

4-9-25

The Flight of Lincoln's Assassins

On the Trail of J. Wilkes Booth and David E. Herold—Third Article

By F. L. BLACK

"VENGEANCE!" was the cry of Washington and the North on Saturday, April 15, 1865, when the word sped abroad that Lincoln was dead. Where had the assassins hidden? Who aided them? The terror-stricken Capitol city was made still gloomier by a heavy rain. It was rumored that there was a great conspiracy headed by Jeff Davis and his colleagues to murder all the officials of the Union Government. The wildest tales were easily believed, reason fled, and chaos reigned.

The first attempt at organization for the pursuit and capture was a special commission of three colonels formed in the early morning hours to start an investigation. Hundreds of soldiers, policemen, and detectives were put on guard by the War Department at all possible avenues of escape. The Navy sent warships to patrol the Potomac and prevent the flight of the assassins by water. Other than the crossing of the Navy Yard bridge, no trace could be found of the direction which Booth and Herold had taken, although it was surmised they had gone toward lower Maryland and the Potomac.

On Sunday \$30,000 reward was offered for the capture of the fugitives. This was increased to \$100,000 by the War Department and handbill descriptions of Booth, Herold, Payne, and John Surratt were posted.

"Booth," said the handbill, "is 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, slender build, high forehead, black hair, black eyes, and wore a heavy black moustache, which there is some reason to believe has been shaved off."

In the meantime, where were the assassins? At the conspiracy trial Polk Gardiner testified that on the night of the fourteenth of April, he was on the Bryantown road, coming to Washington, and about 11 o'clock, when on Good Hope Hill, he met two horsemen, one about half a mile behind the other, and both riding very fast. The first, who was on a dark horse, asked if a horseman had passed ahead; he also asked the road to Marlborough, and if it did not turn to the right. Gardiner told him no; to keep the straight road.

As the second horseman rode up, a number of teamsters were passing and the witness heard him ask them whether a horseman had passed ahead. He rode a light horse of a roan or an iron-gray color.

According to John Lloyd, keeper of the Surratt Tavern, ten miles from Washington, on Friday at midnight, Booth and Herold rode up to the front door. Herold dismounted and entering asked for the weapons which had been left by them five or six weeks before. Booth did not enter and refused to take his carbine, saying that his leg was broken. In addition to a carbine, Herold was given a field glass left by Mrs. Surratt that afternoon and a bottle of whisky from which he first drank then took it out to Booth. As they were leaving Herold boastingly claimed, "I am pretty certain we have assassinated the President and Secretary Seward." Then both were off on the road toward the village of T. B.

