

Providence, Rhode Island

LINCOLN SHOT SIXTY YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

First News of Assassination Reached Providence in Early Evening.—Exhibition of Lincolniana Now at John Hay Library Gives Graphic Picture of National Tragedy

SIXTY years ago, next Tuesday night, the people of Providence were aroused from their slumbers by the tolling of church bells, although many had not retired, for the hour was not yet late. The heads of families hurried down-town to learn the portent of the unmistakable notes of mourning. Instinctively, they made their way to the old Journal office on Washington Row, and to the telegraph office, which was open at an unusually late hour. That fact in itself was very significant.

At the two offices was obtained the information that President Abraham Lincoln had been struck down by an assassin and sustained a mortal wound. Also, that Secretary of State William H. Seward had probably received fatal injury at the hands of another assassin.

The details wired from Washington were brief. The national capital was already shut off from outside communication. Orders had been given to close every road leading out of the city, that the fleeing assassins might be headed off. Still, there was definite information to the effect the President and Mrs. Lincoln, with their guests of the evening, had attended a performance of "The American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre. That while they were engrossed with the play, a man, stealthily making his way to their box, had shot the President in the back of his head.

In the next instant, the assassin had leaped from the box to the stage, tripping over a flag, a part of the box decoration, and that, while he sustained injury, managed to escape. The flight was by way of the stage entrance, where a saddled horse had been held by one of the stage hands.

The President, it was said, had been removed to a house directly opposite the theatre, and eminent surgeons hastily summoned to his relief. They gave no hope whatever; the bullet had penetrated and lacerated the brain.

Secretary Seward, ill at his home, had been stabbed by a man who forced his way into the house and sleeping apartment. It was said that Mr. Seward could not live.

The next bulletin received from Washington was to the effect that Lincoln's assassin was John Wilkes Booth, an actor, and brother of Edwin Booth, the eminent tragedian; also, that Mr. Seward was dead.

Sadly the men folks returned to their homes to acquaint their families with the terrible news that had been the cause of the tolling of church bells. Many sat up for the remainder of the night, hoping that later information would disclose that the President was easier and possibly might recover. The early morning edition of the Journal gave no such encouragement. President Lincoln lingered until 7:22 o'clock in the morning, when the spark of life fled.

Booth escaped from Washington within a few minutes after he shot the President, having made careful preparations for his flight, the holding of the horse at the stage entrance being included. The Provost Marshal of the District of Columbia immediately sent his Adjutant to a signal station on the Winder residence near the theatre, so elevated that it commanded communication with all outlying stations.

It was a Providence signal service man, the late John J. Bellows, who received the hastily written order issued by the Provost Marshal, ran with it to the roof and flashed this message:

"Let no man, woman or child cross the lines, with or without the countersign."

Each station encircling Washington checked up with Mr. Bellows, to make sure the order was correctly received, and then began a flood of inquiries. What was it all about? Briefly information was flashed of the double assassinations.

Every road and bridge was closed, but not in time to intercept Booth; all others in any way implicated in the tragedies were trapped.

Booth, in leaping from the box to the stage of the theatre, sustained the fracture of a leg. Although suffering intense pain, he hobbled across the stage, mounted his horse and drove at a furious pace over the navy yard bridge, where he was held up for a few minutes by a sentry. He persuaded the sentry that he had been waiting for the moon to rise before he started for his home in the country, and was allowed to pass.

His first stop was at the tavern kept by Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, the widow of a Confederate soldier, a resident of Maryland, but who latterly had kept boarders in a house in Washington. Accompanied by David E. Herold, a fellow conspirator, Booth pressed on to the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd, a Marylander, who set the broken leg.

Guilty knowledge that they were being pursued impelled Booth and Herold to ride on with all possible haste to the home of Samuel Cox, near Port Tobacco, who turned them over to Thomas Jones, a contraband trader. Jones kept Booth and Herold in hiding for a week, selecting a spot in the woods near the Potomac river. Government detectives were so hot on the trail of the fugitives that Herold, to prevent the saddle horses from betraying their whereabouts, killed both animals.

After repeated failures to get his guests across the river, Jones finally succeeded in his endeavor on a particularly favorable night. For three days and nights they sought shelter and food from Confederates, which was reluctantly provided when it was explained what Booth had done.

Hunted like a dog through the swamps and woods of Virginia, Booth and Herold at last fell in with three sympathizing ex-Confederate soldiers, who piloted them to Port Royal. From there the fugitives were taken to the house of a man named Garrett, on the road to Bowling Green.

On the night of April 25, William Jett, one of the three sympathizing ex-Confederate soldiers, was apprehended and forced to disclose where Booth and Herold were hiding. The fugitives were located in Garrett's barn. They were called upon to surrender, Herold complying, but Booth refusing to do so.

The barn was then fired, the flames making Booth clearly visible. It had been intended to take him alive, but Boston Corbett, one of the pursuing Union soldiers, a Sergeant in the cavalry, shot Booth in the back of the neck. Three hours later Booth died. To avoid the display of mawkish sentiment, the body of the assassin was privately buried, the grave filled with quicklime, the reset flagstones guaranteeing secrecy. Not until many years after were the remains privately disinterred and reburied in the Booth family lot.

The wheels of justice turned fast and with unerring certainty. They determined that John Wilkes Booth, an actor, 26 years old; Lewis Powell, alias Payne, a former Confederate soldier; George Atzerodt, a coach-maker, spy and blockade runner on the Potomac river; David E. Herold, a young drug clerk; Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Laughlin and John H. Surratt, ex-Confederate soldiers, and Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, mother of John H. Surratt, for months had been conspiring against President Lincoln.

