

Assassination of Lincoln

Recalled by Eye Witnesses

All Members of U. S. Military Telegraph Corps

The tragedy that robbed this country of the titanic figure of Abraham Lincoln occurred just 50 years ago next Wednesday, and the Sunday Post prints herewith stories of eyewitnesses assembled by David H. Bates, manager and cipher operator of the United States War Department from 1861 to 1869. A remarkable feature of these stories is the direct variance of the versions of Mr. Maynard and Mr. Laird, who were both present at the actual shooting.

BY DAVID HOMER BATES

Author of "Lincoln in the Telegraph Office"

The first time I saw Abraham Lincoln was on April 27, 1861, two weeks after the fall of Sumter, having been called to Washington with three other telegraph operators by a message from Andrew Carnegie, assistant general manager of military railroads and telegraphs. The last time I saw the martyr President was on the day of his death, four years later.

Between those two dates, while serving as operator, cipher operator and manager of the War Department telegraph office, I saw Lincoln nearly every day, sometimes several times a day, and on rare occasions all night long while battles were impending and the President and members of his cabinet waited in the cipher room for news from the front.

During the Civil war the executive mansion (or White House, as it is called) was not, as now, connected by telegraph, and all the President's telegrams were handled at the War Department.

Indeed, the President spent more of his waking hours in the War Department office than in any other place except the White House.

Of Lincoln's official family not one survives, and of the leading generals there remains only one—my old business and personal friend, General Granville M. Dodge.

Of the War Department telegraph staff on duty the night of the assassination there are eight survivors, whose several accounts of the tragic incidents of that fateful time are here recorded.

THAT BLACK NIGHT

Fifty years have gone by, but I still remember with more or less distinctness that long night of Good Friday, April 14, 1865, that black night in our country's history, when the terrible feeling fired by four years of war culminated in a stroke of madness aimed at the life of one who had only "charity for all, with malice toward none." Although on duty in the cipher room that evening, I have no particular remembrance of anything that occurred prior to the moment when someone rushed into the office with blanched face, saying: "There is a rumor below that President Lincoln has been shot in Ford's Theatre."

Before we could fully take in the awful import, other rumors reached us—the savage attack upon Mr. Seward, Secretary of State, and the frustrated efforts to reach and kill Vice-President Johnson, Mr. Stanton, Secretary of War, and other members of the government. As the successive accounts crystallized a fearful dread filled our hearts lest it should be found that the entire Cabinet had been murdered.

After an hour of this awful suspense we received word from Major Eckert, who had gone quickly to Stanton's house in K street, and from there to Seward's house in Fifteenth street, and then to the Petersen house in Tenth street, opposite the theatre, to which the President had been carried after having been shot by the assassin. This message merely assured us of the present safety of Stanton, while confirming our worst fears concerning the President.

Two of my comrades were in the audience at the theatre, Thomas A. Laird, now of Buffalo, and George C. Maynard, now curator of the National Museum at Washington. Laird ran first to the house of Major Eckert, our chief, in Thirteenth street, near F, to give him the news, while Maynard came direct to the War Department, followed a little later by Laird. Both men remained on duty with me all night with Albert Chandler and several others, including John H. Dwight and Frank Stewart, both since deceased. George A. Low came in about dawn.

A relay of mounted messengers in charge of John C. Hatter, Secretary Stanton's telegraph messenger (deceased 1913), was immediately established by Major Eckert, and all night long they carried bulletins in Stanton's handwriting addressed to General Dix, New York city, which were at once given to the Associated Press and flashed over the wires throughout the country. As these bulletins were spelled out in the Morse telegraph characters our hearts were stunned, and yet they seemed to be on fire. The awfulness of the tragedy hushed us into silence. As the hours slowly passed hope revived fitfully as some sentence in the despatches offered faint encouragement that perhaps the precious life might be spared to complete its chosen work, but at last, at 22 minutes past 7 a. m. April 15, the dreaded end came, the tension gave way and we knew that our beloved President was gone from us forever.

