

Lonely Cabin Missed Cue

Believed Built to Hide Kidnaped Lincoln

RICHMOND, Va., Nov. 5.—In a deep woodland in a little valley in Virginia there stood, until some years ago a strange house, heavily boarded inside with timbers having but one small window, without steps to the second story, built in a pocket reaching back from the valley, and obviously of no use then, or ever, to any one. Only the owner of the land whereon it stood, a few neighbors who chanced by while hunting, and one or two farm laborers had ever seen the structure, but soon traditions spread that it was a "haunted house."

The story of the haunted house may or may not have been true, but there was in the history of the house a story as strange as that for, except for chance, in it might have been settled the fate of the nation, and, also save for chance, Abraham Lincoln might have been a prisoner there, and might have even died within its walls.

This story, writes John T. Goodrich in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, came from men who were concerned in the plot to kidnap Lincoln, and men who aided Booth to escape, all of whom were sentenced to death and later retried and acquitted "for lack of evidence."

THEIR KNOWLEDGE

They knew that John Wilkes Booth was dead, either by his own hand or the rifle of Boston Corbett, the Federal cavalryman, who said he shot him as Garrett's barn flamed up. None of these men were in the plot to kill Lincoln, although they were leaders of the scheme to abduct him, and none of them told much of the tale of the events in which they were concerned, save to relatives, for in the days after the War Between the States all of them earned a living in the North and believed it better to tell little of what they knew, too much being published from time to time for them to relish.

The fact behind this sidelight on the great drama, which sent Lincoln to his grave and made Booth's name notorious, is that the group which gathered at the Surratt's boarding house did not intend to kill Lincoln but were intent upon a plan to spirit him away to the South and hold him there, under threats to take his life,

until the North agreed to terms of surrender of prisoners, an armistice, and possibly in the end agreeable terms of peace. Booth, who came into the plot at the Surratt house after the others had spent months hatching and perfecting it, was frequently in and out of Washington, and only in the latter days of the war remained there, where, becoming desperate, he turned the plan from kidnaping to murder, and thus drove half the group back into the Confederate lines.

CONRAD'S TRIPS

Among those who led the kidnaping plan was Capt. Thomas Conrad, one of the boldest of all the Confederate spies, who was sent many times on missions by Lee himself.

It was in midsummer of 1864 while passing along the "Underground Route," which led from Washington into Maryland, thence down the Maryland side of the Potomac to where, between Marbury and Riverside, many roads lead to the river, that Capt. Conrad, stopping at Surratt's, a station on the "route," became involved in the plot to seize Lincoln.

His first duty was a slow trip back over the "underground," during which he sounded every one of the many Southern sympathizers who were part of the route, and traversed every road and pathway along it. Returning, he reported the conditions to the conspirators, and, with one other, was assigned to get into Washington and there watch every movement of President Lincoln. The two spies observed, from Lafayette Park, and from a room they rented which looked toward the White House, and followed Lincoln's carriage every afternoon, or at night, if he went out then, until they knew minutely his usual routine, and most of his variations from it. It was March, 1865, before every plan was made.

A STRANGER

While Conrad and his partner did this, George A. Atzerodt went down the underground on the Maryland side and near Riverside had a boat built in a cove. The boat was a row-boat, with sets for three oarsmen, and was to be used to convey Lincoln to the southern side of the

Potomac. The time set for the kidnaping was in the latter half of March.

About this time, a stranger appeared in Stafford County, and sought a small tract of land, choosing his location near Potomac Creek, almost opposite Riverside. He found a piece of land that suited him, and, after seeking a lawyer, William Henry Fitzhugh, he had the deed made and paid the price asked, without parley, in United States gold, astonishing the attorney, who had long been dealing with the deflated Confederate bills. Then the stranger, with others whom Mr. Fitzhugh never saw, began to build a curious house in an isolated cove that ran back from the valley, where a house appeared to be utterly useless. The owner of the adjacent tract spoke to the newcomer of it when he found out what was going on, but the man was surly and uncommunicative and the neighbor did not go near the place again.