

*Axel Collier*

ENTER - THE BOOTH RELATIVES

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Chapter 21.

ENTER - THE BOOTH RELATIVES.

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The investigation of Mr. Bates' claims made by me in 1920 and 1921 was not for publication purposes, but to satisfy a small group of interested people as to whether there was any foundation for the statements made by the Bates' book, "The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth."

Research in Oklahoma, Texas, Washington D. C. and over the route followed by the fleeing assassins convinced us that all such claims were spurious. The results of these findings were placed before Mr. Bates in a conference. His defense was, "I don't understand how that happened" or "I don't know. I'll have to look it up." He promised to produce further corroborative evidence of his claims if given a little time. He told a great many tales which he declared could be confirmed by affidavits and promised to procure such confirmation. During the following months four sworn statements were received from him. One, a statement from Blanch De Bar Booth, an actress and niece of John Wilkes, will be discussed at some length in later pages. Other affidavits procured by Bates were those of Wilson, Kenzie and N. C. Newman, quoted and reviewed in the preceding chapter. Another statement forwarded by Mr. Bates was unsigned. The writer of this, evidently a paranoiac, claimed that the assassination was the work of the Mexican government, Emperor Franz Joseph and Pope Pius IX. Mr. Bates' comment is that this "rather adds an international purpose and conspiracy against the life of Lincoln." Occasional letters came from Mr. Bates in which he claimed that he was making efforts to gather the additional proof. In the meantime, November, 1923, Bates died and the file was closed until about the time of the Lincoln Birthday celebration in 1925, when the Booth myths were revived in the public press. Among the numerous articles which appeared was one in the Minneapolis Daily Star. It was a purported interview with Blanch DeBar Booth, a Minneapolis woman, who is the daughter of Junius Brutus Booth (known as "the younger,") a brother of Edwin

and John Wilkes. This would make her a niece of Lincoln's assassin.

In the sensational heading for these newspaper stories it is stated, "John Wilkes Booth Escaped. This was admitted today in Minneapolis by his niece, Blanch Booth, breaking the sixty-year silence of the Booth family regarding the fate of Abraham Lincoln's slayer."

And in the story was the statement, "Finis L. Bates, probably the greatest authority on the subject, knew John Wilkes Booth as John St. Helen at Granberry, Texas. (Granberry is misspelled in the same manner as in the Bates book. This and other misspellings indicate that the reporter cribbed most of the story from that "history connection.") Under a picture of Miss Booth is the statement, "niece of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth, whose admission in Minneapolis clears up the controversy over the fate of the Assassin."

The writer of the article in question, not satisfied with repeating the absurd claims from the Bates book, inserted such additions as "He (St. Helen-David George) produced a photograph proving his identity that was identified by Edwin Booth and Joseph Jefferson."

Edwin Booth died June 6, 1893, ten years before David George passed on, and a letter from Jefferson which I have already quoted denies any identification on his part. Reporterial "skill" is exhibited further in the statement, "He (David George) left behind him sworn statements declaring that Andrew Johnson, Vice-President who succeeded Lincoln, not only suggested the crime but arranged for his escape." This outbates Bates, who could not go quite that far.

In the newspaper stories sent broadcast by the International News Service and based on the Minneapolis Star "interview," it was stated that Miss Booth claimed that her uncle, John Wilkes Booth, called on her in St. Louis in the late eighties or early nineties and that although she considered him at that time an impostor, he finally convinced her of his identity by recalling various events of their childhood.

Then follows in these press reports, a recital of parts of the Bates book and an alleged statement by Miss Booth that the body of David George is indeed that of her uncle. It was but the work of a moment to obtain from the files a copy of the affidavit dated March 29, 1922, given by Blanche Booth to Mr. Bates, in which she states:

"During my residence in Minneapolis I joined the Sanford Dodge Company. During the tour the company acted in Enid, Oklahoma, where we know now that John Wilkes Booth had been living under the name of David E. George. We were playing one-night stands at Enid, Oklahoma, to the best of my recollection, during the month of December, 1902. I was in my room at a hotel in Enid, getting ready to take a needed rest, having to act that night, being dreadfully fatigued. A knock came upon my bedroom door; I went to the door and opened it; it was late in the afternoon, the shades were down, a man was there who said, 'Blanche, would you like to see Johnny,' in a quiet tone, and handed me a card; not realizing then the truth of what was transpiring, I said to this dark-complexioned man, 'I act tonight and must have my rest,' and closed the door. Before going to the theater that night I glanced at the card which I had thrown upon the table, on which was written 'John Wilkes Booth.' I did not realize then the truth of the chance I had of meeting face to face my uncle, John Wilkes Booth."

When interviewed in March, 1925, less than a month after the news service stories were published, Blanche Booth stated that she did not know positively that John Wilkes Booth escaped, but that she had accepted the theories of Finis L. Bates, who she claimed had gone into the matter very thoroughly and had consulted her in connection with the matter.

The only pictures in her possession were a retouched copy of Bates' tintype of St. Helen, a copy of a picture of David George taken after his death, which had been given her by Mr. Bates, and a copy of a very common picture of John Wilkes Booth taken before the assassination. She had no documentary or other proof

to substantiate the statements credited to her by the press.

Miss Booth's value as a contributor to the matter was somewhat depreciated by the fact that the alleged statements to the press and in the affidavit she has contradicted herself on some point. In the story given out by the newspapers, she was reported as saying that the only time she saw her uncle after the assassination was in St. Louis in the "late 80's or early 90's." In the affidavit given Mr. Bates the date is 1902, and the place is Enid.

A magazine article in which I discussed the statements and affidavits attributed to her was sent to Miss Booth, and on June 20, 1925, a letter was received from her in which she wrote, "I have read carefully the papers you send me. I am not and never have been a 'business woman' - always getting away from, sometimes ignoring these, to me - wretched commercial, legal documents. I'm distressed at what I read in these black and white sheets - still the truth, or a falsehood is the same, if recorded on a rose leaf. Something has gone wrong here or I would not be so distressed.

I'll try to be clear! I never saw the body that is spoken about, as being that of John Wilkes Booth. I came face to face with the man who knocked at my door, while I was acting with a Sanford Dodge Company at Enid, Oklahoma - I exchanged but a word or two with him, telling him I was too fatigued to see anyone - As I have repeatedly mentioned at that time 1923. I had no doubt but that John had been captured by the government and thought the slip of paper he handed me was written John Wilkes Booth. I thought it all a stupid trick then, and threw the paper on a bureau or table, never thinking anything more of the incident, until I partly, not carefully, read the book, written by Mr. F. L. Bates, which he sent to me here. Shortly after this Mr. Bates came to Minneapolis to meet me, which he did. Several of my days, were given to his service, meaning no benefit to me, outside of the interest and influence which grew out of what he wrote and told me. The book has influenced wiser heads than

mine ; the little tintype making converts many of the notable members of my profession, Wise "old Rip" and many others. Mr. Bates brought at one time while visiting me in my apartment here a young lady typewriter, I'd forgotten her name. There seemed to me nothing importantly legal about the doings. I am very stupid concerning these legal affairs. I have no recollection of these black and white pages being read to me, I mean being read over to me. I had a chance at Enid, 1823, (2) of meeting face to face, a man calling himself J. W. Booth, the chance of identifying that man which I let pass, giving the incident not a serious thought. Now the significant signature - its so simple. Mr. Bates handed to me one day of the several a small photograph of my uncle John Wilkes Booth, the one familiar to so many. It had the unusual mark of John's signature. Now I recall distinctly that the slip given to me by the man at the door had not the unusual mark but that doesn't seem to mean anything. John might sign his name either with or without 'his mark' as the mood came to him. The photograph and little card John sent me when he came to St. Louis to play a theatrical engagement at my late uncle's theatre, St. Louis. These bits were not returned to me after I had been arrested and released when a girl, so short a time before (after) John's mad act. I dislike the publicity I am involved in. Aside from the relationship, I am not proud of being in any way connected with so shocking a tragedy. Please let me try to tell you in my rambling manner about the Minneapolis Daily Star incident. One day last winter, I was ill a great part of the winter confined to my room but still roaming round my room at times for exercise, a strange voice called me to the telephone asking me my opinion of the Booth tragedy I replied, 'I believe Mr. Bates book to be an authority.' Two minutes, perhaps not so long, was all there was of this. My attention was called to the horrid black pictures in the Star and the text a liberal quotation of pages from Mr. Bates book making it all seem my words, after a legitimate interview. Perhaps my quoting Mr. Bates

book justified the gentleman in giving publicity to the terrible black pictures, and further making it appear to be the result of a personal interview with me."

Reference to a letter she wrote some years ago for a stage directory shows that Miss Booth was born April 2nd, 1844, this made her eighty-one years of age at the time she gave these interviews. (3) Her confusion can to some extent be accounted for by the fact that she had "carefully examined the pictures illustrating a book, 'The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth,' written and published by Finis L. Bates." Following this in the affidavit written by Mr. Bates' typist, but which Miss Booth cannot remember reading or having read over to her, she is caused to state, "I unquestionably identify those pictures of John Wilkes Booth. I have also examined the mummified body of John Wilkes Booth, now being exhibited by Finis L. Bates and lessees is the true body of John Wilkes Booth my uncle. She emphatically denies ever having seen the body in her letter to me and underscores her denials. She is not the only one who has become confused by reading the Bates book.

The newspaper stories containing the interview credited to Miss Booth also stated that Dr. Clarence True Wilson, of Washington, D. C., (4) General Secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, confirmed Miss Booth's statements.