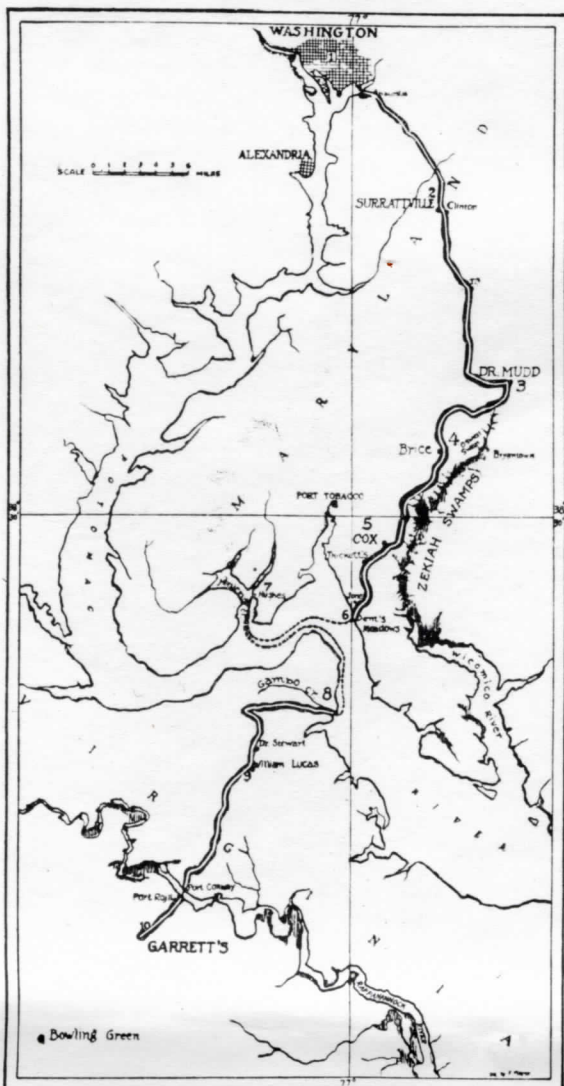
With a fracture, what was more natural than that Booth should seek medical assistance from one he felt could be trusted—Dr. Samuel Mudd, a rebel sympathizer, whom he had met the previous autumn. Arriving at the home of Doctor Mudd about daybreak on Saturday morning, Herold rapped at the door while Booth remained mounted. Doctor Mudd opened the door and with the aid of Herold helped Booth off his horse and into the house. Placing him on a sofa, the doctor, according to his own story, split the leg of his boot down to the instep, slipped it off and the sock with it. He then felt carefully with both hands down along the leg, and found that it was fractured near the ankle. He then improvised out of pasteboard a sort of boot that adhered close enough to the leg to keep it rigidly straight below the knee. A low-cut shoe was substituted for the leather boot. Colonel H. H. Wells testified that, in an interview the week after the assassination, Doctor Mudd told him he had examined Booth's leg and found that the front bone was broken, nearly at right angles, about two inches above the instep. It seemed in his (Doctor Mudd's) judgment as slight a breaking as it could possibly be.

Procuring the doctor's razor, Booth shaved off his mustache and going upstairs, he and Herold remained until between 3 and 4 o'clock that afternoon when the nearness of evening made it seem safer to venture forth.

On the following Friday the boot removed from Booth's broken leg was given to Federal detectives and placed in evidence at the trial. Inside the leg of the boot were found the words, "J. Wilkes." It was a long riding boot, for the left foot, slit up the front for about eight inches, and can be found today in the secret archives of the War Department among other mementoes of the assassination.

Booth and Herold lost their way near Brice Chapel and finding a Negro, Oswald Swann, hired him to lead them to Rich Hill, the house of Samuel Cox, a southern sympathizer, where they arrived early Saturday morning. This was on the edge of the Zaskiah Swamp, several miles south of Doctor Mudd's. Cox, afraid to take them in, hid them in the thickets near the swamp and sent for his foster-brother, Thomas J. Jones, who has told his story in a book, "John Wilkes Booth," from which we quote:

"It was a little after nine o'clock when we reached Rich Hill. Cox met me at the gate and we walked off a short distance to an open space where there was nothing that might conceal a listener. At length he said to me: 'Tom, I had visitors about 4 o'clock this morning.' 'Who were they, and what did they want?' I asked. 'They want to get across the river,' said Cox, answering my last question first; and then added in a whisper, 'Have you heard that Lincoln was killed Friday night?' I said,



Route taken by fugitives.

1. Ford's Theater, 10:20 p. m., April 14.
2. Surrattville, midnight, April 14.
3. Dr. Mudd's, 4 a. m. to 4 p. m., April 15.
4. Near Brice's, lost; Herold goes to Oswald Swann's and takes him for a guide.
5. Reaches Cox and is placed by him in "the thicket," a. m., April 16; remains there to p. m., April 21.
6. Dent's Meadows, put in boat by Jones to cross river, p. m., April 21.
7. Miss their bearings in the darkness and enter Nanjemoy Creek and stop near Colonel John J. Hughes', April 22.
8. Cross river and leave boat at bridge Gambo Creek, a. m., April 23.
9. Stop overnight in cabin of William Lucas, April 23.
10. Cross ferry at Port Conway and arrive at Garrett's barn, April 24.
11. Captured and shot 2:30 a. m., April 26.

