

One of Booth's Captors Recalls Assassin's Death

Actor Slew Lincoln After Cousin Was Hanged, Veteran Says.

(Special to The Times-Picayune)

Bloomington, Ill., Feb. 7.—William A. McDonald, tall, stalwart, gray mustached, the only survivor, it is said, of the party of cavalymen who captured John Wilkes Booth, slayer of Abraham Lincoln, has been passing several months in Central Illinois, visiting relatives. A former resident here he has been making his home in Long Beach, Cal. Modest and taciturn, he was slow to talk about the events connected with that memorable quest of sixty years ago. He recalled somewhat reticently that he was a member of Troop F, Eighth Illinois Volunteer Cavalry, he and his command having been on duty in Washington some weeks before the assassination. Booth, he said, was something of a social lion in the national capital and had the entrée of the most exclusive circles.

"Booth's cousin, John Bates Bell," said McDonald, "was a dashing Confederate officer, and had been captured as a spy. There was a plot to release and arm the rebel prisoners then in confinement at Camp Douglas, Chicago. The scheme was discovered and Bell condemned to die by hanging.

"Booth, with the aid of Wash McLetan of the Cincinnati Enquirer, and Senator John P. Hale, attempted to

secure a reprieve. The three called upon Lincoln and Booth made a stirring appeal in behalf of Bell. Lincoln's kindly heart was moved and he wrote the order, staying the execution.

"This order was transmitted to Seward, secretary of war, but he held it up, resenting the interference of the president. When Booth learned his relative had been hanged, he became half crazed, and not knowing that Lincoln had kept his word, resolved to assassinate him.

"Our troop was one of those detailed to capture the murderer. Booth rode to the home of Dr. Mudd, a Southern sympathizer, where the fracture of the leg he injured in escaping was reduced. Booth then pressed on to Port Royal, Va., and applied for shelter at the Garrett farm, explaining that his horse had fallen upon him, thus accounting for the injury. Booth was accompanied by a friend. David Harold, later hanged for complicity in the plot.

"It was ten days after the shooting of Lincoln when Booth and Harold reached Port Royal, successfully eluding pursuers. The next day, after Booth and Harold had been given accommodations, the news was received of Lincoln's shooting. The neighbors immediately surmised the guests of the Garretts were the men sought by the cavalry and the pursuing soldiers were informed. The Garretts advised the two fugitives to hide in the tobacco warehouse and they did so.

"When the cavalymen of our command commenced their search a son of the elder Garrett informed the trooper of the hiding place of Booth and his companion. The building was surrounded and the two occupants ordered to surrender. Harold was willing and did so but Booth refused. Harold left his revolvers with Booth, thrust his hands through the half open door, permitted himself to be handcuffed and taken away. Booth then sought to argue with the soldiers, indicating his disordered mind. Colonel Baker, in command of the regiment, wearying of the delay, ordered a fire started against the building, believing that would force the fugitive to emerge.

"Through the cracks of the warehouse our soldiers could see the form of Booth, the light from the flames revealing him. One of them, Sergeant Boston Corbett, thrust his gun through an opening in the boards and shot Booth, disregarding orders to take him alive. Booth was carried to the veranda of the Garrett home, mortally wounded and died one hour later."

McDonald recalls that in the pocket of Booth's coat was a letter intended for Garrett, his host, and which contained a \$5 bill to pay for his hospitality. He had doubtless planned to leave this during the night and secretly make his way to the South. This letter read as follows:

"My Dear Sir—Forgive me but I have some little pride left. I cannot blame you for want of hospitality. You know your own affairs best. I was sick, tired with a broken leg, and in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog away in such a plight. However, you were kind enough to give me something to eat for which I thank you. It is not the substance but the way in which kindness is extended that makes one happy in the acceptance thereof. Need I ask you accept the enclosed \$5, although hard to spare, in payment for what we have received. Most respectfully, your obedient servant,
"JOHN WILKES BOOTH."