



ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN

The President Shot at Theatre Last Evening.

On the night of April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theatre by John Wilkes Booth. He died in the early hours of April 15 in the small back bedroom of a boarding house across the street.

Lincoln, who had struggled through the Civil War to preserve the Union, lived long enough to see it maintained but not long enough to help in healing the wounds left by the war.

The Conspirators

John Wilkes Booth, a well-known actor and southern sympathizer, saw Lincoln as the source of the South's problems. In late 1864, he began laying plans to kidnap the president.

Early recruits were Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Laughlin, and John Surratt. John's mother, Mary Surratt, ran a boarding house in Washington, D.C., where the conspirators met. By 1865 David Herold, George Atzerodt, and Lewis Powell had joined Booth. An attempt to seize Lincoln on March 17 failed. John Surratt, Samuel

Arnold, and Michael O'Laughlin apparently left the venture then.

After Robert E. Lee's surrender, Booth put together a desperate plan. Powell was to kill Secretary of State William Seward, Atzerodt was to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Booth would assassinate President Lincoln. Only Booth was successful. In the chaos after the shooting at Ford's Theatre, Booth fled to Maryland where he met up with Herold. The pain in Booth's left leg, broken when he leaped from the theatre box, was intense, and

The theatre where Lincoln was shot and the house where he died are preserved today as Ford's Theatre National Historic Site. It tells us of these events, reminds us of the troubling times this nation passed through, and encourages us to perpetuate the aspirations, hopes, and ideals that Lincoln held for the United States.



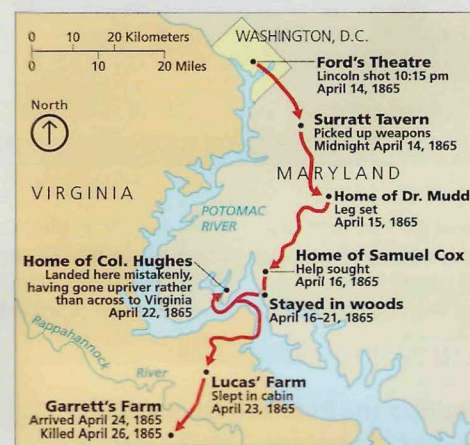
John Wilkes Booth
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

he rode to the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd to have the bone set. On April 26, while Booth and Herold hid in a tobacco barn on the Garrett farm near Port Royal, Va., Union troops surrounded them. Herold surrendered immediately. Booth was shot while still in the barn after troops set it afire.

Booth died three hours later on Garrett's porch. Although barely coherent, he asked the soldiers to "tell my mother I died for my country."

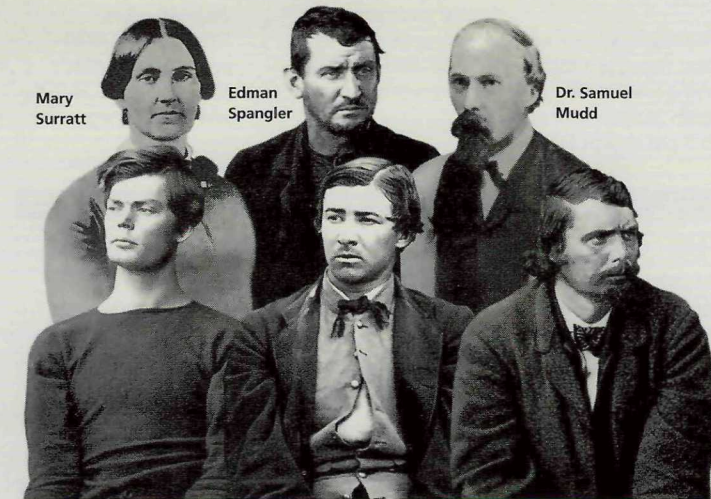
The other conspirators were soon arrested. Their trial began on May 10 and ended on June 29. Atzerodt, Herold, Powell, and Mary Surratt received death sentences—all were hanged on July 7, 1865. Arnold and O'Laughlin, involved in the kidnapping conspiracy, were given life sentences, as was Dr. Samuel Mudd. Edman Spangler, a stage hand at Ford's

Theatre who did odd jobs for Booth, got six years of hard labor. The four were sent to Fort Jefferson in Florida to serve their sentences. O'Laughlin died of yellow fever in 1867. President Johnson pardoned and released the others in 1869.



