

NEW LIGHT SHED ON LINCOLN ASSASSINATION

Col. Wood, Chief of the Secret Service, Left a Statement of the Facts—Edwin Booth's Story of His Brother's Last Days Is Also Made Public.

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 25.—In the passing of Colonel William P. Wood, in Washington several weeks ago, there has gone a man whose association with the central figures in the Lincoln assassination tragedy were of the most intimate character. Colonel Wood was chief of the secret service at the time of the assassination, the thirty-eighth anniversary of which will occur next Tuesday, and was in Cincinnati when President Lincoln was shot. A telegram from Secretary of War Stanton brought him in haste to Washington, where he was the first to learn positively that the assassin was John Wilkes Booth. He secured from Dr. Samuel A. Mudd of Prince George's county, Maryland, the first and only statement that Booth ever made concerning his part in the matter. Colonel Wood, many years ago, at the request of the writer, made a written statement of the facts in the assassination conspiracy, and the subsequent killing of John Wilkes Booth. This statement, which is now published for the first time, is in part as follows:

The plan of abducting President Lincoln originated with J. Wilkes Booth. It was one of those daring undertakings which, if successful, would have won him great personal notoriety, which is generally the highest aspiration of professional play actors. That Booth was the master spirit of the undertaking is now generally conceded. That he made a convenience of Mrs. Surratt's residence to lay his plans and keep up correspondence with his friends in the confederate capital is equally possible. This Mrs. Surratt, her son John and her daughter Annie were ardent sympathizers with the confederate cause and a well-established fact. But that a religious and respectable lady should be charged with being the central figure in the plot of assassination is simply idiotic.

BOOTH ALONE RESPONSIBLE.

Wilkes Booth was ambitious to plan and successfully perform some act which would distinguish him and cause the people of the south to regard him as a hero. (I do not mean to impute by this that the people of the south desired the death of Lincoln—far from it.) The assassination of Lincoln was a hastily planned scheme of J. Wilkes Booth, and no one else. The proof of this fact is established by the entry made in his diary, taken from his person after capture and death. It read thus:

"April 14, Friday, The Ides.—Until today nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we have worked to capture, but our cause being lost, something great must be done. But its failure was owing to others who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly!"

The plot of the assassination, as far as Booth was concerned, did not require great ability to be carried out. Without any care for the fate of his associates, he took hurried precautions for his own escape. The spur on his boot catching in the drapery when he jumped from the box to the stage resulted in breaking his leg. The splintered bone cutting in the flesh, compelled him slowly to drag his way to the rear of the theater, and this occupied his time until the police put in an appearance on the stage. Not until they had appeared did the negro who was in charge of the house succeed in placing Booth in the saddle. But until the sound of the bay mare's hoof resounded on the cobblestones the police did not realize that the assassin of Lincoln had escaped.

In the statement Colonel Wood then gives an interesting story of how Vice-President Andrew Johnson escaped assassination:

HOW JOHNSON ESCAPED.

On the evening of the assassination a lady friend called on Vice President Johnson at the Kirkwood hotel, where he made his home, and invited on his spending the evening in the company. The gallant Tennessean willingly accepted the pressing invitation. Before leaving the hotel he took the trouble to inform the clerk that he would not return before morning. When Atzerodt (who was detailed to kill Johnson) discovered that the room was vacant, he reported the fact to Herold, Booth's lieutenant. Herold went to the clerk of the hotel to learn when Johnson would return. He was told not till morning. Then Herold, first telling Atzerodt to look out for himself, hurriedly mounted his horse, and rode rapidly to Lafayette square to see if Payne was at his post of duty. Finding Payne was there, he wheeled his horse and rode rapidly to the navy yard bridge, where he had previously agreed to meet Booth. Thus, while the keen-edged knife of the assassin Booth had completed its awful work on that awful evening, totally oblivious of the fact that the bloody work of that night had made him president of the United States, Johnson was enjoying himself in the company of his fair friend.

Some time after the execution of Mrs. Surratt President Johnson sent for me and requested me to give my version of Mrs. Surratt's connection with the assassination of President Lincoln. I did so, and I believe he was thoroughly convinced of the innocence of Mrs. Surratt. He assured me that he sincerely regretted that he had not given Mrs. Surratt the benefit of executive clemency, and strongly expressed his detestation of what he termed the "infamous conduct

of Stanton," in keeping these facts from him.

Colonel Wood was probably nearer to Secretary Stanton Edwin M. Stanton than any other man. Wood was the last man who ever saw Stanton alive and his account of their last interview, which was a stormy one, is of unusual interest. It is as follows:

STANTON'S TRAGIC DEATH.