Youth is ever hopeful, and while mourning the now certain loss of the President and our personal friend, as indeed he was, and with the wickedness of treason brought vividly to our senses and with its culminating crime rankling in our breasts, we still were able to console each other by the suggestion that Andrew Johnson, our new leader (if indeed he were not also slain), would not allow mistaken mercy to stay the hand of punishment. We reasoned also that our stricken President during his lifetime had been so patient and lenient with his enemies that if he had been spared perhaps he would have adopted a policy of condonation that would deprive us of the real fruits of the war and lead to the return to political power of those who had helped to cause it.

LINCOLN'S MANY-SIDED CHARACTER

Although I was in Lincoln's company almost every day for four years, even until the very night of his assassination, and often heard him discuss the vital questions of the Civil war, and

on many occasions took from his hands telegrams in his unique handwriting with never a blot or erasure, yet I was too young to form then a matured, intelligent opinion of his many-sided character. The crystallized opinion of the generation since Lincoln's death is that his official papers, as well as his letters and speeches, are models of clear, undefiled English.

But beyond all beauty of form, cogent words and irresistible logic, inherent in the body of all his utterances, whether oral or written, there was something more—there was the spirit of the simple, great man, the throb of a human heart that loving all sought to protect them from injustice and wrong. He never allowed force of logic or beauty of diction in choice or arrangement of words to obscure his one great purpose—to lead men always to hate tyranny and love freedom.

The following extract from my war diary under date of April 15, 1865, the day of Lincoln's death, is the best expression in a few words of my opinion of that character in its dominating features:

"First pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

David Thomas Bates

AN HISTORIC TELEGRAM

Navy Yard, Washington,
April 15, 1:10 A. M.

To S. Nickerson, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant:
Send the fastest vessel you have with the following message to Commander Parker.
(Signed.) T. H. EASTMAN,
Lieutenant-Commander Potomac Flotilla.

Navy Yard, Washington,
April 15, 1865, 1:15 A. M.

To Commander Parker:
An attempt has this evening been made to assassinate the President and Secretary Seward. The President was shot through the head and Secretary Seward had his throat cut in his own house. Both are in a very dangerous condition. No further particulars. There is great excitement here.
(Signed.) T. H. EASTMAN,
Lieutenant-Commander U. S. Pot. Flotilla.

The Boston Sunday Post
April 11, 1915

"Many Were in Hysterical Condition"

Impression of

THOMAS A. LAIRD, NOW OF BUFFALO, N. Y.

After dinner on April 14, 1865, while on Pennsylvania avenue, walking toward the Capitol, I met a friend who invited me to go to Ford's Theatre with him. We took seats in the fourth row from the stage to the right of the orchestra leader, about 15 feet from President Lincoln's box.

The theatre was packed, it being a "gala night" because of the presence of the presidential party, General Grant having also been expected. "Our American Cousin" was played, Laura Keene taking the part of Florence Trenchard.

The first act was about half over when the President's party arrived, and the audience cheered enthusiastically until after the party was seated, when the play was resumed. We had a full view of the box and its occupants. Major Rathbone and Miss Harris sat in front and the President and Mrs. Lincoln were further back.

In the third act, Mme. Mountchessington (Mrs. D. Kelly) leaves the stage in a huff, saying to Asa Trenchard (Harry Hawk), "You don't understand the manners of good society. That alone can excuse the impertinence of which you are guilty."

Trenchard: "I guess I know enough to turn you inside out!" The audience claps and cheers.

WHAT LAIRD SAW

Just then we heard a footstep in the passage back of the President's box, and very soon thereafter a pistol shot and a man appeared at the front of the box and leaned over the railing, pushing aside the American flags that draped it, and, with one foot on the outer ledge, swung himself outward and dropped to the stage.

His spur caught in one of the flags and he fell to the stage, but recovered himself and, flourishing a dagger, stepping backward and holding his dagger above his head, he uttered the words: "Sic Semper Tyrannis."

He then worked his way to the right entrance and out to the alley in the rear of the theatre.

I and others near me recognized John Wilkes Booth as he fell on the stage. To me he was no stranger, for I had seen him riding a bay horse that very afternoon down Pennsylvania avenue. I had often seen him in Cincinnati, where he played Petruccio and Ingomar at Wood's Theatre.