The Washington Times for February 21, 1925, reported that Doctor Wilson, when interviewed, declared: "I saw the body several months ago. I found on it many marks of identification which prove conclusively the man is Booth."

Doctor Wilson said, according to the Times, that he had just completed an investigation of the Lincoln shooting on which he has spent thirty-eight years. He is then quoted as stating:

"When I was a boy in Maryland I was told the story of Booth's escape by several persons who were in the plot," Doctor Wilson said "Since that time I have been spending much time gathering proof that Lincoln slayer was not killed by soldiers as generally believed.

"I have scores of affidavits from Booth's family and others who were in a position to know everything." (Dr Wilson here refers to the Blanch De Bar Booth and N. C. Newman affidavits, both of which are worthless).

"At the time soldiers from Washington were searching for Booth in lower Maryland, near here, the slayer was riding horseback on his way West.

"The soldiers went to the Garrett home in Virginia on a tip that Booth had gone there. Mr. Garrett met them at the gate. They asked to see his new boarder. That same day a confederate of Booth's, who had just made a trip some miles north to get some papers for the slayer, had asked permission to sleep in the barn.

"The soldiers searched the barn and found this man. His last name was Ruddy. I think his first was Gerald, but I am not sure. Ruddy was shot and killed. His body was taken to the old penitentiary and four years later turned over to the Booth family. It was buried in Baltimore." (This is a repetition from the Bates myth)

"But Booth was never caught I am sure of that. I followed his trail from the time he left Washington until his death. I have affidavits from people who saw him on the trip, people who know Booth intimately." Doctor Wilson said that a dozen or more persons who knew Booth gave him a description of the man together with telltale marks". (Others have claimed these "telltale" marks for their particular "Booths", not the mummy of David of David George).

"One mark in particular identifies him," Doctor Wilson said, "That is cut over his left eye. I saw that mark on his body several months ago."



"It was never buried," according to Doctor Wilson as reported by the Times, "The body was turned over to an old couple in Memphis. The man died several months ago. His wife has been so bothered with people that I do not think it right for me to give the exact address in Memphis." (Dr. Wilson refers to Finis Bates and his wife).

"Doctor Wilson said," stated the newspaper, "That Booth's lawyer, the man who served him for more than twenty-five years, took charge of the body when it first came to Memphis." ("Booth's lawyer" is Mr. Bates)

In his inquiry, extending over nearly four decades, Doctor Wilson is supposed, according to the Times to have traveled thousands of miles. He is then quoted as saying:-

"I investigated all sorts of rumors and reports. I soon learned that what I was told when a boy was true; Booth escaped.

"Everyone in his family knew about it. Most of them saw him and talked with him. His niece's story is true. She saw her uncle before he died". (Everyone in his family refers to a vague reference to Edwin Booth, the worthless N. C. Newman affidavit and the statement of Blanche Booth the Niece).

"I have talked with hundreds of Booth's friends, with several of his co-conspirators. I know the whole story of the plot to kill Lincoln and its execution." (This would be of some value if some of these Booth's friends and co-conspirators were referred to by name and their statements quoted).

Dr. Wilson's statements, if correctly reported, would not indicate any great familiarity with the true story of the plot to kill Lincoln, nor the events transpiring during the four years following. It is manifest that he not only has never carefully studied but is quite unfamiliar with the evidence brought out at the three big trials, on which alone a right judgment can be based.

In his "Wanderings of J. Wilkes Booth" issued in 1902, Mr. Campbell (5) also quotes Doctor Wilson as follows:

"During a brief visit in Oklahoma City, Dr. Lawrence (meant for Clarence) True Wilson, traveling for the Methodist denomination in prohibition work, the writer was highly entertained. Incidentally the doctor is preparing an Epworth lecture on the escape of Booth. During the conversation Mr. Wilson said he at one time had an intimate friend - Sam Colona, who when in Washington City put up with a cousin by the same name. While taking a boat at Princess Ann, Maryland, for a trip to Mexico, Mr. Colona says he noticed a man who had just 'walked the plank' ahead of him; a fine looking gentleman, exquisitely dressed, long wavy raven hair, keen black eyes and mustache. 'There,' says Colona, 'I saw some one who I was sure would be a fine companion, so on landing on the boat I inquired of the stranger if he thought it would leave on time. 'Sure - you will be the last to board.' Noticing that I was in uniform, he inquired if I had yet secured a stateroom, at which I replied I had not; that I was a soldier and used to hard knocks and would sleep on the chairs.' After eyeing me a moment and working at his mustache as he twirled a small cane: 'You will do no such thing. Yonder is my stateroom and you shall occupy a bunk in there with me.' Of course, the offer was accepted and together we traveled until landing at Vera Cruz. And let me say I found the man who after I told him my name was Sam Colona, said his name - 'or will be' he added, 'John St. Helen.' We secured a job in a box factory at Vera Cruz, I on the outside and he an inside clerical position. I finally got tired of Mexico,' says Mr. Colona, 'and told St. Helen that I was going back to God's country and he must go with me; that I could muster enough to set us up in 'business.' But St. Helen demurred. 'No, my best of friends, when we part we will never see each other again. I dare not tell you why, for if you knew it would make your hair stand on end.' With this he shifted the conversation. In a few days after I told St. Helen that I was going and he could at least go as far as the boat with me. We started, but when in about half a mile of the wharf St. Helen stopped and remarked as he extended his

hand: 'If you must go, I suppose it means our parting and it may as well be right now. I might find some one at the river I don't want to see.' After a few desultory remarks he said: 'Well, my dear friend - but before we finally part I am constrained to unbosom myself, feeling that I can trust you with - a secret,' as he reached over and fairly whispered. Again shaking my hand fervently: 'Good-bye, my best of friends, but - 'squaring face to fame: 'I am John Wilkes Booth, and now you know something no one else on this earth knows except myself. Please - do - give no hint that may start the bloodhounds on my track.' With this John St. Helen and I parted."

On February 23rd, 1922, in a letter to Mr. Bates, Doctor Wilson said:

"Have you ever gotten a trace of Mrs. St. Helen and her daughter?. She recently appeared here in Washington, went to see the Lincoln collection and told Mr. Oldroyd that she was the own daughter of John Wilkes Booth and that she had come from Oklahoma, I think from the town of Hydro. (6) I have also learned that Jack Garrett, the boy who got up and gave Booth his bed to sleep in, is still living and has recently been the pastor of the Court Street Baptist Church of Portsmouth, Virginia. I have not gotten into personal touch with him yet.

"Certainly you have put into my hands the best subject for a popular lecture that I have ever had or heard of. The people will listen for two hours at a time breathlessly and wherever you give it dozens of men will come up who had been in the army, and say: 'I never believed the story of the soldiers getting Booth and always thought it was a fake of L. C. Baker's to palm the wrong body off and get the money.'

"Wishing you the best of success and hoping that some time that body may be brought here to Washington, Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia, where I think there would be a great interest in it, I remain."

In December, 1924, I wrote Doctor Wilson a letter with regard to his claims and on the 27th of that month received a reply in which he said, "It is true that I have written what has now grown to be enough for a volume of facts about the escape of John Wilkes Booth and his varied life and various names in the Southwest, in the island of Ceylon, and his visit with his brother, Edwin, in Paris and in London.

"It is the story of the same man written up by his attorney, Finis L. Bates, in rather a crude book, "The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth."

"The story came to me thirty-eight years ago in Princess Anne, Maryland, when Samuel Colona, a man who was thirty years a Justice of the Peace in Princess Anne, gave me the story of his ninety-day stay with Booth in Central America and Mexico, beginning with his boat cruise from Vera Cruz to Central America.

"Francis Wilson has the autobiography of Edwin Booth and I believe is preparing it for the press. Edwin Booth tells the story of a strange meeting with his brother but leaves it a mystery, gives his sensations upon seeing him and shaking his hand, rather than the cold facts that would substantiate the meeting. This, of course, was of design, as Edwin Booth was not anxious to put on record the fact that he knew for many years of his brother's whereabouts.

"I have an affidavit sworn to in Minnesota, from Miss Blanche Booth, Wilkes Booth's niece, that she met her Uncle and spoke to him in the hotel at Enid in which hotel he committed suicide two weeks later, January 14, 1903.

"I have in affidavit form the statement of Wilson Kensay, a sergeant in the regular army, who was in the squad that captured the man in the barn. He and Joe Zisgan were the only two in the party who personally knew John Wilkes Booth. They had been companions of his in New Orleans and they both made the statement at the time and have taken oath to it since that the man killed in the barn was not John Wilkes Booth and did not resemble him in any way.

"I have the sworn statement of the oldest of the Garrett boys that the man killed was a man who had walked the sixteen miles from Bowling Green that night, arrived at eight o'clock, was too tired to go on and asked for permission to sleep in the barn: and that John Wilkes Booth, who could not walk at all because of his broken ankle, had left on horseback at two o'clock in the afternoon, so that he had eight hours start on his pursuers.

"Some months ago I wrote The Dearborn Independent offering my story in three or four installments, but some one in your office wrote me that Mr. Bates' story had been investigated down at Enid and the whole thing was a fake. This was a little amusing to me as I went to Enid again and again, following out every trail that the book gives, have traced out its statements here at Washington, found official documents substantiating almost all that he says and while there are inaccuracies in his book, they are mostly verbal. For instance, he calls Levi Thrailkell, Levi Treadkell. He speaks of Bel Air, Maryland, as being twelve miles out of Baltimore, when it is exactly twenty-two. But with the exception of such slips as that, his book is an accurate and truthful description, and I have material in my volume that practically substantiates everything that his book says or implies.

