booth met his end south of Port Royal, Virginia, about 7:00 in the morning on April 26, 1865. Suffering from a gunshot wound to the neck, he expired on the front porch of Mr. Richard Garrett after being dragged from the burning tobacco barn in the early morning darkness. Whether the fatal bullet came from Sgt. Boston Corbett's revolver or from Booth's own gun is immaterial as the end result is no different in either case. For a thought-provoking look into the possibilities of these scenarios, I would highly recommend the May 2013 article in *The Surratt Courier* written by Bill Richter and Rick Smith.<sup>1</sup>

Following his death on April 26, Booth's corpse was sewn into an army blanket to begin the trip back to Washington. Upon its arrival, the cadaver was placed on board the *U.S.S. Montauk*, anchored at the Navy Yard. For a fascinatingly thorough discussion on the death process of Booth, look no further than Dr. Blaine Houmes's superb article from August 2006.<sup>2</sup> As stated in our discussion of Lincoln's autopsy, this author believes that the Booth post-mortem was also limited in scope. The body was positively identified by numerous persons who came aboard the *Montauk*, after which the autopsy would begin.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Joseph Janvier Woodward, one of the two surgeons who handled Lincoln's autopsy, performed Booth's post-mortem. Surgeon General Joseph Barnes supervised. The obvious areas of injury were examined, those being the broken left leg and the bullet wound to the neck. The neck was dissected, and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> cervical vertebrae were removed along with the corresponding segment of spinal cord, pierced by the bullet and rendering Booth paralyzed below that point. The author suspects that the left leg was not dissected, as the information gleaned from such an operation would not inform the cause of death. Since the cause of death was listed as asphyxia,<sup>4</sup> it is certainly reasonable that the thoracic (chest) cavity would have been opened and the lungs examined. The autopsy report compiled under the direction of Surgeon General Barnes reports that the phrenic nerves were yet functional after the injury, but noted that "respiration was diaphragmatic, of course, and labored and slow."<sup>5</sup> Upon consulting a contemporary anatomy/physiology textbook from 1862, it was obvious to the doctors of that era, as to us now, that the phrenic nerves innervate (provide nerve supply to) the muscle of the diaphragm. However, as the report from the autopsy indicates, this only partially provides for the action of respiration that resulted in a stertorous respiration [i.e., gasping sound] that could not support life any longer than it did in the case of Wilkes Booth. Based on the level of injury, the phrenic nerve function was only partially intact, which certainly explains the last hours of Booth's life, as related by the report, "Death, from asphyxia, took place about two hours after the reception of the injury." In an ironic twist of fate, Booth's vertebrae and segment of spinal cord would later be found in the Army Medical Museum, housed on the third floor of none other than Ford's Theatre. [Editor's Note: It now resides (but may not be on display) at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Silver Spring, Maryland.]

One aspect of the post-mortem of Booth that bears examination is the subject of an article in *The New York Herald* from April 29, 1865, two days after the autopsy. In a section entitled “Excitement Over the Death of Booth in Washington” on the front page, we are told, “...a photographic view of the body was taken before it was removed from the monitor...”<sup>6</sup> The pulse of any devoted Boothie would undoubtedly quicken at the thought of such a photo in existence of Booth’s post-mortem. An image such as that would be rivaled only by the discovery of the one known image of Lincoln lying in state in New York, found among the papers of John Hay and John Nicolay in 1952. Indeed, many have surmised that the photo is the same as the image found in the May 13, 1865, edition of *Harper’s Weekly*,<sup>7</sup> which features the supposed corpse of Booth surrounded by military men under an awning on the deck of the *Montauk*. But this is where the story takes an interesting turn...

The information that follows has been gleaned from the work of John E. Elliott and Barry M. Cauchon, entitled *A Peek Inside the Walls*, and all credit rightly goes to them. I am indebted to these two men for their indefatigable work on details of the Lincoln assassination and would encourage all readers to avail themselves of their work.