Booth's Flight

Booth hoped for a quick escape through the Maryland countryside to Virginia and the South where he expected a hero's welcome. His broken leg slowed him as he followed the established route of Confederate couriers through Southern Maryland and across the Potomac River. Southern sympathizers gave Booth and Herold food and lodging, but many were reluctant to assist them. At one point Booth and Herold were forced to hide in a thicket for several days. Booth had not envisioned such harsh treatment.



Mary Surratt, Edman Spangler, Dr. Samuel Mudd, David Herold, George Atzerodt, Lewis Powell
PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Events of April 9–14, 1865

April 9, 1865 Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrenders his Army of Northern Virginia to Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Va. Celebrations in Washington, D.C. abound.

April 10, 1865 Crowds serenade the White

House. Lincoln promises to make a speech the next day. He asks the band to play *Dixie*, saying it is "one of the best tunes I ever heard."

April 11, 1865 Lincoln tells a crowd on the White House lawn about his post-war plans, including re-

construction. He plans to restore the rebellious states to the Union quickly. About the right to vote in the reunited country, Lincoln notes, "It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man. I would myself prefer that it

were now conferred on the very intelligent and on those who serve our cause as soldiers." John Wilkes Booth, listening in the crowd, becomes angry and says to his accomplice Lewis Powell, "That is the last speech he will ever give!"

April 14, 1865 Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, returns from Appomattox Court House. He has breakfast with his father. Later, Lincoln

and wife Mary take a carriage ride in the city. At 8:30 pm the Lincolns and their guests arrive at Ford's Theatre.



Lincoln's 1861 inauguration took place beneath the unfinished Capitol dome.

taxed. Few streets were paved, and in bad weather became impassible. Creeks and canals were little more than open sewers. The Nation's Capital experienced growing pains that would not be addressed until after the Civil War.

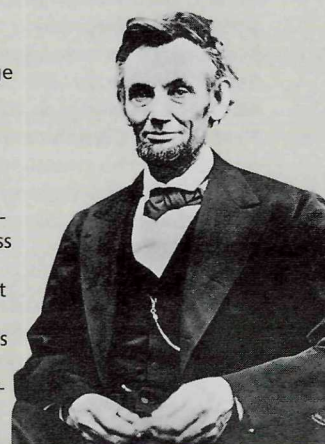
This illustration shows the activity from the time Lincoln was shot until he was carried across the street and placed in the back bedroom of the Petersen House. Read the story (top right) in "Events of April 14–15, 1865."

Events of April 14–15, 1865

About 8:30 pm the Lincolns and their guests, Maj. Henry Reed Rathbone and Clara Harris, arrived at Ford's Theatre to see a performance of *Our American Cousin*. Lincoln enjoyed the theatre, for it gave him some relief from burdens of the presidency.

At about 10:15 pm, when only one actor, Harry Hawk, was on stage and the audience was laughing, John Wilkes Booth entered the presidential box 1 and shot President Lincoln. Booth stabbed Major Rathbone in the left arm, then jumped 2 to the stage. In jumping, Booth got entangled in the decorations for the presidential box and landed off balance on the stage, breaking a bone

in his left leg. He moved across the stage 3, ran out the back door of the theatre, mounted his horse in the alley 4, and escaped from the city. The unconscious president was carried across the street 5 to 453 (now 516) Tenth Street and placed in a back bedroom 6. Mary, his wife, and Robert, his son, waited in the parlor 7. Lincoln died on Saturday, April 15, 1865 at 7:22 am.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Occupants of the Presidential Box

In keeping with events celebrating the war's end, the Lincolns decided to attend a performance of *Our American Cousin* starring Laura Keane at Ford's Theatre on Tenth Street. The Lincolns initially invited Gen. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant, but they left the city in mid-afternoon. At the last minute, the Lincolns invited Clara Harris, daughter of New

York Senator Ira Harris, and her fiancé, Maj. Henry Reed Rathbone. Years after Lincoln's assassination, more tragedy haunted this couple. In 1883, while living in Germany, Henry Rathbone killed his wife Clara, then turned a knife on himself. Rathbone was declared insane and died in an asylum in Hanover, Germany, in 1911.