"I am so sure of this that I would be very glad to have you read the volume and submit the pictures and documents to you with great confidence that your decision would be what every other man's has been who has read them, that there could not be such a set of facts as I prove by documentary evidence, if the story was not real.

"Besides, the body of John Wilkes Booth has never been under ground. It can be viewed today by the people who knew him, as it has been by thousands who knew him and were thoroughly familiar with the family and photographs. I could make a volume of the sworn statements of people that it is in reality John

Wilkes Booth."

The reference to Edwin Booth's story of a "Strange meeting with his brother" is not so mysterious in view of the communications Edwin claimed to have received from his dead wife and father. (7)

He writes, eleven years after the death of his father and sometime subsequent to the death of his wife, "My father and Mary have both been with me there, and have written and spoken with me through Miss E - in a curious manner."

We already have examined the claims made for Miss Blanch Booth who does not swear that she met her uncle and spoke to him in the hotel at Enid." A man came to her door whom she did not recognize, left a note which she considered a joke and threw away. This affidavit from Blanch Booth and the one from N. C. Newman who cannot substantiate his claims to John Wilkes Booth relationship are the only statements of Booth "relatives" on record.

Dr. Wilson next states that he has the affidavit "of Wilson Kensey" referring evidently to the statement obtained by Mr. Bates March 31, 1922, from Wilson D. Kenzie telling his purely imaginary part in the pursuit of Booth which we already have examined and found absolutely worthless as Kenzie was not even along with the capturing troops. Jos Zisgen has not taken oath to that statement. Dr. Wilson's misunderstanding on this point comes from Kenzie's claim that at the Garrett place he (who was not there) called Zisgen, "Come here, sergeant, this ain't J. Wilkes Booth at all." Kenzie, it will be remembered also says that Booth died instantly, which is not a fact, and that Zisgen did not get any of the reward. The Treasury Department Records however, show that he signed for it.

In his letter to Mr. Bates February 23, 1922 Dr. Wilson said that he had learned "that Jack Garrett, the boy who got up and gave Booth his bed to sleep in is still living". In his letter to me December 27, 1924 he has "the sworn statement of the oldest of the Garrett boys."

Jack was the oldest but when I visited on Sunday November 14, 1920 with W. H. Garrett, the second son at the old Garrett place where Booth died, he told me that his brother, Jack, had been dead several years.

But Dr. Wilson says that the Bates' book "is an accurate and truthful description."

I wrote him on December 30, 1924 that I would be glad to go over his manuscript and give him an analysis of it, but that was the last I heard of it.

As Blanch Booth says, "The book has influenced wiser heads than mine."

In "The New Voice" a publication of which Dr. Wilson is the editor, are occasional notices reiterating his claims and those contained in the Bernie Babcock novel, claims filled with assumptions wholly irreconcilable with the evidence.

It is unfortunate that a man of Dr. Wilson's apparent standing and influence should believe and propagate the twaddle contained in statements that will not stand up under investigation. It may spoil the good work he is attempting along other lines.

The legends of Booth's escape grew to such proportions that Harpers, who the myth makers said were on the verge of publishing Mr. Bates claims in a new book or in serial form, asked Mr. William G. Shepherd to probe the evidence to a conclusive issue. Mr. Shepherd, a war correspondent of international reputation and a writer and investigator of twenty years experience, made two trips to Texas and Oklahoma in 1924 and saw many of the same people that I had interviewed in 1921. His results are published in Harper's Magazine for November, 1924, and the title of his story, "Shattering the Myth of John Wilkes Booth's Escape," is also the key to Mr. Shepherd's conclusion that "the evidence against the Enid legend is overwhelming."

ENTER - THE BOOTH RELATIVES.

Notes.

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- (1) The complete statement signed by Blanche Booth for Finis Bates under the conditions described in her letter to me quoted on p.

Minneapolis, Mar. 29, 1922.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:-

I, Blanche Booth, a daughter of Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., he having married Clementina DeBar, sister of Ben DeBar, the well known actor and manager and owner of the St. Louis Theatre, St. Louis, Mo. and the historic St. Charles Theatre, New Orleans, am naturally the niece of Edwin Booth, John Wilkes Booth, Joseph Booth, Rosalie Booth and Asia Booth, children of my grandfather, Junius Brutus Booth, Sr. and my grandmother, Mary Anne Booth.

I acted in the capacity of leading lady with my uncle, Edwin Booth, in his New York Theatre in the early days of that playhouse, under the name of Blanche DeBar, having been adopted by my uncle, Ben DeBar, my father having deserted my mother and myself, my mother secured a divorce from him, the proceedings taking place in the City of Boston. After this my father went immediately to California, where he remained, I believe, a number of years. When I had grown into young womanhood I met again my uncle, John Wilkes Booth, who had come to play a theatrical star engagement in my uncle, Ben DeBar's theatre, St. Louis. My uncle John suggested to me that I go upon the stage and travel with him. John was playing at that time Alfred Evelyn in Bulwer's celebrated play, "Money" and I to play the leading juvenile character, Maria, but my uncle, Ben DeBar, did not give his consent, wishing me, when I did go upon the stage, to appear in leading characters. I went upon the stage the same year that



John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln. Laura Keene, the English actress, failed to keep her contract of a star engagement with Uncle Ben DeBar, and Uncle Ben came to me, saying, "Blanche, do you think you could fill her time?" And my reply was, "Yes, Uncle"! Following the assassination one Sunday night, a big event in my life, sitting quietly in my bedroom, a maid of ours rushed into my room, crying, "Oh, Miss Blanche, there's two Federal soldiers coming into your room". They came into my room, searching my effects thoroughly, taking from me a box containing some innocent girlish letters and papers, and a small picture of John Wilkes Booth, which he had given me, and also an innocent card addressed to me by John. I was then told by the soldiers that I was under arrest together with my Uncle Ben DeBar. While these two Federal Soldiers had their backs turned to me, rummaging through my new stage wardrobe, I rammed a certain very innocent letter belonging to me, into the pocket of a portfolio lying upon the table. They picked this portfolio up, shook it and the letter stuck. The soldiers went outside the door to wait for me to dress to go with them. When the door was closed, I leaped with delight, saying, "Oh, Mary, I fooled those Federal soldiers". I dressed very carefully, putting on my best bib and tucker, I was escorted between two soldiers down the stairway to join my Uncle Ben DeBar in his office. Then we were carried under arrest before Lieutenant Baker, to my best recollection, before whom we were questioned and finally released.

Afterwards I continued my stage career, coming in contact and acting with Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, John McCullough, Tom Keene, Ben DeBar, with whom I played the leading character.

During my childhood I visited for two years with my grandmother and grandfather, Junius Brutus Booth, Sr. in Baltimore and their old farm at Bel

Aire, Md., associating intimately with John Wilkes Booth, who was then growing into manhood, meeting and associating with him again, as I have stated above, I can say that I am one of, if not the one, person to identify pictures and the body of John Wilkes Booth.

During my residence in Minneapolis I joined the Sanford Dodge Company. During the tour the company acted in Enid, Oklahoma, where we know now that John Wilkes Booth had been living, under the name of David E. George. We were playing one night stands at Enid, Oklahoma, to the best of my recollection, during the month of December, 1902. I was in my room at a hotel in Enid, getting ready to take a needed rest, having to act that night, being dreadfully fatigued. A knock came upon my bedroom door; I went to the door and opened it; it was late in the afternoon, the shades were down, a man was there who said "Blanche, would you like to see Johnny", in a quiet tone, and handed me a card; not realizing then the truth of what was transpiring. I said to this dark complexioned man, "I act tonight and must have my rest," and closed the door. Before going to the theatre that night I glanced at the card which I had thrown upon the table, on which was written "John Wilkes Booth". I did not realize then the truth of the chance I had of meeting face to face my uncle, John Wilkes Booth. I remember distinctly a certain peculiarity of John's signature, and I have before me now this same signature of John Wilkes Booth, with its same peculiarity, as appeared on the card left by this person at the hotel in Enid.

I have carefully examined the pictures illustrating a book "The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth," written and published by Finis L. Bates, and I unquestionably identify those pictures of John Wilkes Booth. I have also examined the mummified body of John Wilkes Booth, now being exhibited by Finis L. Bates and lessees, is the true body of John Wilkes Booth, my uncle.

The pictures, papers and souvenirs which have this day been delivered to Mr. Finis L. Bates by me, and made exhibit to the foregoing statements,

are correct as what they purport to be.

I wonder why it should be that these papers, pictures, and souvenirs of the Booth family and myself, should have clung to me so tenaciously through all the vicissitudes of my life, upon which I have bestowed so little thought.

Signed, executed and delivered in triplicate.

Blanche Booth

- (2) (1823) - Apparently meant for 1903.)
- (3) Letter in Booth Collection Harvard University Dramatic Library.

"Booth's Theatre"

July 23 (No year)

Col. T. Allston Brown

Dear Sir:-

In reply to the inquiries you make, I would state that I was born in Philadelphia April 2, 1844. First appeared upon the stage in St. Louis, Missouri at De Bar's Opera House, March 13, 1865 in the character of "Kate Hardcastle" Stoops to Conquer. I was married in St. Louis, June 15, 1868 to Mr. G. W. Riddell.

Respectfully,

(Signed) Blanch Booth (De Bar)

- (4) Minneapolis Daily Star, February 21, 1925, and an interview in the Washington Times, February 21, 1925.
- (5) Campbell p. 89-90.
- (6) (Pages following) --

(Note # 6.)