"Yes, I have heard it," and then told him of my interview with the two soldiers the evening before. When I had finished there was silence between us for a minute, which was broken by Cox.

"Tom, we must get those men who were here this morning across the river." He then went on to say that about 4 o'clock that morning he was disturbed by a knocking at the door. On opening the door he found a strange man standing there, while waiting at the gate was another stranger on horseback accompanied by a Negro man of the neighborhood, named Oswald Swann. He went out to the man on horseback, who, upon being satisfied that it was Samuel Cox he addressed, took him a little apart, out of hearing of the Negro, and told him what he had done. He showed him in India ink upon his wrist the initials of J. W. B. He told Cox that he knew he (Cox) was a southern sympathizer who had worked for the Confederacy and that he threw himself upon his mercy. He explained how he had broken his leg and thereby been prevented from reaching the river that fateful Friday night. All this Cox told me, speaking almost in a whisper, standing near his gate that bright Easter morn.

"Sam," I replied, "I will see what I can do, but the odds are against me. I must see these men; where are they?"

"He then told me that he had sent them to a place in a thick piece of pine about one mile to the west of his house—his overseer, Franklin Robey, guided them to the spot, with the promise that he would send someone to them; and had advised them to remain perfectly quiet. He agreed with them upon a signal by which they might know the man who came to them was from him. This signal was a peculiar whistle which I do not remember now. He also provided them with food for the day, and I believe, though I am not sure, with a pair of blankets.

"Take care how you approach them, Tom,"

Cox said to me as I was leaving. 'They are fully armed and might shoot you through mistake.'

"I left Cox and rode toward the spot he had indicated. As I drew near the hiding place I saw a bay mare, with saddle and bridle on, grazing in a small open space where a clearing had been made for a tobacco bed. I at first thought that she belonged to someone in the neighborhood and had got away. I caught her and tied her to a tree. I then went on a little farther until I thought I was near the place indicated by Cox. I stopped and gave the whistle. Presently a young man—he looked scarcely more than a boy—came cautiously out of the thicket and stood before me. He carried a carbine ready cocked in his hands.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he demanded. 'I come from Cox,' I replied; 'he told me I would find you here. I am a friend; you have nothing to fear from me.'

"He looked searchingly at me for a moment and then said, 'Follow me,' and led the way for about thirty yards into the thick undergrowth to where his companion was lying. 'This friend comes from Captain Cox,' he said; and that was my introduction to John Wilkes Booth. He was lying on the ground with his head supported on his hand. His carbine, pistols, and knife were close beside him. A blanket was drawn partly over him. His slouch hat and crutch were lying by him. He was dressed in dark—I think black—clothes; and though they were travel-stained, his appearance was respectable.

"I told Booth that I would do what I could to help him; but for the present he must remain where he was; that it would not do to stir during the hue and cry then being made in the neighborhood. I promised to bring him food every day, and to get him across the river, if possible, just as soon as it would not be suicidal to make the attempt.

"He held out his hand and thanked me. He told me, as he had told Cox, that he had killed President Lincoln. He said he knew the United States Government would use every means in its power to secure his capture. 'But,' he added, with a flash of determination lighting up his dark eye, 'John Wilkes Booth will never be taken alive'; and as I looked at him, I believed him.

"He seemed very desirous to know what the world thought of his deed, and asked me to bring him some newspapers.

"Wednesday and Thursday passed uneventfully. The neighborhood was filled with cavalrymen and detectives. They visited my house several times during that week (as they did every house in Southern Maryland) and, upon one occasion, searched it. They also interviewed my colored man, Henry Woodland, and threatened him with dire penalties if he did not tell all he knew. Henry did not know anything because I had told him nothing. I took no one into my confidence.