Maj. Henry Reed Rathbone
PHOTOS: NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Clara Harris

The President's Widow

Neither the judgment of history nor the events she lived through were kind to Mary Todd Lincoln (right). Her husband was assassinated at her side, and three of her four sons died during her lifetime. Criticism stalked her every public action as first lady and did not abate in the aftermath of Lincoln's death. In her final years, Mary was estranged from her only remaining son,



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Robert. Fifteen years after the death of her husband, Mary died at her sister's home in Springfield, Ill., in July 1882.

The Tenth Street Neighborhood

As Washington, D.C.'s population grew during the Civil War, so did the number of gamblers, hustlers, pickpockets, prostitutes, and bootleggers. Unwary citizens or soldiers were relieved of what little money they had. The opening of Ford's Theatre on Tenth Street brought a new type of person to the district—actors—whose profession was deemed a less than desirable trade.

Actors and actresses needed places to stay during theatre engagements, and although suspect characters, boarding houses welcomed them—as long as they had ready cash to pay for the rooms.

By the mid-1860s many homes in the Tenth Street neighborhood had been turned into respectable boarding houses, providing lodging and food for people needing an extended stay in the city. These homes usually served a more genteel clientele like Congressional delegates and their families. Such was the Petersen boarding house across the street from Ford's Theatre.

Ford's Theatre Yesterday and Today

A History of Ford's Theatre

John T. Ford was an extremely successful theatrical entrepreneur from Baltimore, Md., where he managed the Holliday Street Theatre. In 1861 he expanded operations to Washington, D.C. He leased the First Baptist Church on Tenth Street (right) and turned the church into a music hall. Three days after signing the lease he opened with a 2½-month run of the Christy Minstrels.

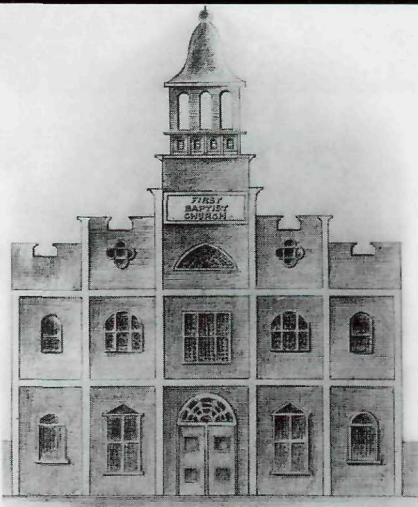
Ford's productions proved profitable, but a fire destroyed the building in December 1862. Undaunted, he raised money for

new construction, and the cornerstone was laid in February 1863.

The first performance in Ford's new theatre took place on August 27, 1863. From then, until the theatre closed in the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination, Ford staged 495 performances. The success was attributed to John Ford's dedication to quality in the construction of his new building, the up-to-date equipment, the first-rate actors he hired, and to the engaging productions that he mounted.

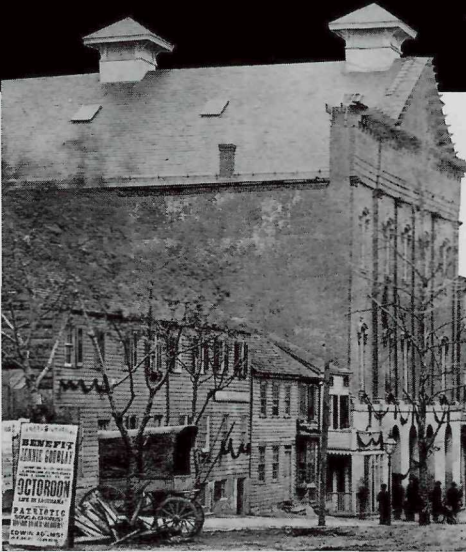
The federal government closed the theatre during the investigation of the assassination and trial of the conspirators. After their sentencing and hanging, Ford was given permission to reopen. Ford received threats that the building would be burned if he reopened the theatre, so the War Department closed it again.