Miss St. Helen is explained by W. P. Campbell in his "Wanderings of J. Wilkes Booth," pages 90 and 91 as follows: "It seems that when the Kiowa-Comanche country was opened in 1901 "George" drew a lucky number and secured a claim near Hydro adjoining one secured by a buxom widow who had drifted in from Texas to take a number in the land lottery. "George was seen to visit the little slab home of the aforesaid buxom and on one or two occasions they visited El Reno - on the same day. Nosey ones declared they could see a family resemblance and were bold enough to inquire of "George" if the woman was a relative. "Excuse me," he added, introducing the woman, "This is Miss St. Helen, a - no, not exactly - my sister." Subsequently he admitted that the woman was no relation, that he merely introduced her as a josh, etc. This set Madam Rumpus a going and it was soon whispered that "George" and the buxomite had been married by a Hydro justice. And soon after the suicide in 1903 the woman gave birth to a girl whom she had christened St. Helen, and soon as mother and daughter were able to travel they lit out ostensible for Texas, and were ever after lost from the sight of Oklahomans. If still living, the girl born in 1903 would have been a trifle beyond the teens at the time Mr. Wilson alleges the pretended daughter of Booth visited Washington. However, one thing seems evident: If either "George" or Booth ever had a handsome young brunette daughter with laughing eyes and raven hair, she never debuted into either El Reno or Enid's social circles of Four Hundred."

John Wilkes Booth, both real and mythical, seems to have been afflicted with "daughters." In chapter XVlll I referred to a woman who claimed to be Laura Ida Booth, a daughter. The following is copied from the Enid, Oklahoma Daily Wave February 17, 1903, a month after David George's suicide.

J. Wilkes Booth.

A New York Woman Claims him as her Father, and also Part of his Estate.

The Mystery Deepens.

New York Papers Stated That, George, Alias Booth left an Estate of \$30,000, but 30 cents is Close to the Amount.

There has been considerable sensational writing indulged in by penny-a-liners over the suicide of D. E. George in this who confessed to having been J. Wilkes Booth. The New York papers said the suicide shot himself in the head at El Reno and, that he left an estate of \$30,000. Before us is a copy of the Utica, N. Y. Saturday Globe which makes the above statement in connection with a chapter of grave doubts as to the death of Booth on the Garrett farm in Virginia. Owing to these misleading publications in the eastern papers, in regard to the estate left by D. E. George a woman claiming to be Booth's daughter has written a letter to Mayor Hensley of El Reno with an eye to claiming the estate of the deceased, should he prove to have been Booth, which scarcely amounts to 30 cents. In fact a share in the estate was more in the mind of the writer than the proper care and burial of the claimed father, hence, the Wave does not take any serious stock in what the letter contains. However, the Wave will publish same. Here it is:-

New York City, Feb. 11, 1903.

Mayor of El Reno.

Dear Sir:

You will please pardon me for taking the liberty of addressing you, but if all the papers are telling the truth about the man who committed suicide in your territory, D. E. George, if he is really John Wilkes Booth, he is my father, and if there is no other identity proven believe him, for he is telling the truth. He was married to my mother long after the assassination of Lincoln in the state of Tennessee. His wife's name was Louisa Booth and my name is after one of his sisters, I believe the only one he had, and one of my mother's sisters. Laura Ida Booth is my name sake. Do you know whether he had a family in the territory or not? His wife, my mother, died in the year 1879. I never saw my father, he went away two months before I was born. This story may seem strange to you, nevertheless it is true. I have a step-brother who saw them married, and if this is John Wilkes Booth, I am entitled to some of his estate. The papers mention several towns as the place of his suicide. The Globe Democrat places it at Guthrie. Another clipping speaks of Enid, and another of El Reno. I have never been in the territory, and do not understand where these places are located. There is no use of my writing so much until I find out something more from the people who know everything about the matter. As soon as you answer this, I can give you all the information that you want. My people all live in the south and they know all about what I am telling you, and can give you all the information you want. Please do not give this to the papers as I do not wish for any notoriety.

Yours respectfully,

Mrs. Charles Levine,  
New York City.

It may be true that John St. Helen, David George, or some other paranoiac, many of whom were wandering around the country after the Civil War, married this woman's mother under the name of "John W. Booth," and then again he may have been, let us say, the John W. Booth who enlisted in the army at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, before the assassination (See page ) of whom no trace could be found. If the real John Wilkes Booth had been alive and this had been he, would he have given the name "J. W. Booth"? Some other criminal, though, would have found his name a most convenient alias.

Laura Ida's knowledge of the Booth family is inaccurate. She says that she was named after one of her father's sisters, "Laura Ida," but no such sister existed in the Wilkes Booth-Edwin Booth family. The Enid papers report that Laura Ida later came to Enid and "immediately recognized the mummy of David George as her father." He may have been, but it would not prove that he was John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Roy J. Wilson, a lawyer of Winchester, Tennessee, said in a letter of April 25, 1925, "With much interest, I have read your John Wilkes Booth articles. A few years ago I made some local investigations for the "Oklahoma Historical Society," and obtained some very interesting information in connection with the David E. George matter. It had been rumored that D. E. George had married in Franklin County, Tennessee, under the name of Booth.

"After interviewing several old people living near Sewanee, Tennessee, a small town in this county, I learned that a strange and very peculiar man, to the mountain people, had come there in the year 1872 and married Mrs. Louisa J. Payne, a widow, who had a boy who was twelve years old at the time of the marriage, named Cager Payne. I looked through the court records and found the original marriage license and attached certificates, dated February 25, 1872.

"John W. Booth to Louisa J. Payne. The old residents told me that Booth soon left the woman. I learned that Cager, her son, lived at Fayetteville, Tennessee, and made a trip there to see him. The Oklahoma Historical Society had sent to me photographs of D. E. George. I was very much surprised when going into Cager Payne's house to see an enlarged picture of his stepfather on the wall and that same was the photograph of the same man George whose picture I had. He then showed me other small pictures of Booth and they were examined very closely and I feel sure that David E. George and the John W. Booth that married this woman were the same man.

Mr. Cager Payne stated that they never discussed the matter very much, but that he would give me some facts pertaining to the matter for the Society. He also had enlarged photographs of his mother, Louisa J. Payne and his sister, Laura Ida Booth, the daughter of John W. Booth, who left before she was born.

"Mr. Payne stated that being twelve years old he remembered Booth well and that he heard him tell his mother, when he did not know that he was about, that he was John Wilkes Booth and the same man who assassinated President Lincoln, and that he might have to leave at any time and that she need not think anything strange when he was gone. Stating that he would make affidavit to these facts any time. He still lives at Fayetteville, Tennessee. By some means it soon got rumored about this county that Mrs. Payne had married John Wilkes Booth who had escaped. He took her and Cager went to Memphis he passed a citizen on the streets of Memphis who turned round and looked back at him and said to the party with him, "If that isn't John Wilkes Booth, it is his ghost." Booth left Memphis at once and neither Cager nor his mother ever heard of him any more until Cager identified him at Enid Oklahoma after he was dead under the name of D. E. George.

"The daughter, Laura Ida, never saw her father except after it was



embalmed. Her picture, which I saw at Cager Payne's home, revealed the fact that she was a very fine looking woman.

"Mr. Payne told me that his mother told him and his half sister, Laura Ida Booth, that the Booth she had married was none other than John Wilkes who escaped and that another man was killed whom they thought was Booth. Mr. Payne is an honorable citizen of his community and states that with all the facts and circumstances before him as he has them, he could not believe anything else than that John Wilkes Booth, John W. Booth and D. E. George are one and the same man and that he positively knows that John. W. Booth and David E. George are the same man.

"After the death of Mrs Booth, Laura Ida lived with Mr. Payne until she was fourteen years old, at that age she developed talent for the stage, hired herself to a traveling company and has been on the stage ever since."

In the New York Sunday American December 24, 1911 Laura Ida "Booth" now Mrs. L. A. Howard tells her story in detail. This shows a facsimile of the marriage record of her mother Mrs. Louisa J. Payne to John W. Booth February 24, 1872 at Winchester, Tennessee.

The statement is made that Mrs. Howard has a picture of David George and "a copy of his confession that he was Booth." "The picture of the suicide," declares the writer of the American article, "bears a striking resemblance to the more familiar photographs of Booth. The signature to the confession appears identical with that on the marriage license." By "Copy of his confession," she evidently refers to Mrs. Harpers story of the 1900 "confession," quoted in chapter 19. This was made to Mrs Harper orally and not put in writing by her until after George's death nearly three years later.

At the time of the 1900 confession, however, George wrote "J. Wilkes Booth" on a slip of paper. If this is identical with the signature of Mrs. Howard's father it proves conclusively that he was not John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Lincoln. For only the blind or those mentally blinded

by gross prejudice could claim any resemblance between this and the authentic signature of Booth. Both are shown in chapter 19.

Mrs. Howard is quoted as saying, "from what people in Tennessee who knew my father tell me, there is every indication that he was a man of parts. His familiarity with Shakespeare strengthens the belief that he was also familiar with the stage."

It would be interesting to know how familiar these Tennessee mountain folks were with Shakespeare in 1872. Would they be competent witnesses on this point? The man, "John W. Booth" must have made a tremendous effort to convince them of his identity during the few months he was among them otherwise he would not have impressed his personality so indelibly upon their memories for all these many years.

"My mother" Mrs. Howard says, "always believed that her husband had received sudden information that made him apprehensive of arrest on a charge of responsibility for the death of the President. My mother never heard of my father again after he left her. She was always reticent about discussing my father. I believe that my father confided his identity to her prior to their marriage, and that she always respected his confidence. I will let the reader judge of the value of this as proofs.