Shortly after the inauguration of President Grant the Republican leaders induced him to name Stanton for a judge of the supreme court. He did so. The senate promptly confirmed the nomination, but Grant, for some reason best known to himself, did not put his signature to the commission, or if he did sign the commission, it was not forwarded to Mr. Stanton. It was at this time Mr. Stanton sent for me and I called at his residence in K street. When ushered into his presence I was startled at his woebegone and wretched appearance.

He asked me if I knew the reason why that man (meaning General Grant) withheld his commission. I told him. Then we drifted our conversation to the execution of the conspirators, and he rebuked me for not making greater efforts to save the woman who was hanged. He said he would have trusted his life in my keeping; that I would have saved him the torments of hell had I been more persistent in my efforts. I reminded him of my call on President Johnson to plead for Mrs. Surratt, and that I was met by L. C. Baker at the entrance of the president's house, and Baker produced an order over his (Stanton's) signature which set forth that I was not to be admitted to the building or to communicate with President Johnson.

"No true," Stanton responded, "and the Surratt woman haunts me so that my nights are sleepless and my days miserable, and Grant aids my enemies by refusing to sign my commission, which would afford me temporary relief, and, perhaps, prolong my life. He will not do it, and Wood, this is at last the end." Placing his hands to his head he continued: "I cannot endure this pressure; I am dying, dying surely, dying now!"

A few parting words were exchanged between us, and the following day the death of Edwin M. Stanton was publicly announced. He never received his commission of judge of the supreme court, though he had been confirmed by the senate of the United States.

CAPTURE OF BOOTH.

Colonel Wood then gives the following account of the capture of John Wilkes Booth and David E. Herold:

Booth and Herold were found hiding in a barn belonging to a Mr. Garrett, at Bowling Green, Va. The barn was immediately surrounded by the soldiers, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Conger and Lieutenant L. B. Baker. Conger and Baker advanced toward the barn and Baker told Booth and Herold that they must surrender, or else he would burn the barn and shoot them on the spot. Herold was willing to surrender, and did so, amidst a shower of imprecations from Booth. Conger then set fire to the barn.

The blaze lit up the black recesses of the great barn till every wasp's nest and cobweb in the roof was luminous, flinging streaks of red and violet across the tumbled farm-gear in the corner and bathed the murderer's retreat in vivid illumination, and while in bold outline Booth's figure stood revealed, they rose like an impenetrable wall to guard from the sight the dread enemy who hid there. Behind the blaze, with his eyes to a crack, Conger saw Wilkes Booth standing upright on a crutch. At the gleam of fire Booth dropped his crutch and carbine and on both hands crept up to the spot to spy the incendiary and shoot him dead. His eyes were lustrous like fever, and swelled and rolled in terrible anxiety, while his teeth were fixed and he wore the expression of one in the calmness before frenzy. In vain he peered with vengeance in his look; the blaze that made him visible concealed his enemy.

DEFIANT IN DEATH.

A second he turned glaring at the fire, as if to leap upon it and extinguish it, but the flames had made such headway that this was a futile impulse and he dismissed it. As calmly as upon the battlefield a veteran stands amidst the hail of ball and shell and plunging iron, Booth turned, at a man's stride, and pushed for the door, catching in robes, and the last resolve of death—despair—set on his bloodless and strangely handsome face. At this instant Sergt. Boston Corbett, one of Conger's command, fired through a crevice, and shot Booth in the neck. They then took him up and carried him out on the grass a short distance from the barn, beneath a locust tree.

At first it was supposed that he was dead, but Colonel Conger saw his eyes and mouth were moving, and immediately called for water, and put some on the assassin's face. Booth seemed to revive and attempted to speak. Conger bent down to Booth and heard him faintly mutter: "Tell my mother I died for my country."

They carried him to the porch of Garrett's home and laid him on a straw bed; Colonel Conger then sent for a doctor. When the doctor arrived Booth asked to have his hands raised and shown him. When his request was complied with, he murmured: "Useless, useless!" These were his last words. He died about four hours after he was shot.

VERIFIED BY EDWIN BOOTH.

This statement of Colonel Wood would seem to settle at once and for all time the fate of Booth. However, corroboration of the death of Booth, as related by Colonel Wood, is found in the statement made by John T. Sullivan, the well-known actor.

Mr. Sullivan heard the story direct from Edwin Booth, who confided it to him under the seal of secrecy, which has only been lifted by the death of Edwin Booth. Mr. Sullivan probably would

never have mentioned the matter, even at this late day, save for the excitement caused in Oklahoma, recently, by the statement of a man who afterward committed suicide on there, who claimed to be John Wilkes Booth.