In August 1865 the department leased the building from Ford and began its conversion to a three-story office building. Everything in the interior was gutted and removed. In 1866 the federal government



First Baptist Church

bought the theatre from Ford for \$100,000. In June 1893, a section of three interior floors collapsed, killing 22 clerks and injuring 68. Repaired once again, the building served as a government office. On February 12, 1932, on the 123rd anniversary of Lincoln's birth, the Lincoln Museum opened on the first floor of Ford's old theatre. In 1933 the building and museum collection was entrusted to the National Park Service.

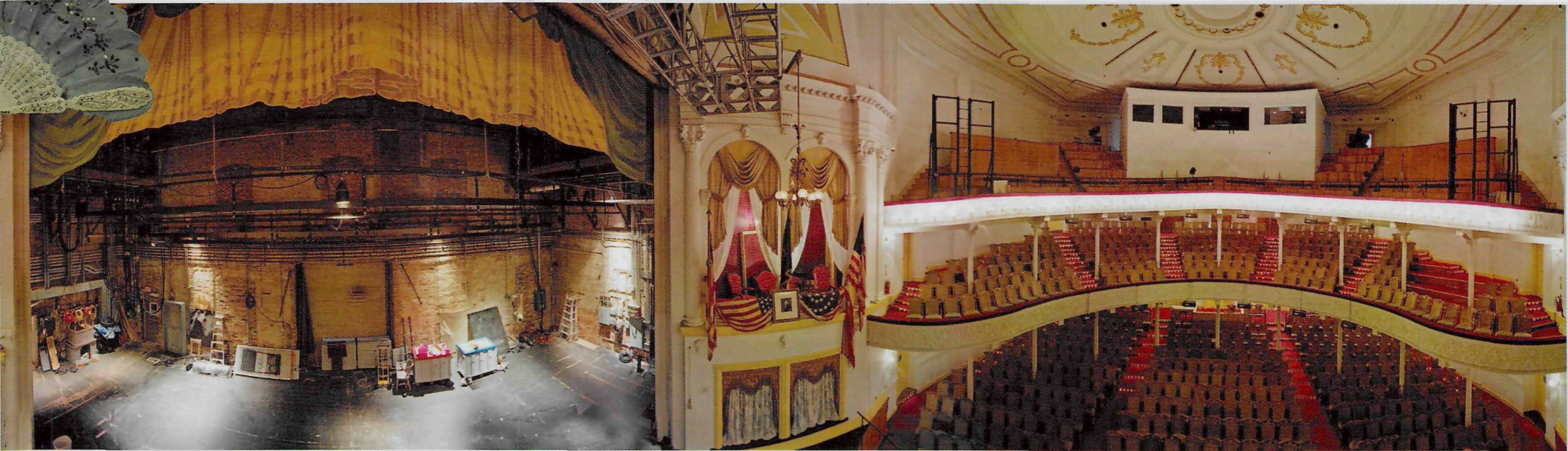


This photograph, taken shortly after the assassination, shows the theatre and nearby buildings draped in black mourning bands. Note the muddy, unpaved street.

Renovation and Restoration

Today's Ford's Theatre is the result of two efforts. First is the Lincoln Museum—the initial collection of Lincoln items assembled by Osborn Oldroyd and brought to Washington, D.C. in 1893. The federal government purchased Oldroyd's collection in 1926 and moved it to a museum in Ford's Theatre in 1932.

The second began after World War II when the public became interested in restoring the theatre to its 1865 appearance. In 1960 Congress budgeted funds for research and an architectural study and approved the restoration in 1964. Work proceeded carefully, ensuring that furnishings corresponded to those in Ford's Theatre in 1865. Most items in the Presidential Box are reproductions, but the sofa upon which Major Rathbone sat and one parlor chair are original. The George Washington engraving hanging on the Presidential Box is also original. The restored theatre and museum opened to the public on February 13, 1968.



Panoramic view of Ford's Theatre (left to right): backstage, Presidential Box, and theatre seating.

