

June 13, 1923

LINCOLN SLAYER'S GRAVE HIS SECRET

Only Man Who Knows Says He'll Never Tell.

(SPECIAL TO THE DETROIT NEWS.)
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MOLINE, Ill., June 13.—Today for the first time E. H. Sampson, of Moline, told of the burial of John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's assassin. Yet he declined to say where Booth's body lies and he's the only man in the world who knows.

"For 58 years that secret has been buried in my breast," he declared. "I took a solemn oath never to tell. I will die still keeping that oath."

Sampson and Col. Lafayette Baker, later Gen. Baker, dead these 20 years, buried Booth's body. At the command of E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War, they removed the remains from a man-of-war and somewhere interred them.

"The body disappeared in the darkness," said Sampson, "and we returned in the darkness. Only the elements and I know where we went and what we did."

Probably no other living man can relate the events of April, 1865, with such accuracy as Sampson.

"I was a member of the Secret Service," he said, "and was in Ford's Theater the night Lincoln was shot. I saw the President's head drop forward and saw Booth trip over the American flag draped over the President's box. I helped pursue Booth to the barn on Garrett's farm, saw the match applied to straw straggling from the loft, saw the assassin pacing up and down inside, and heard Boston Corbett fire the shot that mortally wounded him."

"I stood over the dying man as he begged that his arms be raised so he could see his hands and heard him look and mumble, 'Worthless! Worthless!' And I heard the final whisper, 'Mother.' I helped transfer the body to a revenue cutter and saw it placed on a man-o'-war in the Philadelphia navy yard. Then I was one of two who buried it."

"Where did we bury it? No, I can't tell. Father Time is stalking me with his scythe, but when he cuts me down he'll take the secret, too. The world will never know."

Sampson dead Winter 1925

February 20, 1925

JOHN WILKES BOOTH'S GRAVE IS REVEALED

Union Army Officer Tells of Midnight Burial.

CHICAGO, Feb. 21.—Col. James Hamilton Davidson, former commander of the 122d Infantry, today revealed what he said was the burial place of John Wilkes Booth, assassin of Abraham Lincoln. Col. Davidson, who lives here with a daughter, believes he is the only living man who knows. Recently Edwin Harper Sampson, who had said he was one of seven men who disposed of Booth's body, died in Moline, Ill., without revealing what had been done with the body.

Col. Davidson said he was in command at Portsmouth, Va., the night of Booth's burial.

"Just after the shooting of Booth at Bowling Green, Va.," said Col. Davidson, "a report came to me about a group of men acting mysteriously in the middle of the night around one of the warehouses."

"I didn't have to wait long for my information. The head of the Secret Service in the Army, Col. Baker, came to me the next morning and said he wanted to see me in privacy."

"This is what he said: 'Last night I brought into Portsmouth the body of Booth. Six of my men carried it on a stretcher to the first warehouse to the north. We took it into the basement, where we dug a grave.'

"The body was placed in there and covered with acid. Then the grave was filled with limestone and dirt. Every man of us is pledged to secrecy. Will you promise never to say a word?"

"That was 60 years ago. There can't be any harm in telling it now. The country ought to know."

ONE BY ONE THE OLD GUARD GOES.

The recent death of Addison G. Procter, aged 87, removes the last of the delegates who nominated Lincoln at Chicago in 1860. Also at Moline, Illinois, the other day there died Edward Harper Sampson, the last of the posse which captured John Wilkes Booth, killed and secretly buried him. Thus one by one the actors in the great drama of the sixties go the way of all the earth. In another twenty-five years or sooner the last survivor of the Civil War will have answered the last roll call.

In the meantime the myths and legends which already surround the figure of Lincoln will increase in number and bulk. It will take no small ability and very great patience on the part of a student of history to separate the apocryphal from the facts of Lincoln's life. Thus it has ever been, "History fades into fable; fact becomes clouded with doubt and controversy; the inscription moulders from the tablet." So mused Washington Irving in his mournful essay on Westminster Abbey.