"On Friday evening, one week after the assassination, I rode down to Allen's Fresh. I think I had been there every day Booth had been under my care, except the Tuesday I went to Port Tobacco.

"Allen's Fresh, about three miles east of my house, was and still is, a small village situated where Zaskiah Swamp ends and the Wicomico River begins.

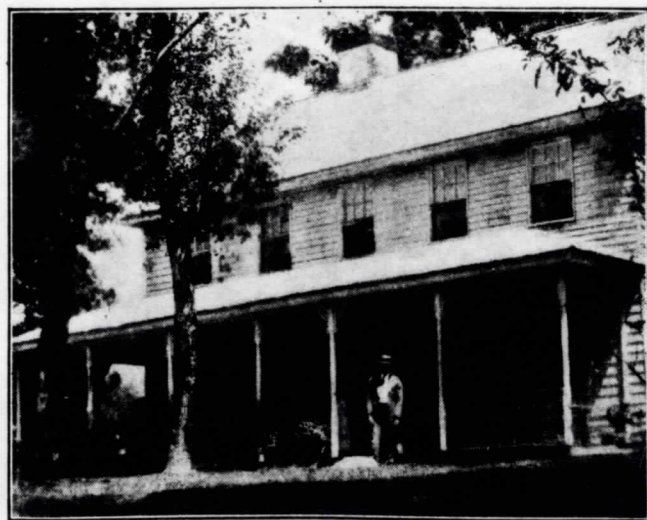
"I had not been long in the village when a body of cavalry, guided by a man from St. Mary's County, named John R. Walton, rode in and dismounted. Some of the soldiers entered Colton's store, where I was sitting, and called for something to drink. Soon afterward Walton came in and exclaimed, 'Boys, I have news that they have been seen in St. Mary's,' whereupon they all hastily remounted their horses and galloped off across the bridge in the direction of St. Mary's County. I was confident there were no other soldiers in the neighborhood. 'Now or never,' I thought, 'is my chance.' I waited a few minutes so as not to excite suspicion by leaving immediately after the soldiers, then mounted my horse and rode slowly out of the village.

"As soon as I was well out of the village, I put whip to my horse and rode rapidly toward the spot where the man who was that night to test his fate was lying. It was dark by the time I reached the place. I had never before visited the fugitives at night; I, therefore, approached with more than usual caution and gave the signal. Herold answered me and led the way to Booth. I informed them of what had just occurred at Allen's

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From an early photograph. DAVID E. HEROLD.



The Surratt Tavern as it looks today.

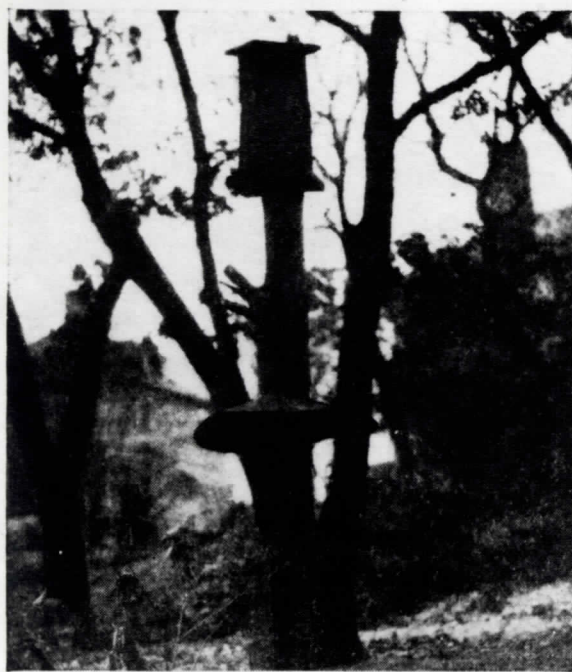
4-4-25

Hints on Bird Houses —By D. LANGE

WITH the progress of more intensive cultivation of the land and the disappearance of old hollow trees, a number of our most desirable song birds and insectivorous birds are being more and more hard pressed in finding suitable nesting sites. There is a decided housing shortage for these friends of man.

