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IDENTIFICATION OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH

There are many questions still in dispute about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln but no one to our knowledge has ever suggested that John Wilkes Booth was not the assassin.

On the other hand, no tradition associated with the assassination has received so much support from Lincoln students, and men of note, as the rumor that Booth was never captured. It is said he died in Oklahoma in 1903 bearing the name of David E. George, alias John St. Helen.

One who will go to the trouble to review the press reports of the capture and the testimonies leading to absolute identification of the man shot in Garrett's stable will have no doubt as to whose body is buried in the Booth family lot in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore, Maryland.

Initials on Hand

On April 29, 1865, the day after Booth was shot, the New York Herald carried this dispatch, "The identification of the body of Booth, the murderer, was rendered complete today by his initials 'J. W. B.' tattooed in India ink upon his wrist."

Charles Dawson, clerk at the National Hotel where Booth often stopped, was present at the autopsy on board the gunboat where Booth's body was being held. He swore that on many occasions when Booth had signed the hotel register that he had observed the initials "J. W. B." on his right hand.

The Mark of the Scalpel

Dr. J. Frederick May, who was called to identify Booth, said before seeing the body that there would be a scar upon the muscle of the left side of his neck three inches below the ear, caused by the removal of a tumor. The scar was found as described by Dr. May and he identified it as the result of a scalpel he had used in performing the operation.

Two Gold Fillings

A well-known Washington dentist, Dr. Merrill, had filled two of Booth's teeth just a few days before the assassination of President Lincoln. Dr. Merrill remembered his work for Booth and he was called to identify the work he had done for the actor. The fillings were fully identified by the dentist.

The Broken Leg

It is well-known that when Booth jumped to the stage after his mur-

derous assault one of the bones in his right leg was fractured. When the autopsy was made by General Barnes on the body of the man supposed to be Booth it was discovered that the "lower right limb was greatly contused, and perfectly black from a fracture of one of the long bones of the leg."

General Appearance

At least nine people who had known Booth were asked to view the body before it was interred so that those in charge of the autopsy felt that the identification of the body had been complete and others who might have assisted in the identification were not needed.

The Bounty Paid

The United States Government was satisfied with the identification of John Wilkes Booth and a committee of claims from the House of Representatives made the report on July 26, 1866, and two days later an appropriation was made to pay the rewards offered for the capture of the assassin of Abraham Lincoln. E. J. Conger, detective, received \$15,000, and the remainder of the \$75,000 was divided between 32 other men. Thirty thousand dollars additional was paid to the captors of Atzerodt and Payne.

Burial in Family Lot

On April 28, Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth, arrived in Washington and asked for the body of his brother, but the press dispatches stated that "The request will not be granted." No member of the Booth family questioned the fact that the body held was that of the assassin. The body was not turned over to the family at this time.

About three years later, however, Edwin Booth wrote to President Johnson requesting the body, and it was delivered to him as the series of exhibits which follow will reveal. That the family was satisfied with the identification of the body at this time is evident.

(Exhibit 1)

New York

February 10, 1869

Andrew Johnson, Esq.,
President of the United States.

Dear Sir: May I not now ask your kind consideration of my poor mother's request in relation to her son's remains?

The bearer of this—Mr. John Weaver—is Sexton of Christ Church, Baltimore, who will observe the strictest secrecy in this matter—and you may rest assured that none of my family desire its publicity.

Unable to visit Washington, I have deputed Mr. Weaver, in whom I have the fullest confidence, and I beg that you will not delay in ordering the body to be given to his care.

He will retain it—placing it in his vault—until such time as we can remove other members of our family to the Baltimore Cemetery and thus prevent any special notice of it.

There is also—I am told—a trunk of his at the National Hotel which I once applied for but was refused—it being under seal of the War Department; it may contain relics of the poor misguided boy—which would be dear to his sorrowing Mother and of no use to anyone. Your Excellency would greatly lessen a crushing weight of grief that is hurrying my Mother to the grave by giving immediate orders for the safe delivery of the remains of John Wilkes Booth to Mr. Weaver and gain the lasting gratitude of

Yr. Obt. Servt.,

(Signed) Edwin Booth.

(Exhibit 2)

Brevet Maj. Gen. George D. Ramsey,
Commanding Washington Arsenal.

Sir: The President directs that the body of John Wilkes Booth, interred at the Washington Arsenal, be delivered to Mr. John Weaver, Sexton of Christ Church, Baltimore, Md., for the purpose of having it removed and properly interred. Please report the execution of this order.

I am, &c.,

E. D. T.,
A. A. G.

(Exhibit 3)

Maj. Gen. E. D. Townsend,
Assistant Adjutant General,
U. S. Army
Washington, D. C.

Sir: I have the honor to report that the body of John Wilkes Booth was on Monday afternoon, the 15th inst. delivered to the person designated in the order of the President of the United States of the same date. I am, sir,

Very respectfully,

Your Obt. Servant,
Brevet Major General,
U. S. Army, Commanding.

(Exhibit 4)

"In volume 25 of the Greenmount Cemetery records, Baltimore, may be found the original permit, numbered 16821 and dated February 18, 1869, issued to J. H. Weaver, undertaker, to inter in lots 9 and 10, Dogwood, the body of J. W. Booth."

Exit Booth!

On April 27 a lengthy editorial in the Albany (New York) *Herald* ended with this significant paragraph, which might well be used as the conclusion of this monograph.

"Exit Booth! With the world for a stage and ages as spectators, chosen to enact a damnable deed, and approving his fitness for the horrid mission, the actor has performed his part. The fantastic mockery of heroism; the false glitter of a theatric combination; brandished dagger, sharpened for the heart of him who bore it,—have all figured in the dreadful scenes. The tragedy which began with a blow at the pillars of a Republic, closed with a funeral tableau in a burning barn. Let the curtain fall!"