Enter Mr. Lawrence Gardner. In 1891, he revealed in an article in *The Evening Star* (Washington D.C.) on March 21 that he had accompanied his father Alexander Gardner onto the *Montauk* on April 27, 1865. Gideon Welles and Edwin Stanton had given permission on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> for Gardner and an assistant to board the *Montauk* and view the body of Booth.<sup>8</sup> For many years it was assumed that the assistant was Timothy O’Sullivan, but with Gardner’s comments in 1891 it is apparent that this assumption is indeed erroneous. Gardner’s recollections carry profound weight, being he was an eyewitness to the occasion and that his memories correspond with the other extant testimonies regarding Booth’s identification onboard the ironclad. Lawrence recounts that very early on the morning of April 27, Major Thomas Eckert came to the Gardner residence and requested that Alexander Gardner accompany him to the Navy Yard. Along the way, Eckert informed the Gardner men that Booth had been apprehended and that his body was indeed waiting for them on the ironclad. Lawrence had accompanied his father for several days prior to the yard and had been engaged in photographing the other conspirators. Here is Lawrence Gardner’s remembrance of the occasion:

“...After reaching the yard we were ferried out to the monitor, which lay in the stream. On the vessel’s deck on a carpenter’s bench, and covered by a tarpaulin, lay the body of Booth. Shortly after reaching the monitor, we were joined by Surgeon General Barnes and one or two other medical officers. On board the boat, according to my recollection, were Baker, Chief of the Secret Service, and one or two of his prominent officers. On removing the tarpaulin from the body **we were all struck by the lack of any resemblance to Booth** (emphasis added)...”

This revelation regarding Booth’s appearance and others like it have been used in the past to suggest that Booth was not the body in the barn. Reports have also been found alleging that the man in the barn had red hair, and not black. Gardner continues:

“...We had a number of photographs with us and endeavored by comparison to find a likeness between the photographs and the body, but there was no resemblance. The hair was very black and the cheek bones prominent, and these were about the only things that gave it semblance to the photograph. On the face was quite a growth of beard, probably that of a week or ten days, and it was evident from the features that there had been great bodily suffering...”

Gardner’s impression of the corpse coincides with Dr. John Frederick May’s own examination from the same day. The other identifying marks such as the tattoo of “JWB” on his left hand and the scar on his neck from the removal a fibroid tumor by Dr. May on April 13, 1863,

aided in the identification. Like so many patients today who disregard the wise counsel of their physician, Booth returned to May a number of days later with the surgical site torn open from vigorous activity while on the stage.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Booth was left with a very characteristic scar. This, combined with the multiple positive identifications of the body, more than outweighs the reports to the contrary about Booth's death. The next comment by Gardner dashes all hope for the discovery of the long sought-after autopsy photo:

“...*The object of my father's visit to the monitor was photography and the body in question was to be the subject. Did we take a picture? No! After everything had been prepared Gen.[sic] Eckert concluded that inasmuch as there was so little likeness in the remains to the photograph in existence of Booth perhaps it would be best not to make the picture and the plan was abandoned for that reason...*”

With Lawrence Gardner's statement in hand, we can conclude that there was no photo taken that day of the corpse of John Wilkes Booth. While all Boothies would certainly be ecstatic over the discovery of a new piece of photographic evidence pertaining to the assassination, it is this author's view that such evidence is nothing more than a contrivance. Of note, no other person who identified Booth mentioned any photo, which leaves the newspaper article as the only report of a photo being taken.

We now bring our discussion of the post-mortem of Wilkes Booth to a close. My aim was to compile information regarding the Booth autopsy from previous work in *The Surratt Courier* as well as point readers to other valuable sources on the subject that they may not have consulted yet. It is my sincere hope that the reader has been presented with new information that will ultimately aid in their study of Booth and the Lincoln assassination and that all will be edified as a result!

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[Editor's Note: The article referenced on Booth's autopsy by Dr. Blaine Houmes is next.]

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## The Last Words of John Wilkes Booth...Or Were They?

By Blaine V. Houmes, M.D.

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, August 2006

John Wilkes Booth died in the early morning hours of April 26, 1865, after being dragged from a burning barn near Port Royal, Virginia. As he lay sprawled on the Garrett porch, unable to move after a bullet tore through his spinal cord, Booth was heard by Detective Everton J. Conger to ask for water. Then the soldiers heard Booth say, "Kill me." As the dawn approached, shortly before he died, Booth made one last effort at speech: "Tell my mother I died for my country." Conger would state in his testimony that he repeated the words to Booth, at first unsure because they were spoken so softly, and he then asked him if that was what he had said. Booth said, "Yes."<sup>1</sup>

On the following afternoon of April 27<sup>th</sup>, Surgeon General Joseph K. Barnes and Dr. Janvier Woodward examined the body of Mr. Booth as it lay on a bench aboard the ironclad *Montauk*, which was anchored at the Washington Navy Yard. After the autopsy, General Barnes produced a handwritten report addressed to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. In it he wrote:

"The cause of death was a gunshot wound in the neck—the ball entering just behind the sterno-cleido muscle—2½ inches above the clavicle—passing through the bony bridge of fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae—severing the spinal cord and passing out through the body of the sterno-cleido of right side, 3 inches above the clavicle.

