



# Lincoln Lore

July, 1981

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.  
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1721

## THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN ENCYCLOPEDIA

By Mark E. Neely, Jr.

New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982. Pp. xii, 356.

Reviewed by

Robert V. Bruce, Professor of History, Boston University

In this book reassurance comes once again to those of us who periodically doubt that any new book on Lincoln can be also original and significant. The fundamental originality of Mark Neely's *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* lies more in its form and function than in its content, but for those who read and write about Lincoln it is nonetheless significant.

In 1950 Archer H. Shaw patched together snippets of Lincoln's writings under topical headings and called the result *The Lincoln Encyclopedia*. That title was an obvious misnomer. Not so with Neely's book. Its more than three hundred articles are arranged alphabetically by title, each one complete in itself.

In this respect the book's coverage of the Lincoln field is indeed encyclopedic. And it further lives up to its title by not straying from that field. Some articles—Abolitionism, Nationalism, and Slavery, for example—have headings broad enough to lure a less self-disciplined writer into long asides, but Neely keeps to those aspects of them that directly involved or impinged on Lincoln. Moreover, Neely distinguishes between the Lincoln story and the Civil War in general, not an easy line to draw. Battles are omitted as article subjects, and only those military leaders with whom Lincoln's dealings were direct and substantial are given articles to themselves.

In choosing subjects, the author drew on nine years of experience not only as a Lincoln scholar but also as director of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum and thus as respondent to countless public inquiries about Lincoln. He also systematically examined index entries in major writings on Lincoln and discussed the list with other Lincoln scholars.

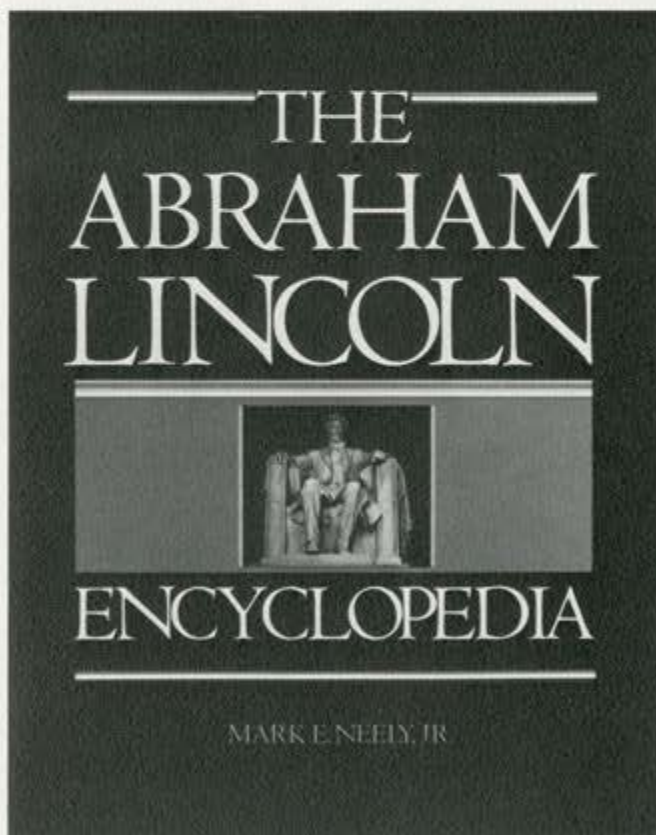
The final roster is therefore by no means capricious or idiosyncratic. Most readers will inevitably disagree with some inclusions and exclusions. My own inclination, for example, would have been to have fewer articles bearing on Lincoln's assassination, perhaps eliminating or consolidating those on peripheral figures in the affair. But the best encyclopedia is one designed to answer what people are most likely to ask, and Neely's judg-

ment on that score has a firmer foundation than mine.

The absence of article subjects that some readers might wish to see included is largely made up for by a full (though not exhaustive) index. For example, there is no article for "Declaration of Independence," while there is one for "Constitution." But the index gives thirty references to the Declaration, including seven under the subheading "primacy of, in Lincoln's thought." Cross-references are often given at the ends of both index entries and articles, although in some cases (for example, Newspapers and Supreme Court) the article inexplicably lists cross-references not given in the index entry, and conversely.

