

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Number 420

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

April 26, 1937

BURIALS OF BOOTH

A mummified body claimed to be that of John Wilkes Booth was offered in 1920 to the publishers of *The Dearborn Independent* for the sum of \$1,000. Mr. F. L. Black was assigned to the task of thoroughly investigating the claims of Finis L. Bates of Memphis, Tennessee, owner of the mummy and author of a book attempting to show that Booth was never captured.

Mr. Black spent many months running down traditions which claimed that the assassin of Lincoln escaped. He proved that the Bates story and similar efforts were wholly unreliable. One who has talked with Mr. Black or read his convincing articles printed in *The Dearborn Independent* during 1925, will have no doubt as to the capture of John Wilkes Booth in the Garrett barn on April 26, 1865.

It is doubtful if many murderers carried in their pockets and on their very bodies more marks of absolute identification than did Booth. A pin removed from his shirt when it was unbuttoned to allow him to breathe more freely after he was shot bore this inscription, "Dan Bryant to J. W. Booth." From his pockets a diary was taken in which he had written in his own hand, episodes of his escape. A check was also found in his purse made out to John Wilkes Booth.

On Wednesday afternoon, February 10, 1937, the editor of *Lincoln Lore* interviewed at Baltimore, Maryland, a Mr. Henry W. Mears, who witnessed the interment of the body of John Wilkes Booth in his fourth and final burial place. The interview with Mr. Mears was directly responsible for the gathering of information for this copy of *Lincoln Lore*.

John Wilkes Booth was shot at 2:30 a. m. on the morning of April 26, and died at 7 a. m. on the porch of the Garrett home to which place he had been removed shortly after the shooting. The body was wrapped in an army blanket and later the bound corpse was sewed in a gunny sack. It was placed in a wagon and taken from the Garrett home near Port Royal in Caroline County, Virginia, to the Potomac River where it was placed on the steamer John S. Ide. A tug was sent out from Washington to meet the steamer and the body of Booth was transferred to it at 10:40 o'clock that night. The monitor, Montauk, was ordered from the navy yard to pull out into the eastern branch of the Anacostia and here at 1:45 a. m. the day following Booth's death, the body was transferred from the tug to the war ship. Here at 11:00 a. m. an autopsy was made and a coroner's inquest was held. The clerk at the Washington hotel where Booth usually stayed positively identified him by the initials "J. W. B." tattooed in India ink on the right hand between the thumb and forefinger. A physician who had treated Booth for a small tumor on his neck identified him by the peculiar scar that it had left.

Several persons who knew the assassin personally agreed without a moment's hesitation that the body was that of the actor John Wilkes Booth. With the initial pin, the diary and the check in his name, supplemented by the initials on his hand, the scar on his neck and the filling in a tooth, is it possible to conceive of a more dependable and irrefutable identification?

If there be a mystery associated with the decease of Booth it does not relate directly to him but to the strange and unusual methods which intelligent men have pursued in an attempt to perpetuate an utterly groundless myth which claims that the man who killed Abraham Lincoln was never apprehended.

The First Interment—1865

The body of Booth, now fully identified, was again wrapped in the same clothes and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon under the direction of Captain Baker, two men in a row boat took the body to the east side of the ar-

senal grounds. Here it was temporarily deposited under guard in a semi-enclosure called the Summer House.

As the midnight hour was being called by the sentries, the store keeper of the arsenal, Mr. Stebbins, and four men placed the body on a wagon bed and removed it to a storage room with a dirt floor, forty by fifty feet, in the old penitentiary. A shallow excavation had been made in the extreme southeast corner of the large room. In the meantime a box had been prepared by order of the Secretary of the Navy and had been set in the grave. The body of Booth, still wrapped in blanket and gunny sack, was placed in the box and the grave was covered on a level with the floor.

Storehouse Depository—1867

In 1867, the building standing over the grave of Booth was razed to provide room for the War College and office quarters. The body of Booth was exhumed and removed to a large storehouse situated on the eastern side of the arsenal grounds. Here he was placed beside the bodies of the four conspirators who also had paid the penalty with their lives. The name Booth was painted on the box containing his body to positively identify it from the others.

Burial in the Weaver Vault—1869

On February 18, 1869, by permission of President Johnson, the body of John Wilkes Booth was removed to Baltimore. The remains were in charge of a Baltimore undertaker, J. H. Weaver. Harvey and Marr, Washington undertakers, were called upon to assist Mr. Weaver. Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes, accompanied the undertakers to the place of interment at the store house. Upon the return to the Washington undertaker's establishment, the box marked "Booth" was opened and the dentist who had filled Booth's teeth made a satisfactory identification. Edwin Booth then had the body placed in a plain casket and removed to Baltimore.

The morning after the arrival of the body at Weaver's undertaking rooms, in Baltimore, Mr. Henry C. Wagner and William M. Pegram, viewed the body. Mr. Pegram made this statement for the press: "Mr. Wagner and I looked at the body as it lay dressed in the suit of clothes in which he had been shot. On the right leg was a long calvary boot coming up to the knee. The left leg was dis-jointed at both the knee and ankle The skin was still drawn tightly over the grinning skull, which showed the splendid teeth for which Booth was noted, there being only a single filling which was identified by the dentist who did the work. The coal black hair which rolled back from the forehead had grown nearly a foot. The family fully identified the body as that of John Wilkes Booth, all doubts to the contrary notwithstanding." The above testimony was also confirmed by Henry C. Wagner, who stated, "I hereby certify that the said statement is absolutely correct." The body was placed by Mr. Weaver, the undertaker, in his own vault in Greenmount Cemetery.

Burial in the Booth Lot—1869

Mr. Henry W. Mears, who witnessed the final interment of the assassin, states that the Booth lot was originally in the old Baltimore Cemetery but in 1869 a lot was acquired in Greenmount Cemetery. The body of John Wilkes Booth was taken from the Weaver vault on June 26 and placed in the lot with other members of the Booth family and his name appears on the family stone with the others. Mr. Mears affirmed, "I saw the body of John Wilkes Booth lowered into the grave." For many years he had charge of the lot and at one time, upon the request of Edwin Booth, he was commissioned to beautify the lot. Mr. Mears said each grave was discussed and when they came to the grave of John Wilkes Booth, Edwin Booth turned to him and said, "Let it remain as it is, unmarked."