

RECOLLECTIONS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

1847 - 1865

BY

WARD HILL LAMON.

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District of Columbia)
County of Washington) ss.

Robert Strong, a citizen of said County and District, being duly sworn, says that he was a policeman at the Capitol on the day of the second inauguration of President Lincoln, and was stationed at the east door of the rotunda, with Commissioner B. B. French, at the time the President, accompanied by the judges and others, passed out to the platform where the ceremonies of inauguration were about to begin, when a man in a very determined and excited manner broke through the line of policemen which had been formed to keep the crowd out. Lieutenant Westfall immediately seized the stranger, and a considerable scuffle ensued. The stranger seemed determined to get to the platform where the President and his party were, but Lieutenant Westfall called for assistance. The Commissioner closed the door, or had it closed, and the intruder was finally thrust from the passage leading to the platform which was reserved for the President's party. After the President was assassinated, the singular conduct of this stranger on that day was frequently talked of by the policemen who observed it. Lieutenant Westfall procured a photograph of the assassin Booth soon after the death of the President and showed it to Commissioner French in my presence and in the presence of several other policemen, and asked him if he had ever met that man. The Commissioner examined it attentively and said: "Yes, I would know that face among ten thousand. That is the man you had a scuffle with on inauguration day. That is the same man." Affiant also recognized the photograph.

Lieutenant Westfall then said: "This is the picture of J. Wilkes Booth."

Major French exclaimed: "My God! what a fearful risk we ran that day!"

ROBERT STRONG.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of March, 1876.

JAMES A TAIT

Notary Public.

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It is a curious fact, that, although Mr. Lincoln believed that his career would be cut short by violence, he was incorrigibly skeptical as to the agency in the expected tragedy, with one solitary exception. Elderly residents of Washington will remember one Garowski, a Polish exile, as many believed. He was an accomplished linguist, a revolutionist by nature, restless, revengeful, and of a fiery and ungovernable temper. He had been employed in the State Department as a translator, I believe, but had quarrelled with Mr. Seward and was discharged. This caused him to pursue Lincoln, Seward, and Sumner with bitter hatred. The curious will find in a published diary of his a fantastic classification of his enemies. The President he rated as "third-class," according to his estimate of statesmanlike qualities.

From this man Gurowski, and from him alone, Mr. Lincoln really apprehended danger by a violent assault, although he knew not what the sense of fear was like. Mr. Lincoln more than once said to me: "So far as my personal safety is concerned, Gurowski is the only man who has given me a serious thought of a personal nature. From the known disposition of the man, he is dangerous wherever he may be. I have sometimes thought that he might try to take my life. It would be just like him to do such a thing."

Recollection Ward Lamon

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The following letter was written one night when I was much annoyed at what seemed to me Mr. Lincoln's carelessness in this matter:

Washington, D.C.,
Dec 10, 1864. 1:30
o'clock A.M.

Hon. A. Lincoln:

Sir:

I regret that you do not appreciate what I have repeatedly said to you in regard to the proper police arrangements connected with your household and your own personal safety. You are in danger. I have nothing to ask, and I flatter myself that you will at least believe that I am honest. If, however, you have been impressed differently, do me and the country the justice to dispose at once of all suspected officers, and accept my resignation of the marshalship, which is hereby tendered. I will give you further reasons which have impelled me to this course. Tonight, as you have done on several previous occasions, you went unattended to the theatre. When I say unattended, I mean that you went alone with Charles Sumner and a foreign minister, neither of whom could defend himself against an assault from any able-bodied woman in this city. And you know, or ought to know, that your life is sought after, and will be taken unless you and your friends are cautious; for you have many enemies within our lines. You certainly know that I have provided men at your mansion to perform all necessary police duty, and I am always ready myself to perform any duty that will properly conduce to your interest or your safety.

God knows that I am unselfish in this matter; and I do think that I have played low comedy long enough and at my time of life I think I ought at least to attempt to play star engagements.

I have the honor to be, your obedient servant,
WARD H LAMON

Lamon

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As we were driving along Pennsylvania Avenue, a horseman rode rapidly past us at a gallop, and wheeling his horse, rode back, peering into our carriage as he again passed us. Mrs. Grant, with a perceptible shade of concern in her voice and manner, remarked to me: "That is the very man who sat near us at lunch today with some others, and tried to overhear our conversation. He was so rude, you remember, as to cause us to leave the diningroom. Here he is again, riding after us!" For myself I thought it was only idle curiosity, but learned afterward that the horseman was Booth.