

Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION
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CONTROVERSY

Abraham Lincoln was born in a community where the atmosphere was charged with bitter controversy. At the time of his birth, the South Fork Church, situated not more than a mile from the Lincoln Cabin, was closed on account of the division in the congregation over the question of slavery. Lincoln's formative years were influenced by the fact that every trading center in the pioneer country served as an open forum, where the different opinions of the citizens were made known by back-woods oratory. It was not strange that Lincoln should feel at home in a debate, and when the important national controversy over state rights and slavery became a vital issue, his choice as a leader of one faction seemed inevitable.

Those who have become interested in studying Lincoln's life find themselves unwilling heirs of this controversial spirit. There has never been a time since Lincoln's death, when so many debatable questions about his history have been discussed pro and con, as just now. The reason for the widespread disagreement about so many items relating to Lincoln is the general use of early source material which was based entirely upon tradition. The modern mind, with its critical approach, is now weighing the authenticity of these original traditions.

Here are some of the most common debatable questions, and the number might be increased indefinitely: Who were the four grandparents of Lincoln? But one, his father's father, is positively known. What were the early influences which Lincoln's mother exerted over her son? No authentic character sketch of her seems to be available. Were Lincoln and Ann Rutledge engaged to be married? Did Lincoln and Mary Todd make arrangements for their wedding to be solemnized as early as January 1, 1841? What was the general character of Lincoln's stories? What was Lincoln's reaction towards atheism? Can Lincoln's military policies stand the test of critical analysis? What did Lincoln say at Gettysburg, and how was his speech received?

Finally, there is the vast amount of controversy about the assassination of Lincoln, when it comes to the details of the event, and there are those who still insist that John Wilkes Booth was never captured. They claim that

some other body occupied that unknown grave, which was said to have been opened at the request of Booth's family and the body delivered to them.

BOSTON CORBETT

Most usually Boston Corbett, who shot John Wilkes Booth against the orders of his superiors, is characterized as a fanatic or half-mad individual. Austin Potter, who was a close associate of Corbett's has denied this charge, affirming that he was a man of good intelligence but of strong conviction. He says, "I well remember he allowed himself to be reduced to the ranks and suffer a humiliating and cruel punishment rather than withdraw a charge, which he believed to be true, that he had made against an officer. He was actuated by his convictions then and I believe he was inspired by the same high motive when he fired the shot that slew the assassin of Lincoln. He believed it was better to disable Booth—for that was his intention—than to permit him to shoot Lieutenant Doherty, which evidently in another moment he would have done."

AN INTERESTING RELIC

There are many gruesome relics associated with the assassination of Lincoln, upon which one does like to contemplate. There is one, however, which played a large part in the capture of Booth which is viewed with much interest by those who visit the Oldroyd collection in Washington. It is the spur from the boot of Booth which caught on the American flag, as he jumped from the President's box, throwing him so heavily to the stage that a bone in his leg was fractured. This accident offered the first clue which resulted in his capture.

THE SEQUEL TO THE CONSPIRACY

Eight people, who were involved in the conspiracy against Lincoln or in the escape of the assassins, were found guilty by the court of inquiry and received severe sentences. The four who paid the penalties with their lives were: Lewis Payne, who attempted to assassinate Seward in his home; George Atzerodt, a carriage painter, who was to have slain Vice-President Johnson; Davey Herold, who aided Booth to escape; and Mrs. Mary E. Surrat, whose home became the center of the conspiracy.

The four defendants who drew heavy penalties were: Michael O'Laughlin, sentenced for life, and died during imprisonment; Sam Arnold, sentenced for life, but pardoned after serving four years; Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, sentenced for life, but pardoned after four years; Edward Spangler, sentenced for six years but pardoned after four years.

THE FLIGHT OF BOOTH

Friday, April 14, 1865—After shooting Lincoln, Booth jumped from the box to the stage, stopped a moment for his tragic speech, then passed out a rear door. He mounted his horse, rode through the city and across the Navy Yard Bridge. He was soon joined by his accomplice, Herold, after passing over Good Hope Hill. About midnight they arrived at Surratt's Tavern, having traveled thirty miles.

Saturday, April 15—After refreshments they pushed on through T. B. to Dr. Mudd's and reached there about daybreak. Here the fractured bone in Booth's leg was set. The fugitives left Dr. Mudd's about 4 p.m., headed for Zekiah Swamp.

Sunday, April 16—About 4:00 a.m. they arrived at the home of Captain Samuel Cox, some four miles from the Potomac River, a distance of nearly twelve miles from Dr. Mudd's. They were, later in the morning, conducted to a hiding place half way between the Cox home and the Potomac River, where they remained several days.

Friday, April 21—After dark that evening they went to the Potomac, where they were taken by boat to Nanjemoy Stores, still on the Maryland side, having lost their way.

Saturday, April 22—They hid in the woods during the day and at night set out in the boat again.

Sunday, April 23—Daybreak found them at Gambo Creek on the Virginia side of the Potomac. Booth remained in hiding during the morning and was then taken to the home of Mr. Bryan and later in the day to Dr. Stuart's. The night was spent in a negro's cabin.

Monday, April 24—They started for the Rappahannock in the morning, stopped at Mr. McDaniell's for dinner and reached Port Conway in the afternoon. They were immediately ferried across the river to Port Royal. Friends assisted Booth to the home of Mr. Garrett on the Bowling Green Road, where he spent the night.

Tuesday, April 25—Booth spent the day at Garrett's and slept that night with his accomplice, Herold, in Garrett's stable.

Wednesday, April 26—At 4:00 a.m. they were discovered, the barn fired, Booth shot and Herold taken prisoner.

ATMOSPHERE

It is hoped that these first three numbers of Lincoln Lore will not be considered so gloomy that further interest in the subject matter will cease. These bulletins propose to borrow all the atmosphere possible to make them timely, and it seems that a few notes on John Wilkes Booth should bring this series on the general subject of Lincoln's assassination to a close.