In the year 1893, in newspaper discussion as to whether Doctor Armstrong was Booth it was repeatedly stated that the wife was doubtful and thought there might be some truth in the claim.

This "John W. Booth" could not have been Mr. Bates' St. Helen for he was in Granbury and Glenrose, Texas, in 1872.

The third Wilkes Booth's daughter was unearthed while I was doing some research work last summer in the Harvard University Library. I found an original letter in the Booth collection on which was the notation "John Wilkes Booth's daughter." The librarian stated that it had been given to them as such.

It is as follows:

"Minneapolis, Minn.

"July 6, 1888

"My dear Friend Mrs. Rogers,

"I write you to learn if possible Aunt Rosalie's address.

I have not heard from her directly in over two years.

"My dear Mother died very suddenly of paralysis of the heart the seventh of last November. I was home at the time with my children. I cannot tell you the shock it was to me for we had no warning. She retired to rest as cheerful and apparently as well as ever. I wrote to Auntie at the time but received no answer. I hope I hear of it from you.

"I lost my youngest child - a beautiful boy sixteen months old last April, which wrung my heart. I have had many trials but no sorrows such as I have suffered this last year.

"I am engaged here at the Peoples Theatre for the season in the stock to alternate the leads with Marie Wellesby.

"My husband is in St. Louis for the summer. I have my two little daughters with me. I wish you could see my beautiful children.

"I hope this will find you and your family enjoying good health.

"With love to you all.

"Sincerely yours

"Ogarita"

Address:

Miss Rita Booth  
c/o Peoples Theatre  
Minneapolis Minn

With the letter was an undated newspaper clipping which read:

WILKES BOOTH'S DAUGHTER

RITA BOOTH, CHARACTER ACTRESS AND WIFE OF ALBERT HENDERSON IS DEAD.

Rita Booth, who is said to have been the daughter of Wilkes Booth, the slayer of President Lincoln, and who for some years has been the wife of Al Henderson, the well-known orchestra leader, died on Tuesday in Binghamton, N. Y., where she was playing in the company of Floy Crowell. The body was brought to this city, and the funeral will take place today.

Rita Booth was a clever character actress, and often declared that she did not wish to rise to any eminence in the dramatic profession, because she feared her relationship would bring unpleasant notoriety. She wore always a medallion locket containing the likeness of the ill-fated Wilkes Booth.

Several people who knew Booth claim to have noted in her the clear-cut features, the big ox eyes, the curly hair and high brow of the man who was regarded as the rising actor of his time. Two children, one a girl of thirteen, survive her. As her husband was an orchestra leader they always managed to get engagements with the same company, and were a very devoted pair.

It was stated at the Players' Club last night that Edwin Booth was not at home.

"The history of Mrs. Henderson's mother would be an interesting one," said a theatrical man last evening, "but she never talked of her parents, though she seemed to constantly think of them. It is a chapter of dramatic history that ought not to be lost."

It is presumed that Aunt Rosalie was Rosalie Ann Booth, an unmarried sister of John Wilkes Booth, who died at the age of sixty-five in 1889, a year after the Ogarita letter. ("Life and Art of Edwin Booth" by William Winter,

p. 266.) Since Ogarita had been in communication with "Aunt Rosalie," she must have been accepted as a fact by the family.

Edwin Booth died in 1893 and since we learn from the clipping that Ogarita's death occurred before his it must have been between July 6, 1888 and 1893. She had one child of thirteen, who could not have been born after 1880 and since it is doubtful whether Ogarita became a mother before she was fifteen, she herself must have come into the world sometime prior to 1865.

- (7) To Adam Badeau June 6, 1863, and June 15, 1863, from "Edwin Booth" by his daughter, Edwina Booth Grossman pages 149 and 151. Also Edwin Booth's Letters in the Houdini collection which go into even greater descriptive detail of meetings with his departed wife, Mary Devlin Booth.

The statement has been made repeatedly that the War Department had no evidence in its files that the body was that of Booth. This is not true. It has the boot cut from his left leg. This was authenticated at the Conspiracy Trial. It has the diary in his handwriting taken from his person while he was dying and the bill of exchange made out to his order. It has, or had, the stick pin taken from his undershirt, and on this pin the assassin's name appeared. It has the Conspiracy Trial records with General Barnes' testimony covering Dr. May's identification and the testimony of Conger, Doherty, Lieutenant Baker, Corbett and Jett and the official report of Lieutenant Doherty, all of which is relevant on this point as they had observed the conduct and utterance of the man shot in the Garrett barn which was evidence of his identity. The slain man had been found with Herold with whom the testimony showed he had fled from Washington. He was captured at the Garrett farm where the testimony showed he had been taken by Jett, Bainbridge and Ruggles.

The War Department did not conduct the Surratt Trial and the Impeachment Investigation and in consequence the records in these cases are not in their files. The testimony submitted in both, however, is fully confirmatory of the Booth identity, and is in the files of the United States Government.

Not a single statement has come from those who claimed to be Wilkes Booth or who have had that claim made for them that would indicate more than the most casual knowledge of the Booth family history prior or subsequent to the assassination. The family's affairs were discussed quite generally in the newspapers immediately following the assassination, but these trumped-up claimants are not acquainted even with the common newspaper knowledge of the Booths which was so easily obtainable.

Without exception the statements denying the identity of the man shot in the Garrett barn as John Wilkes Booth have been based on unproven statements, without the submission of any definite physical proof, and as we have seen they have been bolstered up by altered affidavits, misquoted statements and the senile rambling of those who read the first fictitious accounts and in their confusion imagined

that they also knew something about the matter.

But all this must give way even if there were no other proof, to the confirmation of John Wilkes Booth's identity in his theatrical personality which is the thread running through his entire life from the days when as a "wild brained boy" he "would charge on horseback through the woods on the Maryland farm, spouting heroic speeches, with a lance in his hand," through his hairbrained abduction plots, his leap from the presidential box and the melodramatic "Sic Semper Tyrannis" flung at the stumped audience, his whimpering diary, then the dramatic last stand in the Garret barn when he offered to fight the entire cavalry detachment if they would give him a shooting chance - and finally when the paralysis of death was creeping over him, his desire to look at his hands and the moan, "Useless, useless" later followed by the repeated cry, "Kill me, kill me."

Another Booth thread that ran through the tragedy was the assassin's propensity for note writing. First his thousand word Apologia prepared in November 1864 as a prologue to the abduction plots and left with his sister in Philadelphia, his epilogue written on the day of the assassination for the next day's "National Intelligencer," and what a sensation he expected it to be, then the finale, his miserable dictum in the diary pages.

But all this stopped at the Garrett barn! Let the myth makers produce a single piece of writing of a comparable nature from any one of their pretenders and they will have made a beginning. Let them also produce a single signature or any handwriting from their various claimants that at all resembles Booth's and they will have some claim to our attention.

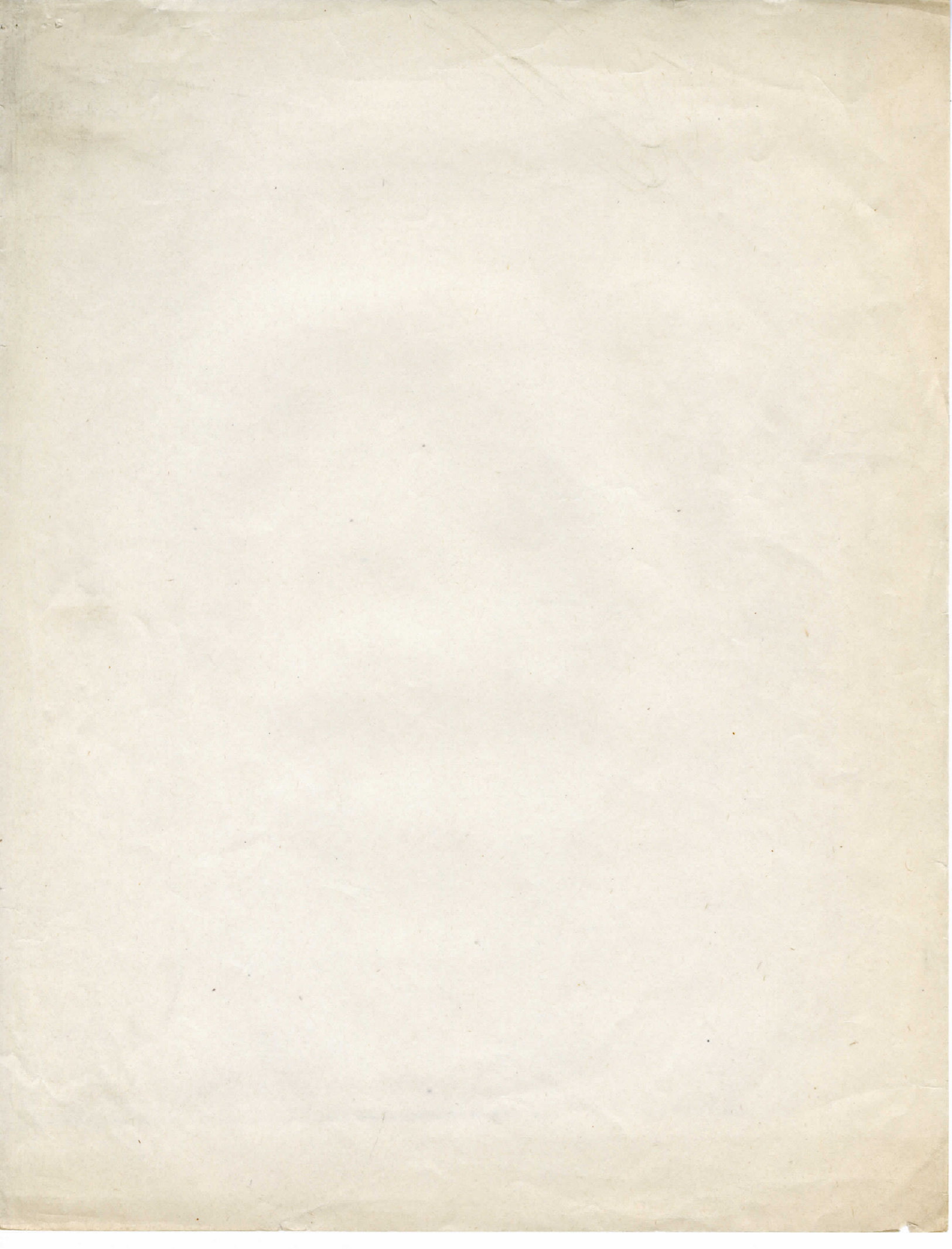
Instead of "Correcting" History, Mr. Bates, Mr. Campbell, Mrs. Babcock and Dr. Wilson obscure the truth of history and tend to the formation of an erroneous public opinion. As has been shown in the analysis of their claims, the accounts which they give consist merely in a confused jumbling of a few comparatively unimportant facts mixed with a lot of myths and fancies and leave