The articles fall into several broad categories. Many are biographical sketches, with emphasis on the Lincoln connection. Politicians thus covered include those who figured in Lincoln's Illinois career, as well as Cabinet members, Congressmen, diplomats, and state governors during the Washington years, and political figures like Washington, Jefferson, Clay, and Webster who influenced Lincoln's life and thought, though he never met them. Journalists, personal friends, associates in the legal profession, family members (including earlier and later generations), and persons related to the assassination form other sizable categories. Significant biographers of Lincoln and leading collectors of Lincolniana appear in considerable number, though limited to those no longer living. Artists, sculptors, and playwrights are included, and an article on Photographs briefly comments on photographers of Lincoln. The biographical sketches give further life to their subjects with small but well-chosen and well-repro-

duced photographs, bringing us face to face with the richly varied individuals who peopled Lincoln's extraordinary life. And the written commentaries give those individuals added dimension by telling us briefly what happened to them before and after their appearance on the Lincoln scene, making them more than mere background accessories. This justifies the allotting of separate sketches to obscure persons,



whose walk-on parts in the Lincoln drama would otherwise deny the reader a sense of their independent reality.

Besides the biographical articles, there is a rich assortment of subject articles, many of them enlivened with contemporary cartoons, drawings, and photographs. They include large themes such as Colonization, Conscription, Negroes, Slavery, Reconstruction, Economics, and Railroads, each focussing sharply on Lincoln's thought and action. There are more concrete political issues such as the Missouri Compromise, the Fugitive Slave Act, and Dred Scott v. Sandford. There are important episodes such as the Altoona Conference, the Hampton Roads Conference, and the Elections of 1860 and 1864. There are localities such as Washington, D.C., the Executive Mansion, Coles County, Illinois, and the towns in which Lincoln debated Douglas. Lincoln's notable legal cases, letters, speeches, and state papers are analyzed and discussed in separate articles. His personal traits and ideas are covered in such articles as Humor, Religion, Music, Physical Characteristics, and Psychology. Complementing the sketches of biographers and collectors are articles on notable Lincoln libraries and museums (with current addresses), on Lincoln Fellowships, and on other latter-day marks of remembrance such as Postage Stamps and the Lincoln Highway.

All this suggests the book's plan and range, but it does not touch on the quality of its execution. Not the least remarkable fact about the work is that, with all allowance for comment and criticism by other Lincoln experts on sundry articles in manuscript, the whole was written by one man. If it departs from the encyclopedia model, it is in its consequent unity of outlook and personal style. The writing is clear and concise, as it should be in an encyclopedia, but it is also vigorous, thoughtful, and unafraid to express opinions. James G. Randall's *Lincoln the President*, for example, is "easily the finest biography of Lincoln ever written" (p. 27), whereas Carl Sandburg's *Lincoln Collector*, on the Oliver Barrett collection of *Lincolniana*, is "rambling and diffuse" (p. 20). Neely's encyclopedia, in short, speaks with the voice of a man, not the monotone of a computer.

But if it is clearly Mark Neely who speaks in this book, it is also clear that he knows whereof he speaks. Almost every article concludes with a succinct, judiciously selective, and thoroughly up-to-date critical bibliography, supporting the article's statements and guiding the reader to further information. On numerous occasions Neely has used primary sources, such as the Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress or manuscripts in other libraries, and these are fully identified. The texts of the articles are as up-to-date as the bibliographies. The most substantial and original recent contribution to the study of Lincoln, G.S. Boritt's *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (1978), is, for example, not only evaluated in the article on Biographers but is also drawn upon (with full credit) in such articles as Banking, Economics, Railroads, Republican Party, Tariff, and Whig Party.

It should be evident by now that anyone interested in Abraham Lincoln will find *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* not only unique but also indispensable, whether his interest is new or longstanding. The newcomer to that endlessly fascinating study may profitably begin with the compact yet lively and illuminating article on Biographers. The longtime Lincolnian may sample an article and find his memory refreshed, his interest rekindled, his impressions sharpened, and his knowledge of the literature made current. Even those familiar with all the facts in a given article will profit from the precision, balance, coherence, and discrimination with which they are presented.

