

God's Involvement In Our History

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

By Charles Stambaugh Good Friday 2021

The Forward

Being a local historian for 11 years, a writer of devotions for 30 years and a Christian for 50 years, I was inspired to start a series that combines all three of these elements. It is called "God's Involvement In Our History". When we look at history, we can at times see God's hand, God's plan and God's message. But there are times that we do not understand why and wonder where is God? This may be one of those times.

The Introduction

Recently, I had to take two several hour trips out of the area. For the first time, while driving, I listened to an audio book. Read by Bill O'Reilly and written by Martin Dugard. It was called "Killing Lincoln" (2011 Maxmillan Audio). It was outstanding. I enjoyed it so much that I will share some of it, with additional resources, that you can enjoy and research yourself.

To begin, here are several unusual occurrences that happened in my home County and State. Abraham Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated for the first time. His train arrived in Harrisburg, PA. It was discovered that there was [a plot to kill him](#) in Baltimore when switching trains. So, instead of taking a direct train through York, PA (within a block of my home), he took a train through Philadelphia then to Baltimore. Years later, however, he did [passed by train](#) near my home but this time he didn't avoid the plot that killed him. His killer, John Wilkes Booth went to [Bland's Boarding School](#) at age 14, in York. It was there that he met [Edman "Ned" Spangler](#), who was the son of York's sheriff. Ned later worked with Booth at Ford's Theatre and was accused of not stopping Booth from escaping. He was sentenced to hard labor with [Dr. Samuel Mudd](#). There exist a few reproductions of Lincoln's casket. One is in Springfield Il. One is in the Smithsonian. The third, which [I have seen](#), is in York, Pa. I also learned that besides acting, Booth was in partnership with Fuller Farm Oil during the war. It was located in Franklin, (near Pittsburg) PA. It yielded 25 barrels of crude oil daily.¹

The Plan

In the Fall of 1864, [John Wilkes Booth](#), [John Surratt](#) and [Lewis Powell](#) met twice to discuss the kidnaping of President Lincoln in exchange for Confederate prisoners. Surratt then met with Confederate [Jefferson Davis](#) and withdraw \$184,000 from a Canadian bank.² Powell was working with Confederate secret agents to plan the escape route of Lincoln. A special horse and carriage were purchased by Booth and were stored at Ford's Theatre for this purpose.³ But then Richmond, the Confederate capital, fell on April 2, 1865 and the Confederate government was on the run. The need to exchange prisoners ended when General Lee surrendered his forces seven days later. On top of this, Booth's [March 17](#) attempt to kidnap Lincoln failed. These events changed Booth's mind from kidnaping to killing.

Booth, now acting without Confederate authority, informed [Lewis Powell](#), [David Herold](#), and [George Atzerodt](#) of his intention to kill Lincoln. He assigned Powell to assassinate Secretary of State William H. Seward. Atzerodt would kill Vice President Andrew Johnson. Herold would assist in their escape into Virginia. However, on the night of the plan, Atzerodt could not muster the courage to kill Johnson. Instead, he began drinking at the hotel bar, becoming heavily intoxicated that he lost his nerve.⁴ Lewis Powell only wounded Seward and several others that tried to stop him. Secretary Seward survived and later, as Secretary of State, he would purchase Alaska from Russia. It was called [Seward's folly](#).

The Prelude

On Good Friday morning 1865, President Abraham Lincoln read his Bible and prayed as he normally did. He believed that God, in a dream, had revealed that he would soon die by an assassin.⁵ He was no stranger to death threats. After four hard years of the Civil War, the Confederate Capital was now captured and General Lee had surrendered. [Fort Sumter](#), which was captured by the Confederates on this date four years earlier, would be again occupied by Union forces this same day. It was time for the President to relax.

