

# JOHN MATTHEWS, OLD ACTOR, DEAD

Was John Wilkes Booth's Room-  
Mate in Civil War Times, and  
Once Suspected of Complicity in  
the Assassination.

AT FORD'S THEATRE  
WHEN SHOT WAS FIRED

Was in Palmer's Original Stock  
Company and in "Two Orphans"  
Cast When Brooklyn Theatre  
Was Burned in 1876.

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.]  
NEW YORK, Jan. 11, 1905. John  
Matthews, aged 69, an actor who for  
a time was held as a suspect in con-  
nection with the assassination of Presi-  
dent Lincoln, died today in a little fur-  
nished room in a boarding house in  
West Thirty-eighth street, which for  
21 years he had called home, and where  
at various times he had sheltered many  
actors who were themselves without  
homes.

Some time during the night heart fail-  
ure had ended a career which for half  
a century was filled with tragedy and  
romance.

Matthews was Wilkes Booth's room-  
mate and one of his closest friends, and  
was on the stage in Ford's Theatre,  
Washington, when the fatal shot was  
fired. After the assassination his room  
was searched, and because of papers  
left in the grate by Booth he was ar-  
rested on suspicion of knowing some-  
thing of the plot. His innocence was  
later established, but his friends say he  
never recovered from the effects of the  
accusation.

By his death the theatrical world lost  
a man whom every one in it called  
"friend." Mr. Matthews retired on  
Tuesday night apparently in good  
health. He had been to the Knicker-  
bocker Theatre to see the produc-  
tion of "Twelfth Night," a play in  
which he many times had taken part  
in the days when the names of Booth  
and Barrett were household words. As  
was his custom before retiring, he  
talked for an hour with his landlady,  
Mrs. Martha Kimball.

He was one of the original members of  
A. M. Palmer's Union Square Theatre  
stock company and had a part in the  
original production of "The Two  
Orphans," and he was with that play at  
the Brooklyn Theatre on the night of  
Dec. 5, 1876, when the theatre burned  
and many lives were destroyed.

## CLOSE TO BOOTH'S HEART.

Letter of Extenuation Written by Presi-  
dent's Slayer Was Intrusted  
to Matthews.

John Matthews, actor, comedian and  
friend of John Wilkes Booth, was prob-  
ably closer to the untoward event that  
robbed the nation of Abraham Lincoln  
than any other man. On the night of  
April 14, 1865, he was at the front of the  
stage in Ford's Theatre, waiting for the  
drop curtain, when the eyes that were  
directed toward him were diverted to  
President Lincoln's box by a flash of  
fire and the report of a revolver in the  
inclosed area of the box. Aid that  
swarmed to the wounded President car-  
ried the man who had fought a success-  
ful war to the room of John Matthews,  
and there he was made comfortable on  
the bed that the actor had occupied  
only the night before, and on which  
Booth and Matthews had sat during the  
afternoon as they talked on casual sub-  
jects.

Yet, closely as he was associated with  
these stirring and grievous events, John  
Matthews knew no more of Booth's in-  
tention than the stage hand who shifted  
scenery on that eventful night. Hav-  
ing joined Laura Keane's company in  
1858, when she brought out "Our Ameri-  
can Cousin," with Joseph Jefferson and  
E. A. Sothern in the cast, he had con-  
tinued with it. When John Wilkes  
Booth became one of its members  
Matthews came to know him rather in-  
timately, but was never initiated into  
the plot for kidnapping the President  
which Booth and others were perfect-  
ing.

So close was he to Booth's heart  
that on the very afternoon of that  
April 14 the letter addressed to the Na-  
tional Intelligencer, written by Booth  
in extenuation of his plot, was intrusted  
to his fellow-actor. Matthews himself  
tells of the meeting in the following  
letter, which explains why Booth's epis-  
tle was never published:

"Much has been said in the public  
prints in regard to the missing letter of

John Wilkes Booth. As I am the person  
to whom this letter was intrusted, I  
know its contents and the circumstances  
attending its delivery into my hands  
better than any person now living. It  
was on the afternoon of Good Friday,  
April 14, 1865, at about 4 o'clock, that I  
met John Wilkes Booth on horseback,  
on Pennsylvania avenue. We met, shook  
hands and passed the compliments of  
the day.

"It so happened that the officers of  
Gen. Lee's army had just passed up in  
a body. I asked Booth: 'Johnny, have  
you seen Lee's officers just brought in?'  
He replied: 'Yes, Johnny, I have.' Then  
placing his hand on his forehead, ex-  
claimed: 'Great God! I have no longer  
a country.'

"Observing his paleness, nervousness  
and agitation, I remarked: 'John, how  
nervous you are! What is the matter?'  
To which he replied: 'Oh, no, it is noth-  
ing.' And continued with: 'Johnny, I  
have a little favor to ask of you. Will  
you grant it?' 'Why, certainly, Johnny,'  
I replied, 'what is it?' He then stated:  
'Perhaps I may leave town tonight, and  
I have a letter here which I desire to  
be published in the National Intelligencer;  
please attend to it for me, unless  
I see you before 10 o'clock tomorrow; in  
that case I will see to it myself.'

"At that moment I observed Gen.  
Grant riding in an open carriage, carry-  
ing also his baggage. Seeing this, I  
called Mr. Booth's attention to him, and  
said: 'Why, Johnny, there goes Grant.  
I thought he was coming to the theatre  
tonight with the President.' 'Where?'  
he exclaimed, I pointed to the carriage;  
he looked toward it, grasped my hand  
tightly and galloped down the avenue  
after the carriage. This was the last  
time I met him until I saw him on the  
stage at Ford's Theatre.

"I desire to state all that did occur  
in that interview, and to say, also, that  
the letter was given with no secrecy of  
manner, nor was there any remark made  
about anything that might occur during  
the night.

"Now for the contents of the letter.  
It was written on commercial note  
paper, and it was only at the conclud-  
ing paragraph that anything was said  
bearing on what transpired, which was  
to this effect and in these words:

"For a long time I have devoted my  
energies, my time and money to the ac-  
complishment of a certain end. I have  
been disappointed. The moment has now  
arrived when I must change my plans.  
Many will blame me for what I intend  
to do, but posterity, I am sure, will jus-  
tify me.

"JOHN WILKES BOOTH."