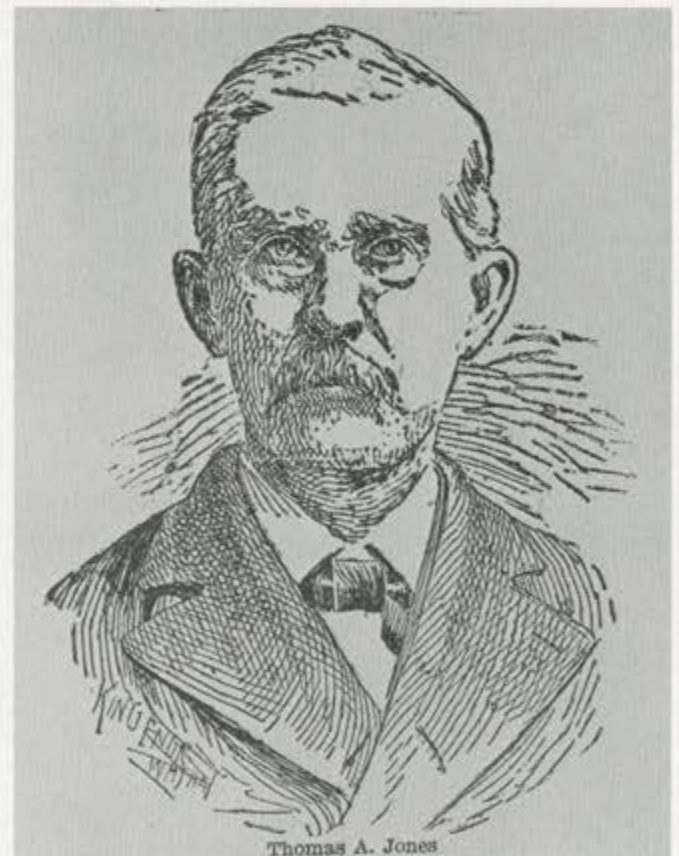
I have only one caution for the reader, whether he be a beginner or an old hand. As is said to be the case with fanciers of peanuts, those who consult this encyclopedia will find it difficult to stop with just one article. They will thus run a grave risk of missing appointments, putting off chores, or staying up too late at night. On the other hand, unlike the case of goober gobblers, it will be their minds, not their waistlines, that will expand.

## Some New Light on Thomas A. Jones and a Mysterious Man Named Mudd

Thomas A. Jones, the man who helped John Wilkes Booth escape, lived to tell about it in his famous little book, *J. Wilkes Booth: An Account of His Sojourn in Southern Maryland after the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, his Passage Across the Potomac, and his Death in Virginia* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1893). As traitors' reminiscences go, it is an engaging and appealing work. Jones readily admitted his part as an accessory after the fact of Booth's crime and described with surprising candor his role as a Confederate "mail" agent in southern Maryland.

Jones told the story of his arrest early in the war for disloyal activities and his release several months later on swearing the oath of allegiance to the Union. A detachment of General Daniel E. Sickles's brigade arrested him near Pope's Creek in Maryland on orders issued from Colonel R.B. Marcy on October 4, 1861. Soldiers took him to the Thirteenth Street Prison in Washington, D.C. E.J. Allen, a Federal agent working for General Andrew Porter, Provost Marshal in Washington, had received information that Jones regularly used his boat to ferry contraband goods and men who wished to join the Confederate army across the Potomac to Virginia.

The official record of Jones's arrest contains some interesting information which he had forgotten later and at least one enticing detail of which he may never have been aware. Jones had heard he was to be arrested and fled for a time to Virginia. Union soldiers searched his house in his absence and found several incriminating letters. One was from the editor of the Richmond *Examiner* asking for copies of the Baltimore *Sun*. Another indicated that Jones and his fellow agents smuggled chloroform across the river in jugs marked "Neat's-foot oil." Other correspondents expressed joy at the Confederate victory at Manassas, the expectation that "Lincoln is pretty nearly played out and that one more victory in favor of the South will knock down his house," and the hope "that the day is not far



From the Louis A. Warren  
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FIGURE 1. Portrait of Jones from his famous book.



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 2. General Andrew Porter.**

distant when the people of the North will condemn Abe's cruel acts and hurl him from power."