That night, Lincoln had tickets to attend Grover's Theatre to see the play "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" with his youngest son [Tad](#). However, Mary Lincoln wanted to see "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre. After getting four tickets, Lincoln asked General Grant to attend with him. Grant's wife did not want to be with Mary Lincoln so she quickly got train tickets to leave town.⁶ (Grant, who commanded thousands of men in battle had to listen to his wife and say no to his boss.) Lincoln then asked his oldest son [Robert](#), who just returned from the war, but he also said no. He asked Secretary of War [Edward Stanton](#), but he also declined. He finally got a yes from Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancée Clara Harris. Then at one point, Mary developed a headache and was inclined to stay home. But Lincoln told her he must attend because newspapers had announced that he would. Lincoln's footman William Crook, advised him not to go, but Lincoln said he had promised his wife. Lincoln told Schuyler Colfax, "I suppose it's time to go though I would rather stay" before assisting Mary into the carriage.⁷

The presidential party arrived late and settled into their box. The play was interrupted and the orchestra played "Hail to the Chief" as the full house of some 1,700 rose in applause. Lincoln sat in a rocking chair that had been selected for him from among the Ford family's personal furnishings.⁸

The Act

Booth had practiced his act and escape earlier that day. The time would be 10:15 PM when there would only be one actor on the stage and the audience would be laughing. Leaving the Star Saloon, located next to Ford's Theatre at 10:05 PM, Booth knew that the President would be unprotected because he saw his bodyguard in the same saloon.⁹ Booth made his way to the President's box with no problem. He looked through the small hole that was made in the door earlier. He then entered into the box and locked the door with a music stand. At the moment of laughter, he fired the shot and attacked the Major with a knife. He then jumped from the box but caught his foot on a flag. He landed on the stage, with a broken foot and shouted something. He then ran through the back stage and exited the building. On his horse he blended into the crowded streets. The guard at the bridge left him and Booth's guide David Herold to exit the city.

The Postlude

"Dr. Charles Augustus Leale and other patrons carried the president's body outside Ford's Theatre. One in the group asked "Where can we take him?" A [Petersen house](#) boarder Henry Stafford heard the commotion, leaned out his window, and yelled, "Bring him in here!" Lincoln was carried to a back room too small for his mourners with a bed too short for his 6'4" body. (The bigger main guest room was locked.) Visitors came and went all night long. Lincoln never gained consciousness.... President, expired at 7:22 a.m. on April 15. A doctor placed silver half-dollars on Lincoln's eyelids. A pastor said a prayer and Secretary of War Stanton saluted and said 'Now he belongs to the ages'"¹⁰

The Faith

Lincoln grew up in a highly religious Baptist family. He never joined a church but at times, attend Presbyterian churches. He frequently read and referenced the Bible and did pray daily. Lincoln did not speak openly about his beliefs, nor made a public confession of faith. However, various religious leaders did have private talks with him and believed that he was a Christian.¹¹ There is little written about Mary Lincoln's faith but she did believe in Spiritualism. (It was a religious movement based on the belief that the spirits of the dead exist and have both the ability and the inclination to communicate with the living.)¹²

The Convicted

After Booth and David Herold left the city, they stopped at Mary Surratt's boardinghouse to pick up supplies. They then stopped at [Dr. Samuel Mudd](#) home to get Booth's injured leg treated. (Dr. Mudd made the mistake of keeping Booth's cut-off boot which was used as evidence against him.¹³) They were on the run for 12 days before being surrounded in [Richard H. Garrett's](#) tobacco barn in Port Royal, Virginia. David Herold surrendered, but Booth refused Lieutenant Colonel Everton Conger's demands to surrender. The soldiers then set the barn on fire. As Booth moved about inside the blazing barn, Sergeant Boston Corbett went in and shot him. Corbett was initially arrested for disobeying orders of taking Booth alive, but was later released and was largely considered a hero by the media and the public.¹⁴

[Mary Surratt](#) was convicted of taking part in the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln. Sentenced to death, she was hanged and became the first woman executed by the US federal government. She maintained her innocence until her death, and the case against her was controversial. Five of the nine judges at her trial asked that Mary be granted clemency by President Johnson because of her age and sex. Johnson did not grant her clemency, though accounts differ as to whether or not he received the clemency request.¹⁵

[John Surratt](#) was the son of Mary Surratt. John met with Confederate Jefferson Davis and withdrew \$184,000 from a Canadian bank for this purpose. He fled to Canada just before the assassination. He was later tried in civil court, but due to statute of limitations, was not convicted. He openly gave talks about the kidnapping attempt. He died 51 years to the day, when Lincoln's funeral train started across the county.

