

Feb. 23, 1925

Mad Lear Betrayed Slayer of Lincoln, City Man Declares

Jim Duffy Says Booth Revealed Identity When He Lived As Painter in El Reno.

King Lear, mad victim of intrigue, followed a handsome, gray-haired house painter to Oklahoma thirty years ago, and betrayed him as the slayer of Abraham Lincoln. The painter was John Wilkes Booth.

Eight years before he died by his own hand, Booth fled with a friend to the wilderness of his own room in El Reno, where, maddened by the loss of position, friends and country, recited Lear, Hamlet and Richard III, before telling the story of the crime, escape and supposed capture of the president's murderer.

Identity Not Admitted

The friend was Jim Duffy, 503 West Frisco, the only crony the painter had after coming to Oklahoma.

On that fateful night, only a short time before the painter left El Reno, Duffy recognized the histrionic genius as bearing a remarkable resemblance to Wilkes Booth, whom he had seen in many plays in Ford's theater in Washington, years before.

Booth never admitted his real identity to Duffy, but related his story in the third person, so in spite of much correspondence and work on the part of Duffy and government officials, the identity was never established beyond Duffy's identification.

"I knew the painter as Rogers," Duffy said. "He was a hard drinker, but we never found out where he got his money. He seemed always to have plenty. That night I met him on the street, and as usual he was intoxicated. He said, 'Jim, you've always been a good friend to me. Come up to the room, and I'll show you something.'

Recited Old Plays

"I went, and we no sooner got inside the door when he struck an attitude, and went through those plays just as I had seen Booth do them many years before.

"When he finished, I asked him if he ever knew John Wilkes Booth. He replied, 'Yes, I was raised with him. He was a ham actor.'"

Rogers then sat down, Duffy said, and leaning back asked, "Do you know what ever became of him?"

"Booth escaped from the theater after the shots were fired, on a gray horse, Rogers said. For five days he stayed at the home of Madam Surat, later hanged when she was accused of aiding in the conspiracy.

"Fearing his trail would be picked up, he left Washington, finally going to Texas, where all track of him was lost," said Rogers. More than this, he could not be induced to tell, Duffy said.

Duffy Recognized Body

Shortly afterward, Rogers left El Reno, wandered about Oklahoma for awhile, and went to Enid. There he was known as David E. George, and it was there Duffy recognized the corpse of the man who committed suicide in 1903 as being the body of the painter he knew in El Reno eight years before.

General suspicion was directed to Booth before he left El Reno, Duffy said. It was partly for this reason that he left, it was said.

After the body was embalmed, a stranger tried to rent it from W. B. Penniman, Enid undertaker, to be used in an exhibit at the world's fair in San Francisco, Duffy said, but the government interfered and prevented the exhibition. Later the body was stolen, and has not been located.

Enid Folk Differ As To Where Cadaver Is

ENID, Feb. 22.—(Special.)—Where is the body of John Wilkes Booth, slayer of Abraham Lincoln?

The report that Blanche Booth, his niece, has confirmed the story of Finis L. Bates, which declared he died here by his own hand in 1903, has set a portion of the old residents wagging fingers and saying, "I told you so," at the other half, which is becoming more set in the belief that the man known as David E. George was not the president's slayer.

Indefinite reports say the body is in a garage in Memphis, Tenn. Old-timers maintain that it may be, and still be in the possession of the same man who is said to have shipped it B. Penniman, who moved, years ago and exhibited it at 25 cents a look, "children under 12 years of age, 10 cents."

Capt. S. E. Hill, civil war veteran here, has stated that he was in the theater the night Lincoln was assassinated, and that he was in a group of men that gave chase to the slayer. He maintains stoutly that George and Booth were not the same.