The head and front of this coterie was Booth, who developed a furious spirit of partisanship against Lincoln. After Lincoln's second election, Booth went to Canada, where, being liberally supplied with money, he planned to abduct the President.

March 4, 1865, he was in Washington and made an unsuccessful attempt to break through the lines. It is believed that he was then endeavoring to attack the President. The abduction conspiracy was growing, although Arnold advised Booth to ascertain whether Richmond approved the abduction. Not until after Lee surrendered did Booth abandon the abduction programme and plan the removal of Lincoln, Seward and Vice President Johnson.

Booth was to slay Lincoln, Payne was to murder Seward and Atzerodt was to assassinate Johnson. Herold was to supervise Booth's escape and stage carpenters and stage hands, as minor conspirators, were to assist in the Ford's Theatre tragedy. These plans were formulated at meetings held in a tavern at Surrattville, Md., belonging to Mrs. Surratt, but kept by a man named Lloyd. April 11 Mrs. Surratt called at the house to see if certain shooting irons were kept in readiness. She made a similar call April 14, notifying Lloyd the weapons would be called for that night.

The reason for this second call was that Booth had learned that noon that President and Mrs. Lincoln were to occupy the state box at Ford's Theatre that night. He therefore moved swiftly to get his co-conspirators in readiness for action.

That night he stealthily passed down the side aisle of the balcony and reached the entrance to the boxes. He could have been held up had the sentry placed on duty at that door remained at his post, instead of moving down to the seats to watch the performance. Booth had arranged that there be deposited inside the state box a bar of wood, cut to fit a niche in the wall and hold the door closed, if anyone sought to open it from the outside. Softly opening the door, and as silently placing the bar in place, Booth put the muzzle of a pistol against Lincoln's head, and fired the fatal shot.

Investigation established the fact that Booth, Herold, Surratt and Atzerodt were near the theatre that afternoon. The man who attacked Secretary Seward dropped his hat as he was escaping. The fugitive hid in the woods east of Washington for two days, when hunger drove him back to the city. On the way, he stopped in the woods and made a cap out of one sleeve of his undershirt.

Making his way to Mrs. Surratt's house he gave a private signal by knocks upon the door. When he entered the house he found he had fallen into a trap; Government police inspectors were there. The man, who was Payne, said he had been employed by Mrs. Surratt to dig a drain. Mrs. Surratt, not knowing what he had said, denied knowing or ever before to have seen the man. Both made fatal slips.

The conspirators, with the exception of Surratt, who had escaped into Canada, with Edward Sprangler, were tried and found guilty. Mrs. Surratt, Payne, Herold and Atzerodt suffered the extreme penalty by hanging at Washington, July 7, 1865. Dr. Mudd, Arnold and O'Laughlin were sentenced to imprisonment for life at Torgugas. Spangler was sentenced to prison for six years. John H. Surratt, after hiding in a monastery for several weeks, went to Europe and sought further privacy in the ranks of the Papal Guard. Still impelled by fear, he deserted, went

to Egypt, where he was apprehended and ordered back to America. He was tried in 1867 on the charge of conspiracy, the case running on for two months, and resulting in a disagreement of the jury. There was no second trial.

The whole country was plunged into deep mourning by the great tragedy. Lincoln's funeral was held first at Washington, and finally at Springfield, Ill. The body was carried from Washington to Harrisburg, Pa., Philadelphia, New York city, Albany, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Indianapolis and Chicago. In all those places the body remained in state and was viewed by hundreds of thousands of people. On the night of May 2, the body was taken from Chicago to Springfield, and May 4 the casket was closed for the last time and sealed. The body, on Oct. 15, 1874, was placed in a tomb, the cost of which was \$180,000, at Springfield.

Simultaneously with the holding of the funeral in Washington, like services were held all over the country, save south of the Mason and Dixon Line. In Providence they were held in the City Hall, a structure which occupied a part of the site of the present municipal building. All the public buildings, the store and office structures, the churches and most of the private residences were heavily draped in mourning for a month.

Apropos of the 60th anniversary of that national tragedy, Prof. Francis K. W. Drury, assistant librarian at the John Hay Library, Brown University, has arranged a special exhibition of Lincolniana. It is in half a dozen desk cases in the basement of the library. It includes photographs, sketches, etchings and newspaper and magazine illustrations taken and made in April, 1865, covering every phase of the tragedy. There are pictures of the exterior and interior of Ford's Theatre; the stub of a seat check held by a son of Hannibal Hamlin, on the night of the assassination; a picture of Booth, together with one of his autograph letters; printed copies of the official notices issued in Rhode Island relative to Lincoln's death and funeral; bound copies of funeral sermons and eulogies from all over the country and from foreign lands, some printed in Japanese, Hebrew, Spanish and other languages; funeral badges and memorial medals and envelopes. One large medal in bronze is a copy of that in solid gold sent to Mrs. Lincoln by the citizens of France, as an expression of their sympathy for the American Union. There are many handsomely bound volumes of poems; one by Walt Whitman, another by Tom Taylor which was published in London Punch. Also copies of Providence and New York newspapers that were published on April 15, 1865, with turned column rules, and borders of black in some instances. One desk cabinet is devoted exclusively to the Gettysburg episode in Lincoln's life. Another has several etchings, some of which are of relatively recent issue.