

1903

Mr. Bates arrived in Enid, Oklahoma, January 22nd, 1921, which is determined from the fact that he got Dumount's and Brown's statement (Bates page 273) on that date, the first day he was in Enid. He arrived in El Reno, about 65 miles south of Enid the night before January 21st. (Bates page 254) He claims he was delayed due to washouts on the Frisco System between Memphis and Enid. Since Mr. Bates went to Enid by way of El Reno, and the Frisco lines do not run through El Reno, but the Rock Island R.R. has a direct line from Memphis to El Reno and then from El Reno to Enid, we can safely assume that this was his route. The running time from Memphis to El Reno is twenty-two hours, from El Reno to Enid, two hours. Neither the Memphis or El Reno papers from Jan 15th to 25th, 1903 report washouts on either the Frisco or Rock Island lines, so whatever washouts there may have been were not of enough importance to mention.

Allowing twenty-four hours delay for washouts would start Mr. Bates from Memphis Monday night, January 19th, give him forty-eight hours for washouts and he could have started Sunday evening after the Memphis Commercial Appeal story about D.E. George appeared, and have easily made it.

We are fairly safe in assuming that Mr. Bates got his first information about the suicide of David E. George and the claim that he was John Wilkes Booth from the Sunday morning Memphis Commercial Appeal, January 18

Mr. Bates says in his book (pages 254-262): "I was met at the Enid depot by Mr. Brown, the clerk of the hotel named, who informed me that my coming was awaited with great anxiety by a large and much-excited throng of people from widely located sections of the country, and that there was a large number of old Federal soldiers in the city, who, it had been whispered about, intended to take the body into the streets and burn it, if it should be identified as that of John Wilkes Booth.

(Mr. Penniman letter July 8, 1921: "Nothing to this burning dope.") He suggested that I register under an assumed name, and that I should play the role of a drummer for a furniture house, carrying as a specialty feather top mattresses, saying that as T.B. Road was the password for Booth at the Potomac bridge, so feather top mattresses was to be the password which would make me known to Mr. Pennaman, who was a large furniture dealer as well as proprietor of the undertaking establishment and morgue of the city where the body of Booth lay in state. It was estimated that

more than fifty thousand men, women and children had viewed the body of Booth. (Mr. Penniman in his Sunnyside story estimates that ten thousand saw the body during the first two weeks.)

The crowd had grown so great that the doors to the morgue had to be closed, as it seemed that the place would be actually picked to pieces by the souvenir hunters; they

had cut up the carpets, rugs, curtains, shades, furniture and everything else in the house convenient at the time.

"We had plenty of time to talk on the way from the depot to the Grand Avenue Hotel, as it seems a part of the plan in the West to locate the depots as far from the town and hotels as possible, to add as much inconvenience and expense as the traveling public can stand, I suppose. Arriving at the hotel we found a large crowd of excited men in earnest conversation, but scanning every passenger who entered the hotel. I walked up to the desk and registered as Charles O'Connor, of New York City. As I turned away from the register a Tall, well-dressed young man glanced at the name and I could not help a quiet smile at his disgust when he read the name I had just written. And I smile even now when I recall the tall, dark, olive-complected, black-eyed reporter, who expressed such contempt in his manner as he glanced at the insignificant man with so exalted a name. He was on a hot trail, but so far away. If he is living now I hope he will read this story and learn how well he judged hisman, and that I now forgive him.

"After being dusted off and otherwise perfecting my toilet, I walked into the spacious breakfast room of the hotel, where I was again met by Mr. Brown, who joined me at a private table specially prepared and removed from the other guests in the room.

"By this time I was well on to my job--necessity being the mother of invention--I had early made my plans, and said to Mr. Brown, in the most familiar way:

"Well, Brown, how did you like that last furniture shipped you by my house? We had to ship the feather mattresses out from Cincinnati, not having them in stock in New York, and hope they proved entirely satisfactory. We are anxious to maintain our already established reputation in the West for correct dealing. Especially do I hope those light walnut suites, which I personally inspected before shipment, were satisfactory, and that no fault could be found with them, as they were of patterns a specialty by our leading designers." Then in an undertone I asked Brown if the word "designers" was the correct thing in this connection.

"D----if I know," he replied in a whisper. Then in a pleasant, natural tone of voice, audible to those present, he said: "The shipment made us by your house, as a whole, has been entirely satisfactory, and the feather top mattresses were by far the best of their kind in the market. By the way, W.B. Pennaman, wants to carry those mattresses in this market, and it would be well for you to see him"

*(Mr. Bates has spelled the name wrong
it should be Penniman)*

"Thank you very much for this information, and since I don't know his location in the city I shall trouble you for directions as to how to find him I shall certainly call on him the very first thing.

"By the way, Brown, what is the meaning of all this excitement in town?

Is there a widely advertised circus or an election going on? I asked, turning to him, showing surprise in both voice and manner.

"No," he said, "it is on account of the suicide at this hotel the other day of a man who is supposed to be John Wilkes Booth."

"Yes, I have read something of that in the newspapers during the past few days," I said, "but did not suppose a report of this character would create the present state of excitement. But, from what I read in the newspapers, I thought Booth killed himself at El Reno."

"No, Booth lived at El Reno, but killed himself in this place, Enid."

"Is this all a farce?" I asked, but at this juncture Mr. Brown was called to the office and I finished my breakfast in silence and alone.

"Gaining the information as to the location of Pennaman's place of business, I at once went to the store of the undertaker and furniture dealer. On entering the store I saw a number of clerks, all busy. At the center desk was a handsome man of thirty-five or forty; but which of these men was Pennaman, to whom I was to talk feather top mattresses, was my proposition. I sized up the men, walked over to the center desk, introduced myself as Charles O'Connor and inquired for Mr. Pennaman. The gentleman before me acknowledged himself to be the man inquired for, and I told him that I was representing one of the largest furniture houses in the East; that

we made a specialty of feather top mattresses, and I would be glad to make a date with him to present the merits of the line of goods carried by my firm, and invited him to call on me at the commercial parlors of the Grand Avenue Hotel at any hour convenient to him, where I would take pleasure in presenting samples and prices, which I thought would prove attractive. He told me he was then quite busy, but asked that I be seated, and unlatching the gate to the railing around his desk, he invited me inside and pointed to the papers on the table. This done, he excused himself and with a polite indifference to my presence proceeded with his letter writing. (Mr. Penniman in his letter of July 8, 1921 in answer to the question "Is there anything at all to Bates' story that he impersonated a furniture salesman?" wrote "feebly, yes."

"As a matter of fact, this table and chair had been placed there for me in anticipation of my coming. The papers were those containing the news of Booth's suicide, etcetera, as well as photographs taken of Booth after death. I could only admire this delicate way of furnishing me, unobserved, the means of identifying the body of Booth without actually seeing it, if it should not be opportune to do so. The recognition of St. Helen, or Booth, in the pictures provided was instantaneous.

"On the back of the pictures was written in a small, fine hand with a pencil: "Conceal and take these pictures with you and call my attention when you desire. I am busy, you know, and must not be annoyed by you."