unnoticed and untouched the great mass of relevant and conclusive testimony offered at the Conspiracy and Surratt trials and the Impeachment Investigation.

We have had John Wilkes Booth as "a soldier in Maximillian's army," (23) "an itinerant Catholic Priest in Mexico"; (24) "as a pseudo lawyer and politician in Lexington, Ky."; (25) "As a lumberman in northwestern Canada,"; (26) As "Jesse Smith, a teamster"; " as Laura Ida's father in 1872"; as "an evangelist and Episcopalian Rector in Georgia",; "as a sailor on the seven seas."; "As Professor Ravenwood, a Texas school teacher,"; "St. Helen, a Texas saloon keeper,"; "As Enos, the great South American actor,"; "As 'Happy Jack' the crippled cobbler,"; "As a Kentucky school teacher for forty-three years"; "David George, the house painter of Hennessey, El Reno and Enid, Oklahoma." The only one whose handwriting we have is David George's and an expert is not needed to tell us that not by the wildest stretch of the imagination could it be identified as that of John Wilkes Booth. Some of the claimants were in different parts of the world at the same time and it is certain that they were not all the same man. I pass the problem of their real identities to whomsoever has the inclination, the time and the money to untangle it. I feel that the careful reader is now satisfied that John Wilkes Booth lies buried in the family plot at Baltimore and will join me in the hope that the many contenders for the assassin's infamy, James Glasgow Armstrong, John St. Helen, David George and others of lesser notoriety, may at last rest peacefully undisturbed by myth makers. They were indeed romantic rascals, egomaniacs, who have enjoyed their precarious places in history, and now in the category of historical fiction let us trust they will remain.

FINIS.





## Notes.

- (1) The complete statement signed by Blanch<sup>e</sup> Booth for Finis Bates under the conditions described in her letter to me quoted on p. .

Minneapolis, Mar. 29, 1922.

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:-

I, Blanche Booth, a daughter of Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., he having married Clementina DeBar, sister of Ben DeBar, the well known actor and manager and owner of the St. Louis Theatre, St. Louis, Mo. and the historic St. Charles Theatre, New Orleans, am naturally the niece of Edwin Booth, John Wilkes Booth, Joseph Booth, Rosalie Booth and Asia Booth, children of my grandfather, Junius Brutus Booth, Sr. and my grandmother, Mary Anne Booth.

I acted in the capacity of leading lady with my uncle, Edwin Booth, in his New York Theatre in the early days of that playhouse, under the name of Blanche DeBar, having been adopted by my uncle, Ben DeBar, my father having deserted my mother and myself, my mother secured a divorce from him, the proceedings taking place in the City of Boston. After this my father went immediately to California, where he remained, I believe, a number of years. When I had grown into young womanhood I met again my uncle, John Wilkes Booth, who had come to play a theatrical star engagement in my uncle, Ben DeBar's theatre, St. Louis. My uncle John suggested to me that I go upon the stage and travel with him. John was playing at that time Alfred Evelyn in Bulwer's celebrated play, "Money" and I to play the leading juvenile character, Maria, but my uncle, Ben DeBar, did not give his consent, wishing me, when I did go upon the stage, to appear in leading characters. I went upon the stage the same year that John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln. Laura Keane, the English actress, failed to keep her contract of a star engagement with Uncle Ben DeBar, and Uncle Ben came to me, saying, "Blanche, do you think you could fill her time?" And my reply was, "Yes, Uncle"! Following the assassination one Sunday night, a big

event in my life, sitting quietly in my bedroom, a maid of ours rushed into my room, crying, "Oh, Miss Blanche, there's two Federal soldiers coming into your room". They came into my room, searching my effects thoroughly, taking from me a box containing some innocent girlish letters and papers, and a small picture of John Wilkes Booth, which he had given me, and also an innocent card addressed to me by John. I was then told by the soldiers that I was under arrest together with my Uncle Ben DeBar. While these two Federal Soldiers had their backs turned to me, rummaging through my new stage wardrobe, I rammed a certain very innocent letter belonging to me, into the pocket of a portfolio lying upon the table. They picked this portfolio up, shook it and the letter stuck. The soldiers went outside the door to wait for me to dress to go with them. When the door was closed, I leaped with delight, saying, "Oh, Mary, I fooled those Federal soldiers". I dressed very carefully, putting on my best bib and tucker, I was escorted between two soldiers down the stairway to join my Uncle Ben DeBar in his office. Then we were carried under arrest before Lieutenant Baker, to my best recollection, before whom we were questioned and finally released.

Afterwards I continued my stage career, coming in contact and acting with Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, John McCullough, Tom Keene, Ben DeBar, with whom I played the leading character.

During my childhood I visited for two years with my grandmother and grandfather, Junius Brutus Booth, Sr. in Baltimore and their old farm at Belaire, Md., associating intimately with John Wilkes Booth, who was then growing into manhood, meeting and associating with him again, as I have stated above, I can say that I am one of, if not the one, person to identify pictures and the body of John Wilkes Booth.

During my residence in Minneapolis I joined the Sanford Dodge Company. During the tour the company acted in Enid, Oklahoma, where we know now that John Wilkes Booth had been living, under the name of David E. George. We were playing one night stands at Enid, Oklahoma, to the best of my recollection, during the month of December, 1902. I was in my room at a hotel in Enid, getting ready to take a needed rest, having to act that night, being dreadfully fatigued. A knock came upon my bedroom door; I went to the door and opened it; it was late in the afternoon, the shades were down, a man was there who said "Blanche, would you like to see Johnny", in a quiet tone, and handed me a card; not realizing then the truth of what was transpiring. I said to this dark complexioned man, "I act tonight and must have my rest," and closed the door. Before going to the theatre that night I glanced at the card which I had thrown upon the table, on which was written "John Wilkes Booth". I did not realize then the truth of the chance I had of meeting face to face my uncle, John Wilkes Booth. I remember distinctly a certain peculiarity of John's signature, and I have before me now this same signature of John Wilkes Booth, with its same peculiarity, as appeared on the card left by this person at the hotel in Enid.

I have carefully examined the pictures illustrating a book "The Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth", written and published by Finis L. Bates, and I unquestionably identify those pictures of John Wilkes Booth. I have also examined the mummified body of John Wilkes Booth, now being exhibited by Finis L. Bates and lessees, is the true body of John Wilkes Booth, my uncle.

The pictures, papers and souvenirs which have this day been delivered to Mr. Finis L. Bates by me, and made exhibit to the foregoing statements, are correct as what they purport to be.

I wonder why it should be that these papers, pictures, and souvenirs of the Booth family and myself, should have clung to me so tenaciously through all the vicissitudes of my life, upon which I have bestowed so little thought.

Signed, executed and delivered in triplicate.

Blanche Booth

- (2) (1823 - Apparently meant for 1903.)
- (3) Letter in Booth Collection Harvard University Dramatic Library.

"Booth's Theatre"

July 23 (No year)

Col. T. Allston Brown

Dear Sir:-

In reply to the inquiries you make, I would state that I was born in Philadelphia April 2, 1844. First appeared upon the stage in St. Louis, Missouri at De Bar's Opera House, March 13, 1865 in the character of "Kate Hardcastle" Stoops to Conquer. I was married in St. Louis, June 15, 1868 to Mr. G.W. Riddell.

Respectfully,

(Signed) Blanch Booth (De Bar)

- (4) Minneapolis Daily Star, February 21, 1925, and an interview in the Washington Times, February 21, 1925.
- (5) Campbell p.89-90.
- (6) (Pages following)--

(Note# 6.)