While he was making his way out of the theatre it appeared that somebody was helping him, by the way in which the scenery was withdrawn out of his path. The time was about a few minutes after 10 o'clock.

Most of the audience rose to its feet, many shouting "Catch him!" "He has shot the President!" "Cut his heart out!" But no one molested the assassin, and he escaped.

A woman near me had fainted at her escort's feet. I helped to place her in a chair. Many others were in a hysterical condition. I lost my companion in the excitement. The noise

was awful; the tumult and shrieks continued.

Miss Keene stepped to the front of the stage and, raising her hand, said: "Please be seated. The President is not dead." She then picked up a glass of water, came down the steps near the drummer of the orchestra, passed me in the centre aisle and worked her way through the crowd toward the street front, turned to her left and came back to the President's box.

All this occupied possibly two minutes; so short a space of time, and yet long enough for all to realize that a most dastardly deed had been committed.

I went out of the theatre to Tenth and F streets and ran to the house of Major Thomas T. Eckert, assistant secretary of war, three blocks above where I lived. On reaching the door I burst in abruptly, ringing the bell as I entered. A colored servant met me in the hallway and said, "Why, Mistah Laird, you g'wine tear dat door down?"

Major and Mrs. Eckert, on the floor above, came to the head of the stairway, the major asking: "What's the matter?"

"LINCOLN HAS BEEN SHOT"

I said, "President Lincoln has been shot at Ford's Theatre, but was not dead when I left, a few minutes before."

The major was shaving himself, his face being covered with lather. He remarked "I will be down in a moment." He was ready almost immediately, and as we reached the street he told me to hasten to the War Department telegraph office and notify Mr. Bates, the manager, of what had occurred; request him to summon to duty every operator available and see that every wire was manned. It required but a few minutes of lively sprinting to land me at the War Department, where I delivered Major Eckert's instructions to Manager Bates, who was on duty with others of the telegraph staff, including Albert B. Chandler and George C. Maynard. The latter had been in the theatre when the President was shot, and had come direct to the telegraph office. Soon we were all busy sending and receiving important despatches relating to the tragedy and to the efforts of the authorities to find the assassin.

Major Eckert established a relay of messengers between the Tenth street house and the War Department, and sent us frequent bulletins written by Secretary Stanton, which we transmitted over the wires for distribution to the press.

For several days the telegraph staff had their meals served in the telegraph office by order of Secretary Stanton. We lacked nothing for comfort except more exercise for our limbs beyond the confines of the building.

Thomas Austin Laird

Eye witness account of the assassination
of Lincoln

Boston Sunday Post
April 11, 1915

Connecticut Man's War Diary Brings Back Old Memories

BY CHARLES A. TINKER

I entered the Military Telegraph Corps in 1861 and left it in 1869. I was first with General McClellan's army, and from 1862 in the War Department as cipher operator and from 1866 until 1869 as manager. During the Civil war I had the honor of meeting President Lincoln perhaps 1000 times, and had learned to look upon him in his daily and nightly visits almost as a companion while we telegraph boys venerated him as a father.

My war diary of April 11, 1865, records that the President came to the office late that day while I was alone on duty and told one of his inimitable stories (which Bates quotes in his "Lincoln in the Telegraph Office"), illustrating the finale by gathering his coat tails under his arms and taking long strides, passing out of the office laughing loudly, leaving me convulsed with laughter at his amusing performance.

LAST MEETING

That was the last time I saw him alive. I was not well and did not go to the office on the 12th or 13th, but on the 14th I spent an hour with Bates and Chandler, who gave me the news of the parole of Lee's army and the grand illumination of the city of the preceding night.

To quote from my diary:

"Saturday, April 15—At 7 a. m. a servant girl came into my room and reported . . . that the President and Secretary Seward were killed at 5 o'clock this morning. I thought it an idle rumor . . . but shortly after my wife returned from marketing and reported she had heard a similar story in the grocery store.

STREETS LINED WITH PEOPLE

"I hurriedly dressed and, swallowing a hasty breakfast, started for my office. On my way I found the streets lined with groups of people discussing the tragedy. I hurried on, knowing that at the office I could learn all the facts.