"Paralysis of the entire body was immediate, and all the horrors of consciousness of suffering and death must have been present to the assassin during the two hours he lingered."<sup>2</sup>

Two later books, both published under the direction of Dr. Barnes, also describe the wound. *The Catalogue of the Surgical Section of the United States Army Medical Museum*, published in 1866, notes the path of the bullet as passing through the spinal column, but avoiding the large blood vessels of the neck.<sup>3</sup> *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion (1861-1865)*, provides a case history speculating that swallowing was not possible and that speech was unintelligible during Booth's "one or two attempts at articulation."<sup>4</sup>

A more recent review has also explored the injuries Booth suffered. In the January/February 1993 issue of *Navy Medicine*, Leonard Guttridge reviewed the death and autopsy of John Wilkes Booth. His article provides clear photographic images of the vertebrae, with the back of the fourth and parts of the fifth vertebra missing. An editorial comment on the article noted that pathologists and anthropologists were asked before publication of the journal to reexamine the bones and tissue, and they concluded that there would have been immediate paralysis.<sup>5</sup>

Although in recent years there's been speculation regarding Booth's ability to speak after being shot, in much of the literature there are interviews and accounts describing that it happened—yet not one detailing if it would have been possible.

Speech is a complex function of the human body, requiring the coordination of air movement, muscles, and cartilage. Normal speech is produced by movements and positions of the tongue, lips, teeth, and soft roof of the pharynx, along with the "voicebox" or larynx. Without a larynx, most individuals can only attempt to speak, silently.

Likewise, normal breathing is a combined effort powered by the diaphragm, a muscle separating the chest and abdomen. The diaphragm contracts during inspiration and actually pushes the abdominal organs and tissue down, while raising the lower ribs, expanding the lungs outward

and drawing in air through a bellows effect. Normal exhalation is essentially passive. When needed, forced exhalation (for sneezing and coughing) occurs by contracting the abdominal and chest wall muscles, which then force the diaphragm suddenly upward.

The nerve supply to the tongue, larynx, chest wall, and abdomen is varied. Both the tongue and the larynx are controlled by branches of the vagus nerve. The chest and abdominal wall muscles receive signals from intercostal nerves, which branch out from each side of the spinal cord in the upper back. What is important is that the branches to the tongue and larynx are from nerves leaving the brain, while the nerves of the chest and belly muscles leave the spinal cord. Booth's brain wasn't injured; his spinal cord was.

The diaphragm is controlled separately by a pair of phrenic nerves, which also split off from the spinal cord (from both sides at the back of the third, fourth, and fifth cervical vertebrae) although they leave the cord at a higher level than the intercostal nerves. Medical students learn early in their training that these nerves are vital to sustain breathing (memorizing the adage "C 5 to stay alive"), and that if a spinal cord injury must occur, one hopes it is below the level of the fifth cervical vertebrae. If the trauma is below the fifth vertebra, the victim may be paralyzed, yet still able to breathe.

In addition to the challenge of breathing, under normal circumstances the combined amount of nasal, oral, and airway secretions will exceed 3000 milliliters (about 3 quarts of liquid) per day.<sup>6</sup> Any secretions not evaporated must be swallowed or coughed up. If the diaphragm is paralyzed by a spinal cord injury, the body's cough reflex is also eliminated, and there is not adequate movement of the chest wall muscles. Breathing is compromised and oxygen in the body is depleted, while carbon dioxide builds up. Although it's possible for some individuals with an isolated injury to a phrenic nerve to breathe—inefficiently—using just the abdominal muscles, victims with the spinal cord damage Booth suffered are left quadriplegic, and lose all function of their diaphragm, chest and abdominal muscles. Even if the soldiers had propped Booth up in a sitting position, allowing gravity to help drain the secretions from his upper airway (and oxygen to passively fill his lungs), there still would have been an inevitable decline until death—suffocating and drowning in his secretions.