(Note) ~~Dr. Wilson's letter to Bates~~

Miss St. Helen is explained by W. P. Campbell in his "Wanderings of J. Wilkes Booth" pages 90 and 91 as follows: "It seems that when the Kiowa-Comanche country was opened in 1901 "George" drew a lucky number and secured a claim near Hydro adjoining one secured by a buxom widow who had drifted in from Texas to take a number in the land lottery. "George was seen to visit the little slab home of the aforesaid buxom and on one or two occasions they visited El Reno - on the same day. Nosey ones declared they could see a family resemblance and were bold enough to inquire of "George" if the woman was a relative. "Excuse me," he added, introducing the woman, "This is Miss St. Helen, a - no, not exactly - my sister." Subsequently he admitted that the woman was no relation, that he merely introduced her as a josh, etc. This set Madam Rumpus a going and it was soon whispered that "George" and the buxomite had been married by a Hydro justice. And soon after the suicide in 1903 the woman gave birth to a girl whom she had christened St. Helen, and soon as mother and daughter were able to travel they lit out ostensible for Texas, and were ever after lost from the sight of Oklahomans. If still living, the girl born in 1903 would have been a trifle beyond the teens at the time Mr. Wilson alleges the pretended daughter of Booth visited Washington. However, one thing seems evident: If either "George" or Booth ever had a handsome young brunette daughter with laughing eyes and raven hair, she never debuted into either El Reno or Enid's social circles of Four Hundred."

John Wilkes Booth, both real and mythical, seems to have been afflicted with "daughters." In chapter XVIII I referred to a woman who claimed to be Laura Ida Booth, a daughter. The following is copied from the Enid, Oklahoma Daily Wave February 17, 1903, a month after David George's suicide.

The Enid Daily Wave.  
Feb. 17, 1903

J. Wilkes Booth.

A New York Woman Claims him as her Father, and also Part of his Estate.

The Mystery Deepens.

New York Papers Stated That, George, Alias Booth Left an Estate of \$30,000, but 30 cents is Close to the Amount.

There has been considerable sensational writing indulged in by penny-a-liners over the suicide of D. E. George in this who confessed to having been J. Wilkes Booth. The New York papers said the suicide shot himself in the head at El Reno and, that he left an estate of \$30,000. Before us is a copy of the Utica, N. Y. Saturday Globe which makes the above statement in connection with a chapter of grave doubts as to the death of Booth on the Garrett farm in Virginia. Owing to these misleading publications in the eastern papers, in regard to the estate left by D. E. George a woman claiming to be Booth's daughter has written a letter to Mayor Hensley of El Reno with an eye to claiming the estate of the deceased, should he prove to have been Booth, which scarcely amounts to 30 cents. In fact a share in the estate was more in the mind of the writer than the proper care and burial of the claimed father, hence, the Wave does not take any serious stock in what the letter contains. However, the Wave will publish same. Here it is:-

New York City, Feb. 11, 1903.

Mayor of El Reno.

Dear Sir:

You will please pardon me for taking the liberty of addressing you, but if all the papers are telling the truth about the man who committed suicide in your territory, D. E. George, if he is really John Wilkes Booth, he is my father, and if there is no other identity proven believe him, for he is telling the truth. He was married to my mother long after the assassination of Lincoln in the state of Tennessee. His wife's name was Louisa Booth and my name is after one of his sisters, I believe the only one he had, and one of my mother's sisters. Laura Ida Booth is my name sake. Do you know whether he had a family in the territory or not? His wife, my mother, died in the year 1879. I never saw my father, he went away two months before I was born. This story may seem strange to you, nevertheless it is true. I have a step-brother who saw them married, and if this is John Wilkes Booth, I am entitled to some of his estate. The papers mention several towns as the place of his suicide. The Globe Democrat places it at Guthrie. Another clipping speaks of Enid, and another of El Reno. I have never been in the territory, and do not understand where these places are located. There is no use of my writing so much until I find out something more from the people who know everything about the matter. As soon as you answer this, I can give you all the information that you want. My people all live in the south and they know all about what I am telling you, and can give you all the information you want. Please do not give this to the papers as I do not wish for any notoriety.

Yours Respectfully,  
Mrs. Charles Levine,  
New York City.



It may be true that John St. Helen, David George, or some other paranoiac, many of whom were wandering around the country after the Civil War, married this woman's mother under the name of "John W. Booth", and then again he may have been, let us say, the John W. Booth who enlisted in the Army at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, before the assassination (See page ) of whom no trace could be found. If the real John Wilkes Booth had been alive and this had been ~~the~~, would he have given the name "J. W. Booth"? Some other criminal, though, would have found his name a most convenient alias.

Laura Ida's knowledge of the Booth family is inaccurate. She says that she was named after one of her father's sisters, "Laura Ida", but no such sister existed in the Wilkes Booth-Edwin Booth family. The Enid papers report that Laura Ida later came to Enid and "immediately recognized the mummy of David George as her father." He may have been, but it would not prove that he was John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Roy J. Wilson, a lawyer of Winchester, Tenn., said in a letter of April 25, 1925, "With much interest, I have read your John Wilkes Booth articles. A few years ago I made some local investigations for the "Oklahoma Historical Society", and obtained some very interesting information in connection with the David E. George matter. It had been rumored that D.E. George had married in Franklin County, Tenn., under the name of Booth.

"After interviewing several old people living near Sewanee, Tennessee, a small town in this county, I learned that a strange and very peculiar man, to the mountain people, had come there in the year 1872 and married Mrs. Louisa J. Payne, a widow, who had a boy who was twelve years old at the time of the marriage, named Cager Payne. I looked through the Court Records and found the original marriage license and attached certificates, dated February 25, 1872.

"John W. Booth to Louisa J. Payne. The old residents told me that Booth soon left the woman. I learned that Cager, her son, lived at Fayetteville, Tennessee and made a trip there to see him. The Oklahoma Historical Society had sent to me photographs of D.E. George. I was very much surprised when going into Cager Payne's house to see an enlarged picture of his stepfather on the wall and that same was the photograph of the same man George whose picture I had. He then showed me other small pictures of Booth and they were examined very closely and I feel sure that David E. George and the John W. Booth that married this woman were the same man.

Mr. Cager Payne stated that they never discussed the matter very much, but that he would give me some facts pertaining to the matter for the Society. He also had enlarged photographs of his mother, Louisa J. Payne and his sister, Laura Ida Booth, the daughter of John W. Booth, who left before she was born.

"Mr. Payne stated that being twelve years old he remembered Booth well and that he heard him tell his mother, when he did not know that he was about, that he was John Wilkes Booth and the same man who assassinated President Lincoln, and that he might have to leave at any time and that she need not think anything strange when he was gone. Stating that he would make affidavit to these facts any time. He still lives at Fayetteville, Tennessee. By some means it soon got rumored about this county that Mrs. Payne had married John Wilkes Booth who had escaped. He took her and Cager went to Memphis he passed a citizen on the streets of Memphis who turned round and looked back at him and said to the party with him, "If that isn't John Wilkes Booth, it is his ghost." Booth left Memphis at once and neither Cager nor his mother ever heard of him any more until Cager identified him at Enid Oklahoma after he was dead under the name of D. E. George.

"The daughter, Laura Ida, never saw her father except after it was embalmed. Her picture, which I saw at Cager Payne's home, revealed the fact that she was a very fine looking woman.

"Mr. Payne told me that his mother told him and his half sister, Laura Ida Booth, that the Booth she had married was none other than John Wilkes who escaped and that another man was killed whom they thought was Booth. Mr. Payne is an honorable citizen of his community and states that with all the facts and circumstances before him as he has them, he could not believe anything else than that John Wilkes Booth, John W. Booth and D. E. George are one and the same man and that he positively knows that John. W. Booth and David E. George are the same man.

"After the death of Mrs Booth, Laura Ida lived with Mr. Payne until she was fourteen years old, at that age she developed talent for the stage, hired herself to a traveling company and has been on the stage ever since."

(9/2)

In the New York Sunday American December 24, 1911 Laura Ida "Booth" now Mrs. L. A. Howard tells her story in detail. This shows a facsimile of the marriage record of her mother Mrs. Louisa J. Payne to John W. Booth February 24, 1872 at Winchester Tennessee.

The statement is made that Mrs. Howard has a picture of David George and "a copy of his confession that he was Booth". "The picture of the suicide", declares the writer of the American article, "bears a striking resemblance to the more familiar photographs of Booth. The signature to the confession appears identical with that on the marriage license." <sup>By "copy of his confession"</sup> She evidently refers to Mrs. Harpers story of the 1900 "confession", <sup>to Mrs. Harper</sup> quoted in chapter 19. This was made orally and not put in writing by <sup>her</sup> Mrs. Harper until after George's death nearly three years later. At the time of the 1900 confession, however, George wrote "J. Wilkes Booth" on a slip of paper. If this is identical with the signature of Mrs. Howard's father it proves conclusively that he was not John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Lincoln. For only the blind or those mentally blinded by gross prejudice could claim any resemblance between this and the authentic signature of Booth. Both are shown in chapter 19.

Mrs. Howard is quoted as saying, "from what people in Tennessee who knew my father tell me, there is every indication that he was a man of parts. His familiarity with Shakespeare strengthens the belief that he was also familiar with the stage."

It would be interesting to know how familiar these Tennessee mountain folks were with Shakespeare in 1872. Would they be competent witnesses on this point? The man, "John W. Booth" must have made a tremendous effort to convince them of his identity during the few months he was among them otherwise he would not have impressed his personality so indelibly upon their memories for all these many years.

<sup>Mother</sup> "My father" Mrs. Howard says, "always believed that her husband had received sudden information that made him apprehensive of arrest on a charge of responsibility for the death of the President. My mother never heard of my father again after he left her. She was always reticent about discussing my father. I believe that my

father confided his identity to her prior to their marriage, and that she always respected his confidence. I will let the reader judge of the value of this as proof.

In the year 1893, <sup>in</sup> newspaper discussion as to whether Doctor Armstrong was Booth it was repeatedly stated that the wife was doubtful and thought there might be some truth in the claim.

This "John W. Booth" could not have been Mr. Bates' St. Helen for he was in Granbury and Glenrose, Texas, in 1872.