"A gentleman informed me that the President was dead. In front of the White House grounds I met our colored porter, John Bailey, just coming from the office, from whom I learned that President Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's Theatre the previous night about 10 o'clock by J. Wilkes Booth, an actor."

Chas. A. Tinker

Included with accounts of the assassination
of Lincoln

Boston Sunday Post
April 11, 1915

"No Rush for the Doors"

Version of

GEORGE COLTON MAYNARD, CURATOR OF NATIONAL MUSEUM

On the evening of April 14, 1865, I went to Ford's Theatre to see "Our American Cousin." My seat was in the first gallery, on a level with and in full view of the upper right-hand box, reserved for President Lincoln and his party.

The house was crowded, for it was to be a gala night. It was Laura Keene's benefit, and it was much more. It was an occasion of public rejoicing. The dreadful war was ended. Peace had come. Loyal people everywhere sought relaxation and an opportunity to show their devotion to the cause of their redeemed land. This was to be a patriotic performance. The orchestra played "The Star Spangled Banner," "Red, White and Blue" and "Marching Along." A patriotic song and chorus, "Horror to Our Soldiers," was to be sung by the company. The actors performed their parts with ability and spirit; the audience was sympathetic and enthusiastic.

The presidential party did not arrive until some time after the play commenced. The dairy scene was on, and Georgiana (Miss Hart) was telling Dundreary (Mr. Emerson) an American joke, which he apparently failed to comprehend. Twice she said to him, "Why can't you see it?" "No, I can't see it," he replied. At this moment the President's party arrived, passed around the south side of the gallery and entered the box. The audience rose and cheered enthusiastically. The actors paused until the President was seated, when Georgiana said, with emphasis, "Well, everybody can see that," and Dundreary drawled, "They ought to see it, you know."

THE ASSASSINATION

Later in the evening (my journal says "about 10:30 p. m."), while the play was progressing, a sharp, startling pistol shot rang out, Booth suddenly slid down from the box on to the stage, dragging the flag decorations with him, made some exclamation I did not understand, rushed diagonally across the stage and disappeared.

He did not make a clear jump from the box, he did not face the audience brandishing a knife, he made no heroic or dramatic declaration. His whole demeanor was that of a cowardly, sneaking murderer making frantic endeavors to es-

cape danger. Had Booth paused on that stage for five seconds he would never have left it alive.

Mr. Joseph B. Stewart, a tall, active, athletic man, quickly sprang to the stage and followed Booth, scarcely 10 feet behind him. The theatre people swarmed upon the stage.

A lady leaned over the front of the box, crying out, "The President is shot!" Several men in the gallery went at once to the door of the box, but could not get in. An officer in military uniform climbed up from the stage into the box. Then Laura Keene came through the gallery, with a pitcher of water, and entered the box, the door of which had been opened.

There was intense excitement in the audience, but no lack of self-control; no rush for the doors. Readiness to meet whatsoever duty the emergency demanded, vengeance for the dastardly deed—this was the dominating impulse.

AFTERWARDS EXCITEMENT

A few persons climbed over the seats, a few seats were broken from their places, and the people slowly left the building.

Within 10 minutes after the shot was fired, Mr. Lincoln was carried down the stairs, and Mrs. Lincoln, supported by a gentleman on either side, passed out. I remained in the building while this was taking place.

When I left a mass of people filled Tenth street. I hastened through the crowds and ran to the military telegraph office, in the War Department. The persons I met on the way seemed not to have heard of the tragedy. A report of the assassination, and of the attack on Secretary Seward, had reached the telegraph office, but no particulars were learned until a little later.

At the request of Manager Bates I explained what I had seen. Upon hearing the account, Mr. Bates exclaimed: "Oh! That good man ought not to die." No hope for Lincoln's recovery was felt at any time.

Geo. C. Maynard

Account of the Assassination of Lincoln by
eye witness.