Any secret agent is, of necessity, a liar, but readers who know Jones only from his famous memoir are not able to see what an accomplished and shrewd liar he was. The records of his case make this talent abundantly clear. Jones wrote several letters asking for help in gaining his release. He noted that he had "an affectionate wife at home and eight young children all dependent upon me for protection and support." Moreover, his wife was expecting. It was time (November) for farmers to be making arrangements for the next year. He needed to go home to do that and to provide winter clothing and shoes for his family. Still in prison (he was moved to the Old Capitol Prison) in January, Jones begged for sympathy, "if not for myself for the sake of a distressed wife and nine children, one of which is a stranger to me it having been born since my imprisonment." A "father or a husband" would surely grant him "a speedy release."

The account of his family circumstances was apparently true, but the shrewd lie Jones told was that he had done only what many others in his county would have done in similar circumstances. Besides, he knew of many men from the area who had been in the Confederate service, returned to Maryland, been captured, and released on taking the oath of allegiance. His act was not as bad as theirs. The government had confiscated two of his boats, and his pecuniary loss was severe. Jones readily admitting taking people to Virginia, but he claimed that he never inquired about their business. "Where there was

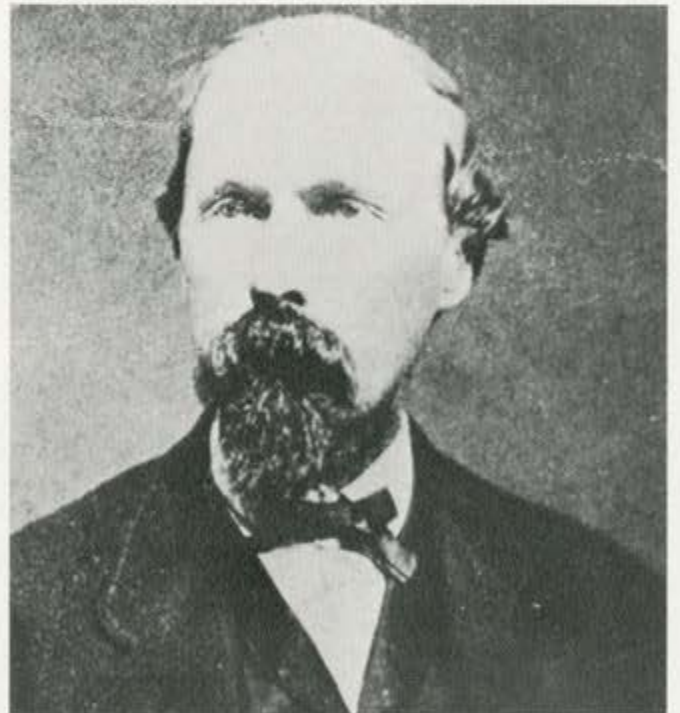
a boat there was no use in saying 'no' when men from a distance came and said they wanted to go to Virginia on important business and must go. I have known in several cases where they after being positively refused took the boat and crossed the river themselves." Jones had "said already more than . . . intended and more than necessary," he said with false candor. He was suffering for the crimes of others in his county who had done more and paid less penalty. "What I did which seems to be treason to the Government I did for profit. . . . I have a large family to support, and being a poor man I thought that if I could make something by carrying a few persons across the river it would be no harm."

Jones lied. He was comfortably well off but lost his money in efforts for the Confederacy. He knew exactly what he was doing in the ferry business; he did it to help the Confederacy. By not making a phony lofty-sounding appeal, he gave his lies the ring of grubby truth born of economic necessity. His lies were artful and, it should be noted, clearly and plainly expressed—proof, incidentally, of his ability to write his later memoir without the aid of a ghost-writer.

The Department of State, battered by Maryland Congressmen looking after their constituents and perhaps a little taken in by Jones's lies, decided to let him go. This is a part of the story that Jones may not have known—a part that provides tragically eloquent tribute to the sound instincts of the Federal secret service. Provost Marshal Porter told Secretary of State William H. Seward that Jones ought not to be released. Seward ordered his release in January anyway. Porter and Allen objected vigorously, saying that Jones was a dangerous man, that Seward had received "untruthful representations" in regard to his case, and that General George B. McClellan regarded it as a military necessity that Jones be kept in custody. Allen said that Jones was part of a "dangerous nest of traitors."