The third Wilkes Booth's daughter was unearthed while I was doing some research work last summer in the Harvard University Library. I found an original letter in the Booth collection on which was the notation "John Wilkes Booth's daughter." The librarian stated that it had been given to them as such. It is as follows:

" Minneapolis, Minn.

" July 6, 1888

" My dear friend Mrs Rogers,

" I write you to learn if possible Aunt Rosalie's address. I have not heard from her directly in over two years.

" My dear Mother died very suddenly of paralysis of the heart the seventh of last November. I was home at the time with my children. I cannot tell you the shock it was to me for we had no warning. She retired to rest as cheerful and apparently as well as ever. I wrote to Auntie at the time but received no answer. I hope I hear of it from you.

" I lost my youngest child - a beautiful boy sixteen months old last April, which wrung my heart. I have had many trials but no sorrows such as I have suffered this last year.

" I am engaged here at the Peoples Theatre for the season in the stock to alternate the leads with Marie Wellesby.

" My husband is in St. Louis for the summer. I have my two little daughters with me. I wish you could see my beautiful children.

" I hope this will find you and your family enjoying good health.

" With love to you all.

" Sincerely yours

" Ogarita "

Address: Miss Rita Booth  
c/o Peoples Theatre  
Minneapolis Minn

With the letter was an undated newspaper clipping which read:

WILKES BOOTH'S DAUGHTER

RITA BOOTH, CHARACTER ACTRESS AND WIFE OF ALBERT HENDERSON IS DEAD.

Rita Booth, who is said to have been the daughter of Wilkes Booth, the slayer of President Lincoln, and who for some years has been the wife of Al Henderson, the well-known orchestra leader, died on Tuesday in Binghamton, N. Y., where she was playing in the company of Floy Crowell. The body was brought to this city, and the funeral will take place today.

Rita Booth was a clever character actress, and often declared that she did not wish to rise to any eminence in the dramatic profession, because she feared her relationship would bring unpleasant notoriety. She wore always a medallion locket containing the likeness of the ill-fated Wilkes Booth.

Several people who knew Booth claim to have noted in her the clear-cut features, the big ox eyes, the curly hair and high brow of the man who was regarded as the rising actor of his time. Two children, one a girl of thirteen, survive her. As her husband was an orchestra leader they always managed to get engagements with the same company, and were a very devoted pair.

It was stated at the Players' Club last night that Edwin Booth was not at home.

"The history of Mrs. Henderson's mother would be an interesting one," said a theatrical man last evening, "but she never talked of her parents, though she seemed to constantly think of them. It is a chapter of dramatic history that ought not to be lost."

It is presumed that Aunt Rosalie was Rosalie Ann Booth, an unmarried sister of John Wilkes Booth, who died at the age of sixty-five in 1889, a year after the Ogarita letter. ("Life and Art of Edwin Booth" by William Winter, p.266.) Since Ogarita had been in communication with "Aunt Rosalie", she must have been accepted as a fact by the family.

Edwin Booth died in 1893 and since we learn from the clipping that Ogarita's death occurred before his it must have been between July 6, 1888 and 1893. She had one child of thirteen, who could not have been born after 1880 and since it is doubtful whether Ogarita became a mother before she was fifteen, she herself must have come into the world sometime prior to 1865.

- (7) To Adam Badeau June 6, 1863, and June 15, 1863, <sup>from</sup> "Edwin Booth" by his daughter, Edwina Booth Grossman pages 149 and 151. Also Edwin Booth's Letters in the Houdini collection which go into even greater descriptive detail of meetings with his departed wife, Mary Devlin Booth.





- (19) The will to which George refers bears the indorsement - "Case 229 Filed this 16th Day of January, 1903, in my office No. 1 In Record of Wills, Page 26-45.

"M. C. Garber, Probate Judge."

It is as follows:-

"I, David E George of the County of Garfield and Territory of Oklahoma, being of sound mind and disposing memory, do make, publish and declare this to be my last will and Testament, hereby revoking all former wills by me made.

- (1) I give, devise and bequeath to my nephew, Willy George, if living the Seven Hundred Acre tract of land which I made proof upon before the Dawes Commission about four years ago, which tract of land is located in a body in the Chickaska Nation I. T. about ten miles South East of Marietta I. T. and within two miles of the Delaware Crossing of Red River; The intention of this gift, devise and bequeath is to give my said nephew all of said tract of land but in the event that I am not granted by the Government the whole of said tract, then my said nephew shall have all of said tract so granted by the Government to me. I further provide that in the event that my said nephew is not alive, then I give, devise and bequeath all of said tract of land or so much thereof as may be granted to me by the Government to the Sisters of Charity of Dallas, Texas.
- (2) I give and bequeath to my friend, Isaac Bernstein, all money that may be collected from the life insurance policy I hold of \$3000.00 in the Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 70 of Dallas, Texas or any other Knights of Pythias Organization or Lodge; also my watch, trunk and all my wearing apparel.
- (3) I give and bequeath to my friend George E Smith, late of El Reno, O. T.

all money that may be collected from my Life Insurance Policy of \$2500.00 in the New York Mutual Life Insurance Co., of New York. After he shall pay from the proceeds of said Insurance all of my just debts, expenses of my last illness and all funeral expenses.

"(4) I give and devise and bequeath to my friend A. A. Dumont the sum of One Hundred Dollars.

"(5) I give and bequeath to my friend L. N. Houston the sum of One Hundred Dollars and one Note signed by J. W. Simmons for \$350.00 note dated at El Reno O. T. July 3, 1902 and which matures two years from said date.

"(6) I give, devise and bequeath all my other property not otherwise disposed of, both real personal and mixed whatsoever and wheresoever the same may be to the Roman Catholic Church of El Reno, Oklahoma.

"(7) Imposing special confidence in the integrity and ability of my friend L. N. Houston I request that he be appointed executor of my Estate and that he be not required to give bond. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand this 31st day of December, 1902.

(SIGNED) David E George

"Signed, published and declared by the Said David E George to be his last will and testament in the presence of us who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses thereto, this the day and date above written.

R. B. Brown .....Post Office, Enid, O. T.

Chas. S. Evans.....Post Office, O. T.

Charles O. Wood.....Post Office, Enid, O. T."

This will was voided by the letter or statement George wrote on the day of his death. Since he did not give the address of his "nephew Willy G. George" and the nephew did not make himself known after David George's death, no trace was ever found of this relative. The bequests

to the Catholic Church may have been the basis for the claims that John Wilkes Booth was a Catholic.

Two years before in El Reno, D. E. George had made a "Last Will and Testament." This also was found with the last day letter. It began: "In the Name of God, Amen:"

"I, D. E. George, being of sound mind and disposing memory, do make and declare this my last will and testament, as follows, to-wit:

" To my friend Anna K. Smith, of El Reno, Oklahoma, I give devise and bequeath all my property, both real and personal, of whatever kind and description.

Having special faith and confidence in George E. Smith, of El Reno, Oklahoma Territory, I hereby designate him, the said George E. Smith, as executor of this my last will and testament to serve without bond, and carry out the provisions of this instrument.

IN WITNESS of all which I hereunto subscribe my name this 17th day of June, A. D. 1900, in the presence of the witnesses whose names are subscribed hereto.

(SIGNED) D. E. George

Witnesses:

Frank Anstine

W. T. Beeks.

Territory of Oklahoma, )  
Canadian County, ) SS

We, whose names are subscribed to the foregoing will as witnesses do hereby certify that D. E. George, to us known to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing will this day in our presence and hearing subscribed his name to said instrument, and declared to us in our presence and in our hearing, and in the presence and hearing of each other that the

same is his will; and we do further certify that our names were there and are hereby subscribed in the presence of the said D. E. George and in the presence of each other at his request.

"Witness our hands this 17th day of June A. D. 1902

"Frank Anstine"

"W. F. Beeks."

This had been made for the purpose of borrowing money from George Smith, Mr. Bates' "mysterious financial agent for the Booths."

Mr. W. P. Campbell, whose "Wanderings of J. Wilkes Booth" we will examine in the next chapter, has this to say about the Wills:

In reference to certain lands in the Chickasaw Nation variously bequeathed by Booth in his will, in reply to inquiry Mr. Clark Wasson, superintendent of the Five Civilized Tribes, writes under date of Muskogee, July 27: "You are informed that the names of David E. George and Willy George do not appear upon any of the approved rolls of the Chickasaw Nation. Prior to approval of the Choctaw-Chickasaw agreement of July 1, 1902, ratified by the Choctaws and Chickasaws September 25, 1902, all of the lands in those two nations were held by the members thereof in common, etc. You are further advised that the first allotment of land to enrolled citizens and freedmen of the Chickasaw Nation was not made until April 10, 1903."

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Replying to inquiry, F. S. M. Clement, superior of the Sisters of Charity at Dallas, Texas, states that nothing was known there whatever of this man (David E George), etc. "We do not think we are the Sisters interested." The writer is then referred to the Sisters of Charity of St Paul's Hospital, Dallas.

(20) Bates, pages 292-298.

(21) Bates, Pages 300-303.

(22) Compare the Bates statements with the Joe Jefferson letter,--

The statement that John Wilkes Booth and Joseph Jefferson were in the same company from the time when "Booth went on the stage at the age of seventeen," is untrue. Reference to the theatrical histories in the <sup>Harvard</sup> Howard College Dramatic Library and numerous play bills do not show that they even appeared together and then Jefferson says in his letter that he "had not seen Booth since he was 19 years old." Mr. Bates, though, quotes Jefferson "I have not seen him since a short time before he killed President Lincoln."