The [assassination trial](#) was held by a Military Court and not a Civil Court. Even though the war was over and it should have been performed by nonmilitary persons, the Supreme Judges believed it to be an act of war. Lewis Powell, David Herold, George Atzerodt and Mary Surratt were sentenced to death by hanging. Michael O'Laughlen and Samuel Arnold, were sentenced to life in prison for planning the March 15 kidnapping of the President. Dr. Samuel Mudd was sentenced to life in prison for aiding Booth's broken leg. Edman Spangler was sentenced to a prison term of six years for not stopping Booth at Ford's Theatre.

The People

Booth was engaged to [Lucy Lambert Hale](#) daughter of Senator John Parker Hale. Another of her admirers was Robert Todd Lincoln, eldest son of President Abraham Lincoln. Her father had entertained the hope that Lucy would marry Robert.¹⁶ She knew Booth hated Lincoln but she got him¹⁷ and Lewis Powell within shooting range [placement](#) of Lincoln, during his second inauguration address. Booth told Lewis to shoot Lincoln but Lewis refused.¹⁸ Booth had a romantic weekend with Lucy in New York while he was toying with the idea of killing Lincoln. He broke up with her on the morning of the assassination. Her picture was found on Booth's body. She wept over Booth's dead body. She was never put on trial for what she may have known or could of stopped.

[Edward Stanton](#) was the Secretary of War. If the President, Vice President, and Secretary of State were killed, he could be next in line to be President. It is not known why Stanton turned down the invitation to go with the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre. Stanton took charge of finding all the conspirators. Stanton contacted [Lafayette C. Baker](#), who he had previously fired, to find Booth. Baker handpicked a group of soldiers who found Booth in a short time. Booth kept a diary of his activities. The diary was given to Baker who gave it to Stanton. When the diary was released to the public from Stanton it had 18 pages missing.¹⁹ Baker was fired again by Stanton and within a year he died by intentional poisoning.²⁰ Later, Stanton was the one pushing for the [impeachment](#) of Lincoln's replacement President Andrew Johnson. Was he a conspirator, too?

[President Andrew Jackson](#) He was the only sitting senator from a Confederate state who did not resign his seat upon learning of his state's secession. His views on the reconstruction of the South were so different then his Northern counterparts that the Civil War continued in the political realm. He was sworn in as President the day of Lincoln's death. He was acquitted from [impeachment](#) by just one vote.

John Parker was the bodyguard assigned to Lincoln that night. Parker was known to have work related issues. He was an hour late to guard duty that night. After seeing Lincoln to his box, he was to sit in a chair outside the door. However, he left his post and went to the Star Saloon next door with the President's coachmen. Sitting in that same saloon was Booth. There was no transcript of disciplinary action against Parker for leaving. Surprisingly, he was assigned to protect Mrs. Lincoln until she left Washington.²¹

Robert Todd Lincoln was the President's oldest son. With the rank of captain, he served as part of General Grant's immediate staff. He was present at Appomattox when Lee surrendered. He arrived home that Good Friday and spent time with his Mother and Father that afternoon. He turned down his Father's invite to attend with them to see the play at Ford's Theatre. Several years before, Robert was saved from a train accident by Edward Booth, John Wilkes Booth's brother.²² In later years, Robert was an eyewitness to President James Garfield's shooting and near President William McKinley's shooting.²³ He became President, not of the United States, but of the Pullman Palace Car Company the largest manufacturing corporation in the country. (This is not the same company that made Pullman automobiles in York, PA.). He had his mother, Mary Lincoln, committed to Bellevue Place, a private, upscale sanitarium. She did suffer for years with emotional and mental abnormalities. Through legal and public outcry, she was out in three months. Robert and his mother never fully reconciled. He built a very large mansion in Manchester, VT.