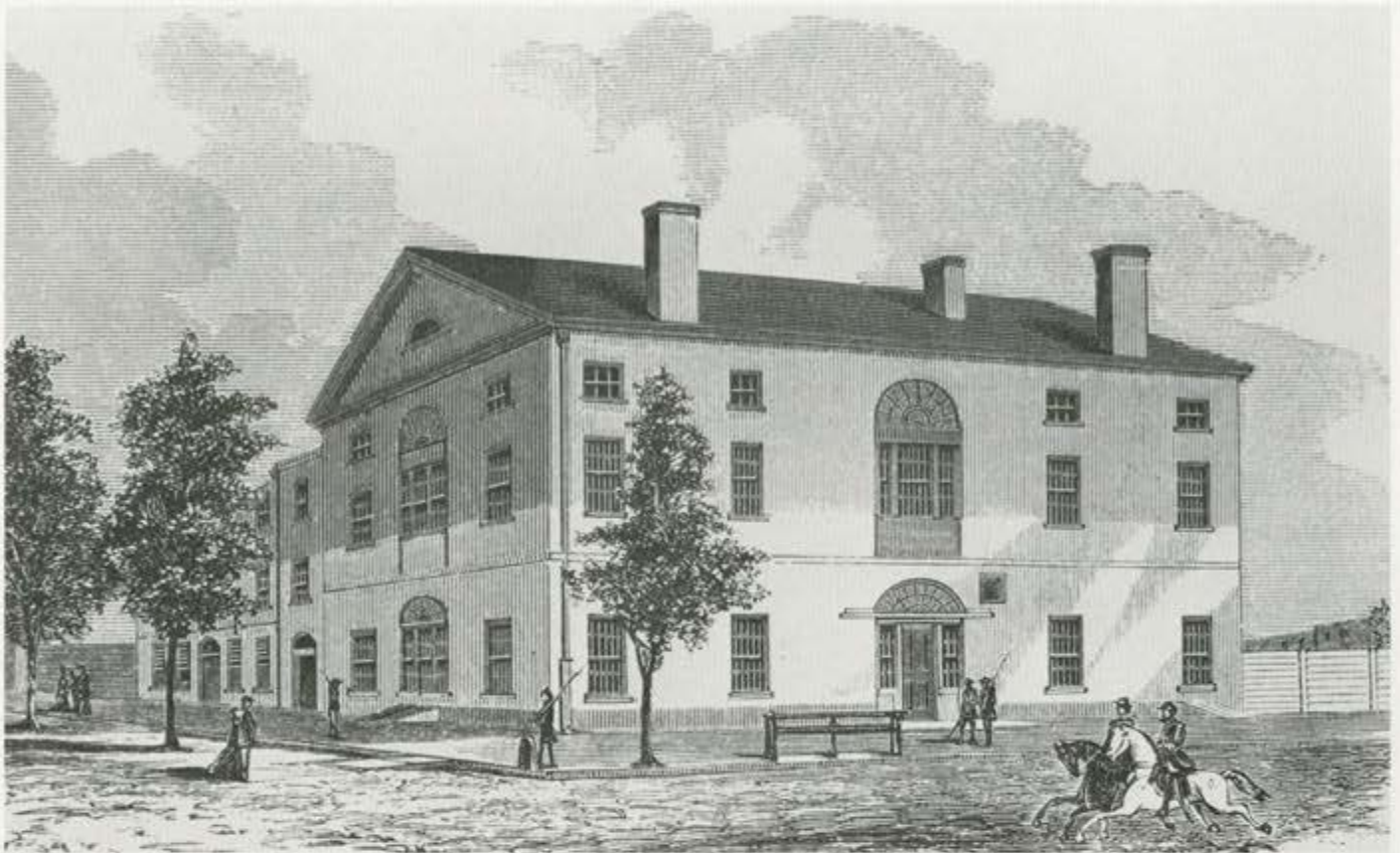
In February, Edwin M. Stanton succeeded Seward as the person in charge of arrests of persons suspected of disloyalty. The same influences that wore Seward down assailed Stanton. Allen told him: "Jones is a most dangerous man to be at large even for the shortest length of time."

Six days later Jones swore his allegiance to the Union and walked out of the Old Capitol Prison. Very shortly thereafter, he became the official Confederate agent in his neighborhood.