The best time to make and put up bird houses is in late autumn and early winter. Most bird house contests and bird house exhibits are held too late for obtaining good results the first season.

Among the most desirable bird neighbors are bluebirds, wrens, nuthatches, chickadees, woodpeckers, martins, and tree swallows. Of this list only the woodpeckers can act as their own carpenters. All the other species must depend on natural cavities or on cavities made but not used by woodpeckers.



A well-placed bluebird house which is occupied every season. Notice the tin collar around the post.

The best bird houses are those made of sections of hollow trees or large branches with the natural bark adhering. It is best to cut those sections during winter, when the bark will not peel or become loosened. It is not advisable to tack bark on sawed boards. Bark tacked on always warps and gives shelter and breeding places to bird vermin.

If sections of natural trees and branches are not available, rough sawed boards, well weathered, should be used. Neither the inside nor the outside surfaces should be planed; and a bird house should not be painted, with the possible exception of martin houses. A dark-green or dark-brown stain is not objectionable.

The birds most easily attracted to bird houses are bluebirds and wrens. Their houses should be placed on a post from six to ten feet high. A ring of tin, about ten inches wide, should be nailed around the post to make it impossible for squirrels and cats to reach the nest.

If bird houses are nailed to the walls of a building, they should not be exposed to the noon and afternoon sun. Trees or bushes should not be more than a rod away, so that the young birds may quickly reach shelter when they leave the nest. If they flutter about on the ground for any length of time, cats or other enemies will get them.

It is best to use screws in the construction of bird houses, because nails will nearly always become loosened and cause open joints, which are objectionable to the birds.

The least desirable place for bird houses is on trees, because houses so placed are nearly always accessible to cats and other enemies.

It is not necessary, but it is better to clean out the bird houses and remove the old nesting materials. A friend of mine, whose bluebird house is occupied every season, cleans out the old material in February or March, before the birds have returned. In the bottom of the house, he always places a layer of about two inches of fresh damp garden soil mixed with sawdust, about half and half.

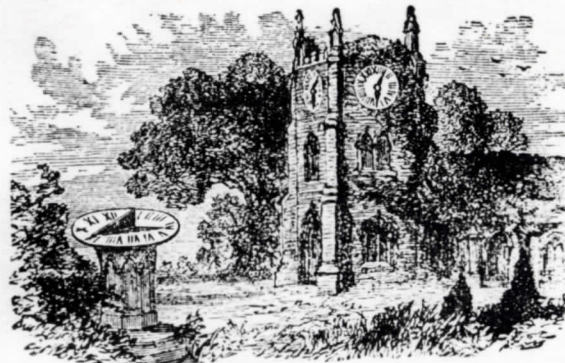
This mixture makes a good foundation for the nest and holds a little moisture like dead spongy wood in natural tree cavities. This new idea deserves a general trial in widely separated localities.

The most desirable and interesting tenants are the bluebirds. Their number is showing a marked increase, on account of nesting boxes put up for them. Within the last few years I have seen as many as forty bluebirds in one flock in late autumn.

McGuffey's Maxims

Little Tales of Conduct From
the Famous School Reader
of the Last Generation

The Clock and the Sun-Dial



1. ONE gloomy day, the Clock on a steeple looking down on the Sun-dial in a garden near by, said, "How stupid it is in you to stand there like a stock."

2. "You never tell the hour, till a bright sun looks forth from the sky, and gives you leave. I go merrily round, day and night; in summer and winter the same, without asking his leave."

3. "I tell the people the time to rise, to come to dinner, and to go to church."

4. "Hark! I am going to strike now: one, two, three, four. There it is for you. How silly you look. You can say nothing."