The Boston Sunday Post
April 11 1915

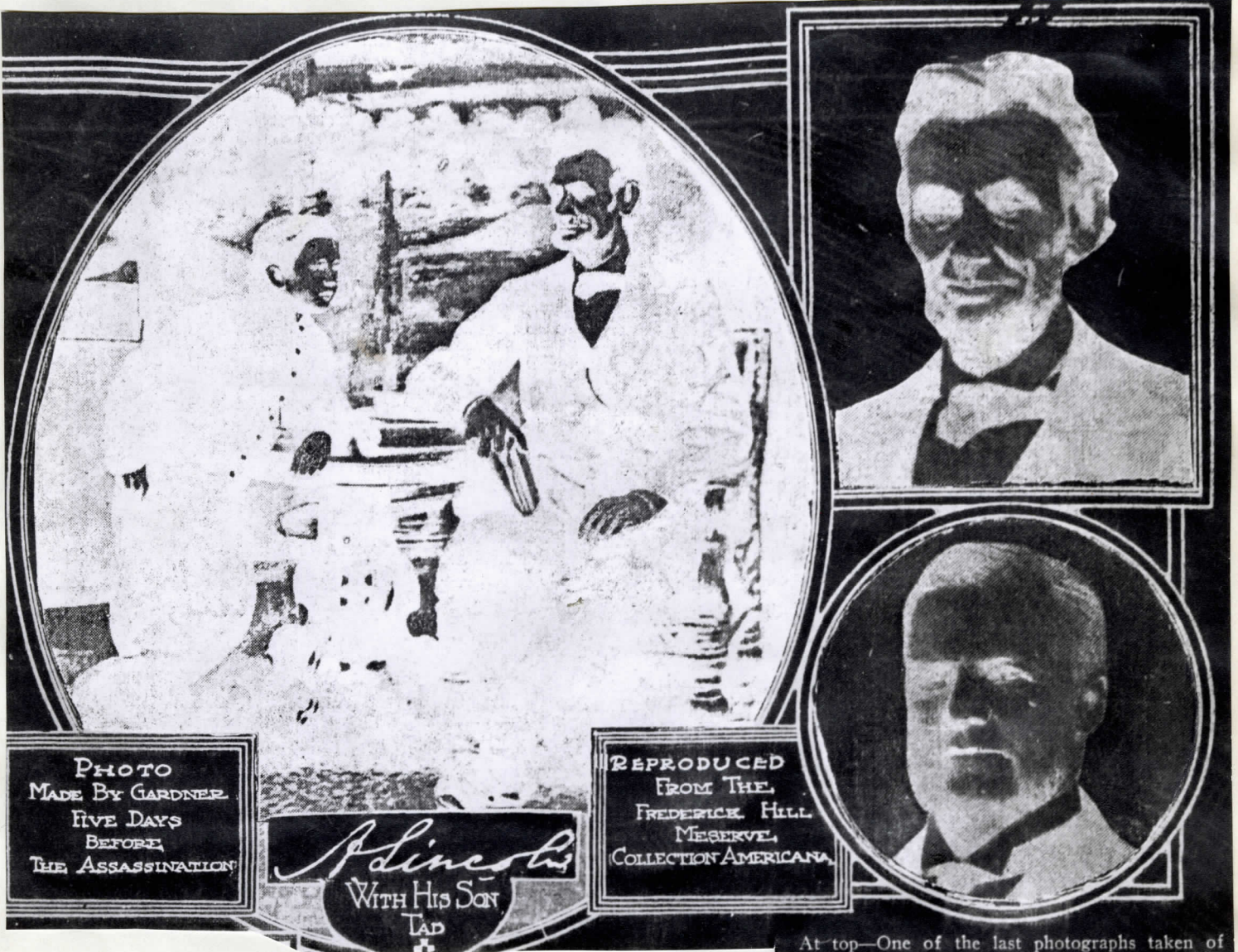


PHOTO
MADE BY GARDNER
FIVE DAYS
BEFORE
THE ASSASSINATION

Abraham Lincoln
WITH HIS SON
TAD

REPRODUCED
FROM THE
FREDERICK HILL
MESERVE,
COLLECTION AMERICANA

At top—One of the last photographs taken of Abraham Lincoln. Like the picture of him and his son Tad, it was made by Gardner, five days before the tragedy, and is reproduced here from the Frederick Hill Meserve Collection of Americana.

Below—Charles Almerin Tinker, now living in Stamford, Conn., who quotes from his diary kept at the time of the assassination.