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 3. Doctor Samuel A. Mudd.**



From the Louis A. Warren  
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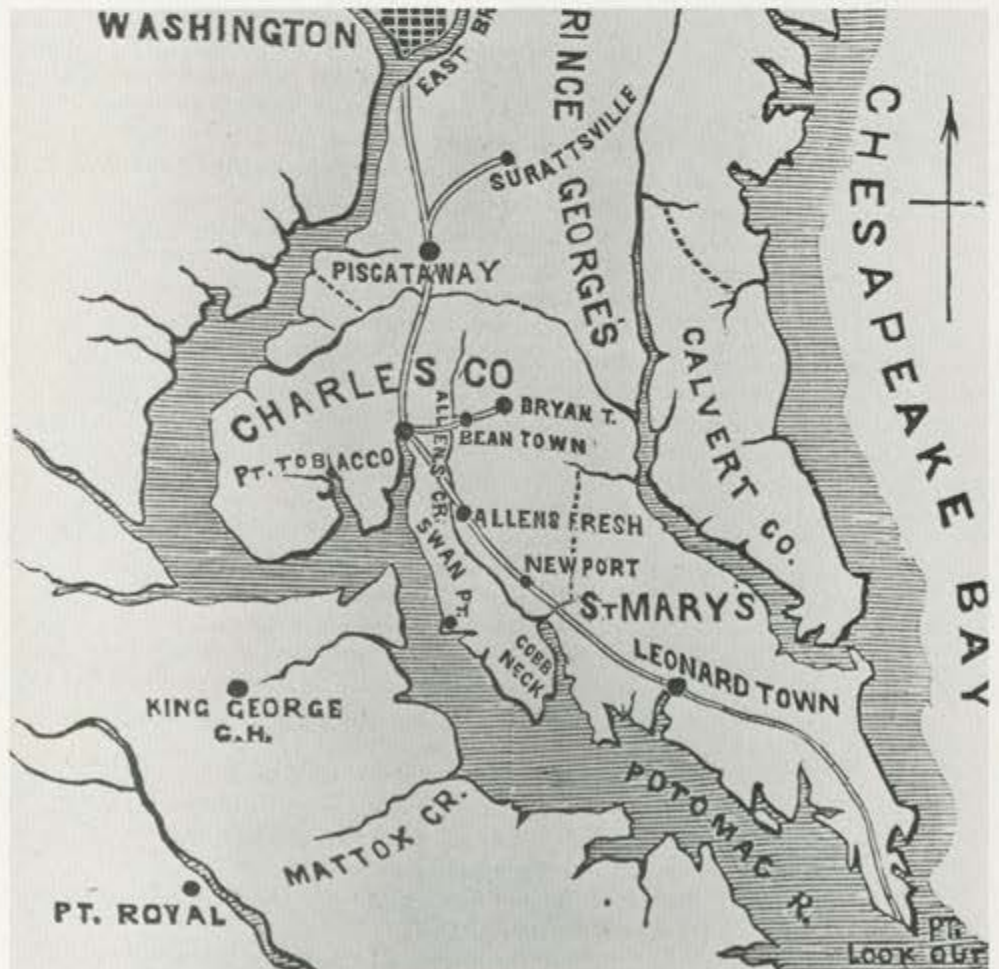
FIGURE 4. The Old Capitol Prison from John A. Marshall's *American Bastille*.

Among the curious materials in the file on Jones's case is a statement made by one George W. Smith of Bryantown, Charles County, Maryland.

The secession feeling commenced about April last, 1861. The principal leaders in the secession party and those who have aided against the Government are, first, James A. Mudd; lives about one mile from Bryantown; has been conveying men and boxes supposed to contain munitions of war from Baltimore and different counties in the State to Pope's Creek on the Potomac. The men were strangers from Baltimore and other places. Mudd paid the expenses. . . . Thomas A. Jones, of Pope's Creek, is the man who receives the men, arms and ammunition at that place and conveys them over to Virginia in his own boat and with his own negroes.

Dr. Samuel A. Mudd lived five miles from Bryantown. The arrest records in the State Department are full of gaps and errors. Many names are mistakenly recorded, especially in verbal testimony taken down, as this was, by a Federal agent. Did Smith get the first name wrong? Was he a little off in his estimate of the distance from Bryantown? Who was Smith? From whom did Jones obtain his chloroform?

History may never know. There is no other record of Smith's arrest than this statement. All that is known for certain is that he told the truth about Thomas A. Jones.



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FIGURE 5. Map of lower Maryland from George A. Townsend's *Life, Crime, and Capture of John Wilkes Booth*.