5. The sun, at that moment broke forth from behind a cloud, and showed, by the Sun-dial, that the Clock was half an hour behind the right time.

6. The boasting Clock now held his tongue, and the Dial only smiled at his folly.

MORAL.

7. Humble modesty is more often right, than a proud and boasting spirit.

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Fresh. "The coast seems to be clear," I said, "and the darkness favors us. Let us make the attempt."

"With difficulty Booth was raised by Herold and myself and placed upon my horse. Every movement, in spite of his stoicism, wrung a groan of anguish from his lips. His arms were then given to him, the blankets rolled up and tied behind him on the horse, and we began the perilous journey.

"At last, after what seemed an interminable age, we reached my place. We stopped under a pear tree near the stable, about forty or fifty yards from my house. It was then between nine and ten o'clock. "Wait here," I said, "while I go in and get you some supper which you can eat here while I get something for myself."

"After supper we resumed our journey across the open field toward the longed-for river. Though there was now little danger of meeting any one, I walked ahead, taking the same precautions I had used during the more hazardous part of our journey. Presently we came to a fence that ran across the path, about three hundred yards from the river. It was difficult to take it down; so we left the horse there and Herold and myself assisted Booth to dismount and, supporting him between us, took our way carefully down the tortuous path that led to the shore.

"The path was steep and narrow and for three men to walk down it abreast, one of them being a cripple, to whom every step was torture, was not the least difficult part of that night's work. But the Potomac, that longed-for goal, at last was near.

"At length we reached the shore and found the boat where Henry had been directed by me to leave it. It was a flat-bottomed boat about twelve feet long, of a dark-lead color. I had bought it in Baltimore the year before for eighteen dollars.

"We placed Booth in the stern with an oar to steer; Herold took the bowseat to row. Then lighting a candle which I had brought for the purpose—I had no lantern—and carefully shading it with an oilcloth coat belonging to one of the men, I pointed out on the compass Booth had with him the course to steer. "Keep to that," I said, "and it will bring you into Machodoc Creek. Mrs. Quesenberry lives near the mouth of this creek. If you tell her you come from me I think she will take care of you."

"I then cautioned them to keep the light hidden and said "Goodby." I pushed the boat off and it glided out of sight into the darkness.

"I stood on the shore and listened till the sound of the oars died away in the distance and then climbed the hill and took my way home."

The following is from the diary of John Wilkes Booth, written while he and Herold were making a frantic attempt to escape:

"Te Amo."

April 13-14, Friday, the Ides.

"Until today nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done. But its failure was owing to others who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly, and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends; who stopped, but pushed on. A colonel was at his side. I shouted *sic semper* before I fired. In jumping broke my leg. I passed all his pickets.

Rode sixty miles that night, with the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump.

"I can never repent it, though we hated to kill. Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment.

"The country is not . . .

"April, 1865

what it was. This forced union is not what I have loved. I care not what *becomes* of me. I have no desire to outlive my country. This night (before the deed) I wrote a long article and left it for one of the editors of the *National Intelligencer*, in which I fully set forth our reasons for our proceedings. He or the Gov't.

"Friday, 21.

"After being hunted like a dog through swamps, woods, and last night being chased by gunboats till I was forced to return wet, cold and starving with every man's hand against me, I am here in despair. And why? For doing what Brutus was honored for. What made Tell a hero? And yet I for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew am looked upon as a common cutthroat. My action was purer than either of theirs. One hoped to be great. The other had not only his country's but his own wrongs to avenge. I hoped for no gain. I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone. A country that groaned beneath this tyranny and prayed for this end, and yet now behold the cold hand they extend to me. God *cannot* pardon me if I have done wrong.

