The World's Mysteries

MYSTERIES of AMERICA

WHAT BECAME OF WILKES BOOTH?

What became of Wilkes Booth, the murderer of President Lincoln? Was he shot by Boston Corbett in the Virginia barn to which he had been tracked after he had fled from Ford's Theater, Washington, immediately following the assassination? If this man was Wilkes Booth, why was there so much mystery regarding his burial? It is hard to believe otherwise, yet many statements have been made which conflict with the killing of Booth and the burning of the tobacco barn, as given out by the government.

One of these stories was to the effect that Booth had escaped South through the country which would naurally have been friendly to him, and, changing his name, became an Episcopal minister. There are those who knew this southern clergyman, and who say he bore a striking resemblance to the Booth family; that he possessed Wilkes Booth's ungovernable temper and love for liquor, and that he also had his mannerisms and was lame in the leg. Booth broke his leg when he fell from the box immediately after he had shot the President.

It is said that this same clergyman had, upon several occasions, hinted that he was Wilkes Booth. The rumor being circulated among his congregation, the minister found it advisable to move farther south, and a newspaper interview in the year 1893, tells that the mysterious clergyman was once secretly visited in a Georgia town by Edwin Booth ,and that the two were closeted in private conversation for hours.

Another story relates that Booth was able to escape through all the southern states until he reached Mexico, being disguised as a Confederate soldier. This seems highly improbable, for in the south at the time only a little precaution would have been necessary for him to have found a safe convoy to whichever section he might wish to go. F. W. Bates, a Tennessee lawyer, some years ago wrote a book, in which he said that he met a man in Texas in 1868 who confessed to being Wilkes Booth, and that this man later killed himself in Enid, Oklahoma.

In 1903, a New Jersey actress affirmed that she was the daughter of Wilkes Booth and that her mother was a Kentucky woman whom Booth had married in the early 70's, having assumed the name of David E. George. But the most mysterious part of her story was that her father said that after his escape he was compelled to hide for a long period in the Kentucky mountains and it would seem that such a thing would have been unnecessary.

The story as told of the capture of Booth was to the effect that the barn in which he and his companion had taken shelter was surrounded by thirty picked cavalrymen, who were compelled to burn it to get him. This seems a rather awkward statement when considering the fact that thirty "picked cavalrymen" were not able to capture one wounded man. It does not seem that it would have been such a difficult task to have surrounded the barn on all sides and to have caught the man by making an entry at different points without any harm to themselves, desperate as he may have been.

But the most mysterious part of the whole procedure seems to have been as to the disposition made of Booth's body, if it was Booth who was killed in the tobacco barn. It was months after the assassination before anything definite was heard as to what was done with the body. Then an officer came forward with the statement that it had been sunk in the Potomac at night. Other men claimed proof that it had been cremated. More authoritatively it was said that the murderer was buried in a government prison. Then many persons began boldly to assert that he had never been captured or shot, and that if anyone had been killed in the tobacco barn it was more than likely some skulking tramp.

The government statement was to the effect that after Booth's body had been carried to a gunboat, it was sesecretly removed, and a few years later it was turned over to the actor, Edwin Booth, who had it interred in Green Mount cemetery in Baltimore. In 1903, one of the pallbearers at the funeral said: "The body buried in Green Mount was not that of Booth. There were never two persons who resembled each other less, and I knew Booth all my life. I saw the body several times. There is a mystery somewhere between the assassination of President Lincoln and the drawing of the curtain in the life of Wilkes Booth.

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WHERE WAS BOOTH BURIED, A MYSTERY.

Man Who Knows, But Who Refuses to Tell, Celebrates His Golden Wedding Anniversary.

[By International News Service.]

Cambridge, Conn., Nov 21.—Dr. George L. Porter and wife commemorated today their golden wedding anniversary. Dr. Porter was a close friend and confidant of Abraham Lincoln and is the last survivor of the secret guard that was entrusted with the disposition of the body of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Lincoln.

Fifty years ago today Dr. Porter and Maria Catherine Chaffee of Providence, were wed at that place at 11 in the forenoon. Four hours later Dr. Porter was called to arms and left his bride of a few hours. He served as an army surgeon throughout the war and was made a commanding officer before its close. He was stationed at the arsenal in Washington at the time of the assassination of Lincoln.

Dr. Porter has faithfully guarded the secret of the burying place of Booth's body and insists that when he dies the secret will die with him.

City News in Brief

Will Play "The Freshmen."

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Booth's Nephew

Murderer Responsible For Double Crime in London.

Helmithnsea, Eng., Dec. 10.—The mantle of melancholy that seemed to overshadow the lives of all the Booths, again has turned back and unveiled a family tragedy.

The Brighthnsea suicide, who first killed his wife, was identified today as the American actor, Junius Brutus Booth of Boston, nephew of the great Edwin Booth and son of the talented Agnes Booth Schoefel, who died a year or so ago at her home in Brookline.

Despondency, extremity, desperation—the same misguided motive which once impelled a Booth—an uncle of this suicide—to a madder deed, once more applies.

Booth and his wife had been shot to death. At first it was believed it was a double suicide. A note found in the room read:

"I have given my wife a sleeping draught to ease her pain. As I can not live without her, I will give myself another.

It is said here by the man's friends that the grandson of the great Booth had become addicted to drugs and that he was despondent because of the failure of a moving picture show in which he was interested.

Junius Brutus Booth, the American actor who killed himself and wife in London, was the elder son of Junius Brutus Booth, the actor, and Agnes Booth, who later became the wife of John B. Schoefel, who is now manager of the Tremont theater in Boston. He was a nephew of Edwin Booth and a brother of Sydney Booth, also an actor.

Mr. Booth was about 44 years old and was born in Boston. His first appearance on any stage was made at the Boston theater when he was about 3 years old. As all his family were interested it is natural that he adopted the stage as a profession.

His first appearance as a professional actor was made with Mary Anderson, with whom he remained for one season. The following season he joined Dion Boucicault's company and played in "The Jilt." Then he became a member of A. M. Palmer's Madison Square company, playing in "Jim the Penman." In which his mother, now dead, achieved notable success.

For a season Mr. Booth was with Richard Mansfield's London Lyceum Theater company. After his London engagement he went to Boston and joined the Boston Museum stock company. He remained with the old time stock company until 1892, when he left the stage and took up the study of medicine.

There remain one the stage only two relatives of Edwin Booth. They are Sydney Booth, brother of the Brighthnsea suicide, and Wilfred Clarke, son of John Sleeper Clarke and brother of the late Creston Clarke. The mother of the Clarkes was a sister of Edwin Booth.

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