"It has often been said that Booth was never killed, but spirited away after the assassination of Lincoln by a number of Southern sympathizers, and is yet alive," said Mr. Sullivan, "but I happen to know that this story has little foundation. I know positively that John Wilkes Booth was killed three days after Lincoln's death, and the assurance came to me from Edwin Booth himself. I was leading man with Mr. Booth for several seasons, and we were close friends. He told me this story in confidence, and I have never spoken of the matter to anyone, and probably never would have mentioned it save for the rumor concerning the identity of the suicide out in Oklahoma."

DETAILS OF ASSASSINATION.

"The details of Lincoln's assassination were given to me by John Matthews, assistant secretary of the Actors' fund in New York. He was in the same company with John Wilkes Booth, and was on the stage when the shot was fired. Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln on Good Friday night, in Ford's theater, in Washington. Mr. Matthews saw Booth when he leaped from the box on to the stage. You will remember that Booth caught his spurs in the drapery of the box and fell, causing him to break his leg, but he rushed to the stage entrance, where a horse was in waiting in the alleyway, leaped on his back and escaped over the Long bridge to Virginia. There his leg was set by Dr. Mudd, and he went on toward the South. It was originally intended to kidnap Lincoln. The plot was made up as follows: Samuel Arnold and James McLaughlin were each to kill one cabinet officer. Lincoln was to have visited Fort Stephens, several miles from Washington, and the plan was to kidnap him on the road, but Arnold and McLaughlin backed out at the last moment.

"Atzerodt, a German house painter, was selected to kill Vice President Johnson at Kirkwood's, and Payne, a blockade runner, tried to kill Secretary Seward in a house in Lafayette square, afterward occupied by James G. Blaine, and now known as the Lafayette theater.

"After Booth had his leg set by the doctor, who charged \$25 for the job, he went on the Athens Fresh, where he was hidden by a Southern sympathizer named Samuel Coxe. He remained there several days, and then continued his flight as far as the Garrett farm, to which point he was traced and the barn surrounded by Captain L. C. Baker and a force of men. He was given five minutes in which to surrender, or he would fire the barn. Booth's answer was: 'I'm a cripple, a one-legged man. Withdraw your forces 100 yards from the door and I'll come. Give me a chance for my life, captain. I will never be taken alive.'

BOOTH'S LAST WORDS.

"The captain refused to agree to any terms but absolute surrender. Booth, still hidden in the barn, said: 'Captain, give me a chance. Draw off your men and I'll fight them singly. I could have killed you six times tonight, but I believe you to be a brave man and would not murder you. Give a lame man a show.'

"Colonel Conger slipped to the rear and thrust a wisp of lighted straw through a crack, and in an instant the barn was ablaze. The captain had instructed his men not to fire on Booth, as he knew the fugitive would be compelled to come out. In the blaze of the fire Booth was seen leaning on a crutch, his gun raised to shoot. As the fire increased he limped to the door, and made one dash, raising his gun as he ran. A sergeant, disobeying orders, fired, and Booth fell. His last words were: 'Tell—mother—and I die—for my country; I thought I did for the best.'

"The men brought out a mattress and placed him on it. He rept on saying 'Kill me, kill me.' At 5 o'clock he motioned to them that he wanted to raise up his hands, but he could not use them; they were completely paralyzed. He said, 'Useless, useless!' and died. Then men raised his body in an army blanket, and it was taken to Washington in a wagon as Lincoln's body was being moved across the country in state. Edwin Booth was taken, practically under arrest, to Washington to identify the body; then it was taken on the steamer Ide, April 27, down the Potomac. From the steamer it was placed in a boat, and Captain Baker and his nephew, a lieutenant in the New York Seventy-first volunteers, carried it to an island 27 miles from Washington and secretly buried it there.

BURIED IN BALTIMORE.

The story was given out that Booth had been buried under the flagstones in the district jail, but that was only told to keep the public mind at rest and satisfy public curiosity. Years after, when the prejudice against the Booth family had somewhat died out, Edwin Booth received secret permission to disinter the body and bury it in the family lot in Greenmount cemetery, in Baltimore. There it is today and Edwin Booth rests beside it.

The permission to remove the body came, of course, from the United States government, and it was the only time that Edwin Booth even entered Washington after Lincoln's death. The fact of his presence there was commented on at the time, though no one suspected why he was there.

"Edwin Booth told me that Mrs. Surratt, who was hanged along with other conspirators, had really nothing to do with the plot, except that the conspirators met at her house. This is the real story of the death of John Wilkes Booth, and came direct from Edwin Booth. I would never have related the story save for this absurd rumor from Oklahoma, which can be easily disproved by sending for John Matthews to identify the body of the man who claimed to be Wilkes Booth.

April 21 1903

Bates Secret Booth

My relative in that John Wilkes capture and but no word has identify by my photo. Apple-lish, as his estimate. He -journal, in his anniversary of feelings—Lincoln of the South. A reconstruction of the Confederate kindly regard Wilson whom mean

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