"Yet I cannot see my wrong except in serving a degenerate people. The little, the very little, I left behind to clear my name, the Gov't will not allow to be printed. So ends all. For my country I have given up all that makes life sweet and holy, brought misery upon my family, and am sure there is no pardon in the Heaven for me since man condemns me so. I have *only* HEARD of what has been done (except what I did myself), and it fills me with horror. God, try and forgive me, and bless my mother. Tonight I will once more try the river with the intent to cross.

"Though I have a greater desire and almost a mind to return to Washington and in a measure clear my name—which I feel I can do—I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before my God, but not to man. I think I have done well. Though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me, when, if the world knew my heart, that one blow would have made me great, though I did desire no greatness."

"Tonight I try to escape these bloodhounds once more. Who, who can read his fate? God's will be done.

"I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. O, may He, may He spare me that, and let me die bravely.

"I bless the entire world. Have never hated or wronged any one. This last was not a wrong, unless God deems it so. And it's with him to damn or bless me. And for this brave boy with me, who often prays (yes, before and since) with a true and sincere heart, was it crime in him, if so, why can he pray the same?"

"I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but I must fight the course. 'Tis all that's left me."

The wanderings of the next few days, beginning with April 21, are covered in interviews by W. N. Walton in May, 1865, for Washington newspapers. He talked with Lucas the Negro, Dr. Stewart, and Mrs. Quesenberry. George Alfred Townsend who wrote volumin-

ously of the assassination at the time, and in the *Century Magazine* for April, 1884, describes how Booth and Herold crossed the Potomac and reached Port Conway. Victor Louis Mason retold the story more in detail in the *Century* for April 1896, and in 1900 O. H. Oldroyd, of the Oldroyd Lincoln Museum, interviewed people all along the route confirming the stories previously written.

Instead of crossing as they had planned, the assassins, due to darkness and inexperience, found themselves when Saturday morning broke on the side of the river from which they had started. Landing, Herold obtained food at the home of Colonel John J. Hugh and again told what Booth had done. Later during the day they were seen entering their boat by a Negro who, thinking they answered the description of Booth and Herold, reported it to the authorities.

On Saturday night the fugitives were more successful and reached Gambo Creek on the Virginia side. Sunday morning Herold called at Mrs. Quesenberry's, about a mile from where they had landed. He told her that he had been directed to her by Thomas Jones, and once more stated that he had with him the man who killed Abraham Lincoln. Following Herold, she was led to Booth's hiding place where she found him in great pain from his broken leg. He requested that he be taken to the nearest physician and stated that now being among friends he anticipated little danger.

That afternoon, Sunday, Mrs. Quesenberry, with the aid of a neighbor, William Bryan, sent them to Dr. Stewart, eight miles away, where they arrived about 6 o'clock. Dr. Stewart, suspecting their identity, after giving them supper would not allow them to remain longer and they went about a quarter of a mile to the hut of William Lucas, a Negro, where they spent the night.

The next morning Booth sent Dr. Stewart the following note:

"Dear Sir: Forgive me, but I have some little pride. I hate to blame you for your want of hospitality; you know your own affairs. I was sick and tired, with a broken leg, in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog from my door in such a condition. However, you were kind enough to give us something to eat, for which I not only thank you, but on account of the reluctant manner in which it was bestowed, I feel bound to pay for it. It is not the substance but the manner in which kindness is extended that makes one happy in the acceptance thereof. The sauce in meat is ceremony; meeting were bare without it. Be kind enough to accept the inclosed two dollars and a half (though hard to spare) for what we have received.

"Yours respectfully,
"Stranger."

April 24, 1865

To Dr. Stewart

Lucas procured a wagon and about 3 o'clock that Monday afternoon, deposited Booth and Herold at the Port Conway end of the Rappahannock River ferry, fifteen miles farther south. Lucas stated about ten days later that on the trip to Port Royal Booth seemed much fatigued, and laid down in the bottom of the wagon and slept at intervals.

In an article to follow the flight of the fugitives will be concluded and there will be told the story of the pursuit.