John Wilkes Booth was doomed the instant Corbett fired his shot. Today Booth's survival rate would also be abysmal. If by some miracle he had survived on April 26, 1865, his life expectancy would have remained limited, as infection from the wound (a bullet through the spine invites meningitis), in his lungs (inefficient breathing is a recipe for pneumonia) or other sources (quadriplegics are prone to serious urinary infections and bedsores) would have been expected. Antibiotics were not available until after 1943.<sup>7</sup>

So, could John Wilkes Booth speak after being shot?

His larynx remained intact, but the phrenic nerves controlling his diaphragm were essentially gone. The most important branch of the phrenic nerve (from cervical nerve 4) was destroyed, and the branch above (cervical nerve 3) was likely ruined as well. The third nerve normally joins nerve 4 enroute to combine with the fifth cervical nerve on the way to the diaphragm. This left only the less important branch of cervical nerve 5 (or parts of it) to coordinate all diaphragm functions. Booth has always been described as truly quadriplegic, suggesting that the nerve signals coordinating abdominal and chest wall movement were also gone. Multiple observations support this, including the soldiers witnessing the event as well as the brothers Willam and Richard Baynham Garrett.<sup>8&9</sup> The major discrepancies involve whether Booth spoke and what he may or may not have said.

Lt. Edward P. Doherty's official report mentioned no statements by Booth, but in later interviews he claimed that, at best, the actor looked at his hands and said "Useless! Useless!"<sup>10&11</sup> Doherty also denied that Booth ever said, "I died for my country" or "Tell Mother."<sup>12</sup>

Others present that night disagreed. Even contemporary newspapers reported the statements made by Booth. On April 28, 1865, *The New York Herald* announced that "Before the moment of final dissolution he replied: 'Tell mother I died for my country. I did what I thought was for the best'" and after an attempt was made to revive him, "he uttered the words, 'useless—useless.'"<sup>13</sup> That same day the *New York Tribune* printed a similar account, but included embellishments, commenting that his last words were: "Tell my mother I died for my country. You, gentlemen, have spoiled my fun in Mexico."<sup>14</sup>

In current medical literature, there are numerous accounts of speech by those with severe spinal cord injuries.<sup>15&16</sup> The mechanism is essentially gasping in small amounts of air, then expelling it as sound. This would have been difficult for Booth and his words would not have been easily heard, particularly with the excitement of the capture and soldiers milling around, along with the noise of a fire burning in the background. Booth's voice was described as a whisper and his secretions at one point led him to believe he was bleeding. He asked Detective Conger to press on his throat, in an attempt to try and cough, and then opened his mouth so the soldiers could check for blood. There was none.<sup>17</sup>

He also would have been in pain. He was clearly uncomfortable, asking repeatedly to be turned. Although a spinal cord that is cut allows no feeling below the level of injury, nerves of the skin and tissue near the bullet wound would still be functioning, leaving Booth in agony. There should be little doubt that as Booth lay paralyzed, awake, and aware that he was dying, he would still have been able to speak—even in a whisper—a few last words.

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## Asia Booth Clarke, Sister to John Wilkes Booth A Woman of the Civil War

By Lisa G. Samia

“So runs the world away.”<sup>1</sup>

It was these five words placed at the very end of the memoir of John Wilkes Booth by his sister, Asia Booth Clarke, that captured the heartache and heartbreak of a woman, who because of her brother’s crime, became a woman of the Civil War. Not from a direct action of a Civil War battlefield, but from a single derringer shot that plunged Asia into a lifetime of loss, sadness, and anguish.

What does Asia mean by “So runs the world away” from *Hamlet* Act 3, Scene 2 and why did she choose this line to end her memoir of her brother John? Of all the lines in Shakespeare and all tragedies, she uses this one. The full line reads, “for some must watch while some must sleep, so runs the world away.”<sup>2</sup> The actual significance of the line is “some must stay vigilant and alert yet some remain carefree.”

Perhaps it is that in the end not only did John create the greatest of all American tragedies, but he became an American tragedy himself. And because of her brother’s crime, she became an American tragedy as well. These five words of Shakespeare describe the haunting reality of Asia’s inner turmoil that belied a life that was at one time content, yet became shrouded in grief. Like so many, she was a woman molded by the Civil War. But that is just part of her life. Through her writings, it was her belief in her faith, and her love of family that resonate from the past to today.