Illustrations accompanying article --

"Assassination of Lincoln
Recalled by Eye Witnesses"

Boston Sunday Post
April 11, 1915

War Department
Washington City
April 16 1865.

General;

The distressing duty has devolved ^{upon the Secretary of War} ~~upon me~~ to announce through you to the arms of the United States that at twenty two minutes after seven o'clock on ^{the morning of Tuesday} ~~the~~ the fifteenth ^{day of April 1865} instant, Abraham Lincoln President of the United States died of a mortal wound inflicted upon him by an assassin.

The arms of the United States will share with their fellow citizens the feelings of grief and horror inspired by the most atrocious murder of their great and beloved President and Commander-in-Chief and with profound sorrow will ^{in a quiet National Council} mourn his death as if it had been their own.

Your Excellency direct that the heads of every Department be ^{informed} ~~informed~~ in mourning for thirty days and that the ^{highest} ~~highest~~ honors be ^{accorded} ~~accorded~~ by the ^{highest} ~~highest~~ regulations of the ^{Army} ~~Army~~ to the memory of the late illustrious Chief Magistrate of the nation, and Commander-in-Chief of its armie.

Very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Lieutenant General Grant will give the necessary instructions for carrying this into effect.

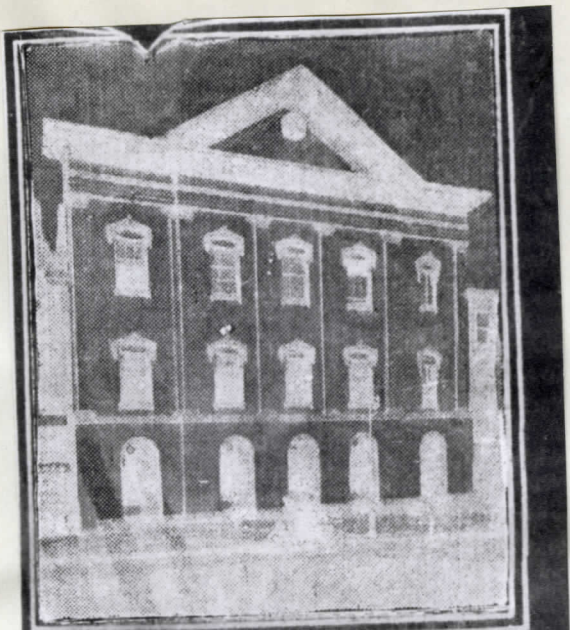
Grant

Original in possession of the War Department, Washington, D.C.

At top—Reproduction of Secretary Stanton's original order announcing Lincoln's death. The interlineations and changes were made by the secretary. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Century Company.)

Illustration accompanying article--
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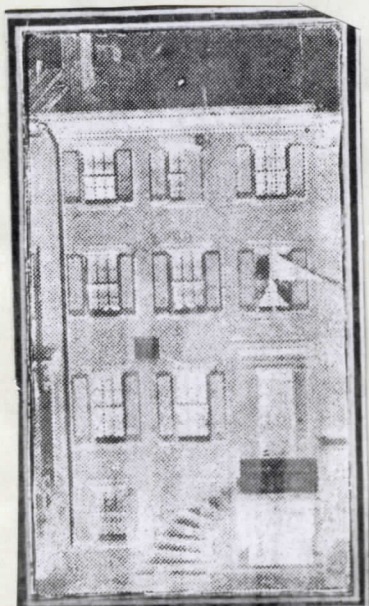
Ford's Theatre in Washington, where Abraham Lincoln was shot, April 14, 1865. (Photo by Cullen.)



Thomas A. Laird, a United States War Department telegrapher in Washington in 1865, and now a resident of Buffalo, N. Y. As an eye-witness of the tragedy in Ford's Theatre, the tumult of the audience impressed him.



George Colton Maynard, War Department cipher operator in 1865, and now curator of the National Museum. As an eye-witness of the shooting, his recollection today is that the audience showed no lack of self-control.



Above—Home of William Petersen, opposite Ford's Theatre, where Lincoln died.



David Homer Bates, manager and cipher operator of the United States War Department telegraph office from 1861 to 1869. He was on duty that fateful Good Friday night, April 14, 1865.

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