Edward Sothorn made his London debut in the main role as Bundreary in the play "Our American Cousin" at Haymarket Theatre on the same day as Lincoln's first inauguration in 1861. At that theatre, it lasted 496 performances and got raving reviews. His last performance in that role ended at Lincoln's assassination.

The Places

Before it was Ford's Theatre, the location was the meeting house of First Baptist Church for 33 years. Some members of the First Baptist Church warned of a "dire fate for anyone who turned the former house of worship into a theatre,"²⁴ The alley behind the theatre where Booth escaped was known as Baptist Alley. After an 1862 fire, John Ford rebuilt it and called it Ford's Theatre. After the assassination, the Young Men's Christian Association offered to purchase the theatre to create a memorial library about Lincoln.²⁵ But the War Department took control of the theatre. They gutted it and turned it into a three-story office building. The first two floors housed the Office of Records and Pensions and the third became an Army Medical Museum. On June 9, 1893, while Edwin Booth, John Wilkes Booth's brother, was being buried there was another tragedy at Ford's Theatre. A 40-foot section of the front of the building collapsed from the third floor, killing 22 people and injuring hundreds of others. After that the building was used for government storage. The building was turned over to the National Park Service in 1933. Not many came to it until it was restored to its original Ford's Theatre 1865 era over 100 years after the assassination.

Soon, hundreds of people were arriving to see the room at the Petersen house where the President died. The owner returned home and had so many visitors that he began charging them admission to be there. His son cut the president's shirt, towels, and sheets into pieces and handed them out... The strange thing about this room and bed was that Charles Warwick rented the same room just a month earlier. He was a friend of Booth and allowed Booth to sleep in the same bed on which Lincoln died.²⁶ The bigger room, which had the larger bed perfect for Lincoln had the door locked.

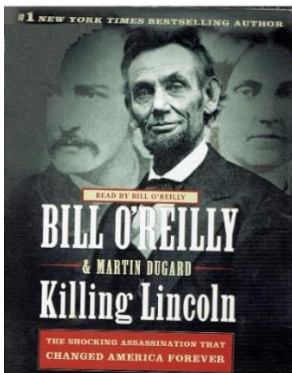
.. Lincoln laid in state in the East Room of the White House on April 18. It was opened to the public. Newspaper reporters estimated the number of visitors at 20,000 to 30,000 or more.²⁷ On April 19, a funeral service was held and then the coffin was transported to the Capitol Rotunda, where a ceremonial burial service was held. On Friday, April 21, the Lincoln coffin was taken by honor guard to the train depot. The train then passed through 444 communities in 7 states. It would essentially retrace the 1,654-mile route Lincoln had traveled as president-elect in 1861.²⁸ (The exception this time was that it included York County PA which was bypassed to prevent an assassination.) After arriving in Springfield IL on May 3, the coffin was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery. But he did not "rest in peace". Lincoln's coffin was moved 17 more times and the coffin reopened five times.²⁹ There was even an attempt to steal it, during the centennial year of the Country. The final tomb was dedicated by President Herbert Hoover on June 17, 1931 in Springfield.

The Conclusion

After listening to “Killing Lincoln” and doing this research, I was amazed at the number of coincidental and unexplainable events. The only way to explain it is that there had to be a supernatural power involved. However, in my mind I cannot understand why a God of love would allow or be involved in this type of event. But as I look back on that first Good Friday 2000 years ago, I see that God allowed His own Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins so that we can have eternal life. Someday my eyes will be opened and I will understand that it was all a part of His Story. I must “trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Prov 3:5,6

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Yes, my shirt.