The life of Asia Booth Clarke is relatively unknown. For all her writing as the Booth family chronicler, poet, and playwright, she was also a daughter, wife, mother, and sister to John Wilkes Booth. She became collateral damage to her brother John’s crime of assassinating President Abraham Lincoln.

Asia’s life began on November 20, 1835, in the log cabin home and farm in the small hamlet town of Bel Air, Maryland. Ten children were born to the great actor and tragedian Junius Brutus Booth and his wife Mary Ann Holmes Booth—only six reached adulthood. It was many months before the Booths chose a name for the child, being undecided “whether to call her after the accomplished young actress Sydney Cowell (Mrs. Bateman), who was a great favorite of the Booths, or Ayesha, in recollection of one of Mahomet’s wives.” At length, Junius wrote to Mary Ann, “Call the little one Asia in remembrance of that country where God first walked with man, and Frigga because she came to us on a Friday,” the day consecrated to the Norse goddess who



**Asia Booth Clarke**

From the Players Foundation, New York, New York. This photo is from Edwina Booth’s personal photo album, given to The Players by her son Clarence Edwin Booth Grossman, who was also a Player



presided over marriage and the home.”<sup>3</sup> She was about two and one-half years older than her brother John Wilkes.

Asia wrote many letters to her lifelong Baltimore friend Jean Anderson. From her early writings, we see a young Asia caught up in the girlish renderings of a life full of country visits and gossip. The letters describe her marriage to theater manager John Sleeper Clarke in Philadelphia in April 1859, and the cryptic warning John Wilkes whispered to her about her groom on her wedding day, a warning that later in life Asia grievously acknowledged. “Always bear in mind that you are a professional stepping-stone. Our father’s name is a power-theatrical in the land. It is dower enough for any struggling actor.”<sup>4</sup>

Asia’s life was forever changed after the assassination of President Lincoln on April 14, 1865. She was at the time expecting her third child and promised her brother John Wilkes she would name her child (if a boy) after him, but of course, that was impossible after his most heinous crime. She gave birth on August 20, 1865, to twins, a boy she named Creston and a girl named Lillian. She lost her little Lillian just one year later. This was the first of many losses experienced related to her children.

The year after the assassination, Asia published her first of three books, *Booth Memorials: Passages, Incidents, and Anecdotes in the Life of Junius Brutus Booth (The Elder)* about the life of her famous father.

In 1868, Asia and her husband John moved to Europe to escape the horrible memory of her brother’s crime. She spent the next twenty years in Europe, never to return to the United States. In those years, she continued to write to her friend Jean Anderson and Sister Theresa Sewell, her former teacher from the Carmelite Convent in Baltimore, Maryland, where she had once attended. Asia revealed her thoughts and feelings about the Catholic faith and her children to Sister Theresa. In one letter, she shared the date of her confirmation into the Catholic Church and her confirmation name, Ignatia. The name derives from Latin, means “Fiery One,” and denotes one who has strong will.

While residing in the French town of Boulogne Sur Mer, she wrote her second book, *A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth by his Sister Asia Booth Clarke*, in 1874. Through a sister’s heart, Asia poignantly portrays the early life of her brother while growing up together as teenagers from 1852-1856 at the Booth family farm in Bel Air called Tudor Hall, a one-and-a-half-story Gothic Revival home. Their father Junius passed away in 1852, and as the eldest son at home, John took up the responsibility of caring for his family, (not very successfully) at the age of fourteen. While this memoir was written from her recollections and bits of material Asia took with her to Europe, it is not a day-by-day verbatim diary. However, she paints incidents of teenage antics and their time together on the farm that bound them closer. They shared their love of poetry, music, and riding, and it was Asia who helped her brother learn the great soliloquies of Shakespeare for, of course, John would follow the family vocation and become an actor.

The prolific words of John Wilkes resonated throughout Asia’s life in Europe with the growing difficulty of her marriage. “I loved my brothers devotedly, but Wilkes had grown nearer in those late years at the farm, where we were lonely together. My marriage, which he often urged me to free myself from; was becoming less pleasing to him, this and his professional pursuits separated us at long intervals.”<sup>5</sup>

Asia and John Sleeper had nine children. In 1882, her eldest son, Edwin who was in the British merchant fleet, was lost at sea. He was just twenty years old, and his body never found.

Only four of their children reached adulthood. In between these times, she wrote to her brother Edwin to share her growing grief, sadness, and disillusionment within her marriage. On June 3, 1879, she wrote about her husband, "... how he hates me the mother of nine babies, but I am a Booth that is sufficient."<sup>6</sup>

Her final book was published in 1882, this one called *The Elder and The Younger Booth* about her famous father Junius and brother Edwin.

Asia died in 1888 at the age of 52 in Bournemouth, England. Present were her husband John, her children Adrienne, Creston, and Wilfred, and daughter Asia, with her husband Rhys Morgan, and their little daughter Ethel May.<sup>7</sup>

Her life after the assassination was one riddled with grief and loss not just for her own family, but for the Booth family as well. Of course, she condemned John's actions, but she still loved him. When she wrote the memoir of her brother John, she wrote it in secret and hid it from her husband. He blamed the Booth family and even Asia for his problems, so Asia knew she had to hide her manuscript. Before she died, she gave it out of the family to have it published at some "future time," which it was, but not until 1938. It was given the title *The Unlocked Book: A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth by his Sister Asia Booth Clarke*.

Upon Asia's death in 1888, she secured from her brother Edwin and daughter Asia to be buried in the Booth family plot in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore, Maryland. This act signifies a testimony of an extraordinary unwritten statement of love as she rests with her family and just steps away from her brother John, who is also buried there in an unmarked grave.

A woman of the Civil War, she suffered a lifetime of collateral damage due to her brother's crime. The five words from Shakespeare that ended her memoir of her brother John, "so runs the world away," were bitter fruit in trying to explain what was in her heart that was and always would be unexplainable.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, *The Unlocked Book A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth By His Sister Asia Booth Clarke* (G.P. Putman's & Sons, New York, 1938), p. 141; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 2.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, *The Unlocked Book*, p. 141; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 2.

<sup>3</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, *The Elder and The Younger Booth* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1882), pp. 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *The Unlocked Book*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> Asia Booth Clarke to Edwin Booth, June 3, 1879, The Players Foundation for Theater Education, New York, New York.

<sup>7</sup> From the Heritage Team, Bournemouth Library, Bournemouth Visitor Guide May 16, 1888 (microfilm).

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## **Life with Father in Baltimore Reminiscence of Samuel K. Chester**

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This reminiscence is from the papers of the Maryland Historical Society. It is based on a 1902 interview of Samuel K. Chester (born S.C. Knapp), who, as a theater professional, was acquainted with the Booth family.

“The Booth residence is located in the west side of Exeter Street three houses from the south side of Lexington Street. When Mr. Booth resided there, his first exit at the north from Exeter Street was by way of Low Street, a narrow but respectable street leading to Front Street....

“Accustomed to ample space at his residence in Harford, the tragedian found the small yard in the rear of his townhouse too small for comfort. This would not do so he bought the adjoining yards, pulled down the fences and was thus possessed of a parcel of ground of considerable size....[a] circle of trees [was] planted in the yard by the tragedian....On the outer edge of this circle was a pathway on which the boys of the neighborhood would ride a horse. It was discerned by them a veritable racetrack. On a summer evening, Mr. Booth would place several of these youngsters on the back of a fiery stud and start the equine on a canter around the circle. He apparently enjoyed the spectacle immensely. When the animal had worked itself into a lathering condition of perspiration, Mr. Booth would, with facetious utterance, order the boys to dismount and rub it down. This operation performed, he would take them to a small shop on Exeter Street near Necessity Alley and treat them to ice cream.

“Very few of the neighbors associated with him because of his profession. Most of them are said to have considered an actor as a prime minister of the devil himself. But with the more intelligent element Mr. Booth was on terms of easy friendship. A peculiarity of his was to call at the house of an opposite resident of the street and request the matron of the premises to favor him in sending her sons to his residence with instructions to arouse John Wilkes and Joe from their early morning slumber. Why he preferred this to awakening them himself is not known.

“The Booth residence is so placed that there is a pleasant atmosphere in the sidewalk in front of the house generally. This in conjunction with a deep gutter way, which collected water from a neighboring jump, made the spot the favorite resort of boys who delighted in sailing boats. Mr. Booth would kindly make a bank of mud at one end of the gutter so as to form a pond. A testy old maid who resided in what is now the bed of Lexington Street was often rendered quite wretched because the boys would use the jump on her premises to flush the pond.

Occasionally the street cleaners would recollect Exeter Street and in pursuance of their avocation remove the bank of mud. This never failed to anger the tragedian, and he would express his opinion of the proceeding in un-Shakespearean terms.”