The Living Theatre

Today Ford's Theatre National Historic Site is a live, working theatre. As a tribute to President Lincoln's love of the performing arts, the Ford's Theatre Society is committed to bringing the best talent to the theatre's historic stage and to produc-

ing plays that are as eloquent, intelligent, and respectful of humanity as Mr. Lincoln was throughout his life and presidency. Productions are praised by critics and audiences for the superior quality of their artistic programming.

For box office information, call 202-347-4833 or visit www.fords.org.

Martin Rayner as Scrooge in the holiday favorite, *A Christmas Carol*.



Planning Your Visit

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site is at 511 10th Street NW; the Petersen House where Lincoln died is across the street.

The site has information, tours, exhibits, and a bookstore. It is open daily from 9 am to 5 pm except De-

cember 25. The theatre is closed to tours during rehearsals or matinees, but the Lincoln Museum in the theatre basement and the Petersen House remain open. Food, drink, and gum are prohibited.

More Information
Ford's Theatre National Historic Site
511 10th Street NW
Washington, DC 20004
202-426-6924
TTY 202-426-1749
www.nps.gov/foth
Ford's Theatre Society
www.fords.org

Events at the Petersen House

The first person to enter the Presidential Box after Lincoln had been shot was Charles Augustus Leale, a 23-year-old doctor who had just completed his medical studies. Dr. Leale found the wound in

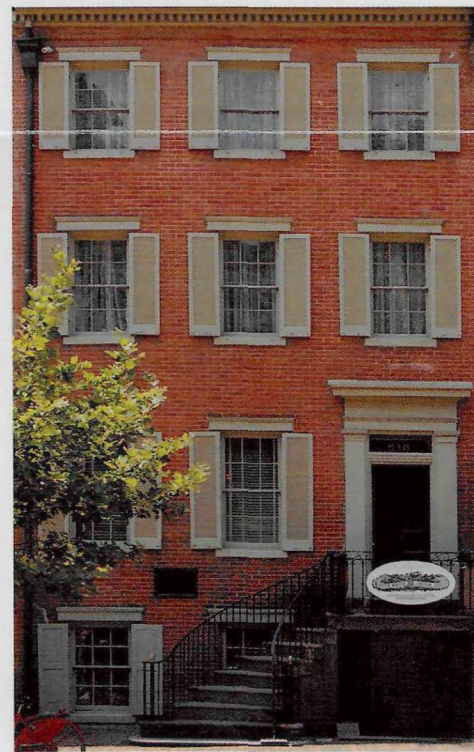
Lincoln's head and removed a blood clot, which released pressure and allowed the unconscious president to breathe on his own. Leale assessed, "His wound is mortal; it is impossible for him to recover," and or-

dered that the president be carried across the street to a bed at the home of William and Anna Petersen. The Petersen family aided as they could, although on this night their home was no longer their own. Over

90 people would come and go through the house to pay their last respects to the dying president. Soldiers stood guard at the front door and were posted on the roof to keep crowds at bay.

Through the night, Leale, along with Lincoln's personal physician Dr. Robert King Stone and other doctors, cared for Lincoln—attempting to make him comfort-

able—for they all knew that the wound was fatal. The president never regained consciousness. At 7:22 am, April 15, 1865, Abraham Lincoln died.



A newspaper artist sketched this death-bed scene as Lincoln lay dying. At his bedside are his son, Robert, friends, physicians, and members of his staff. His

wife Mary was not in the room when her husband died. This illustration appeared in *Harpers Weekly* on May 6, 1865, three weeks after Lincoln died.

Touring the Petersen House Today

Rooms in the Petersen House are furnished in 1865 period pieces. None of the furniture is original to the house.

Back Bedroom The bed in the Petersen House was not long enough for Lincoln. He was laid across it diagonally with his shoulders and head supported by pillows. The furnishings, while not original, are accurate due to detailed sketches provided by eyewitness artists.

Front Parlor Mary Todd Lincoln spent most of the night of April 14–15 here between visits to her husband's bedside. Their eldest son, Robert, and close friends comforted her through the night. In 1865 dou-

ble doors separated this room from the back parlor.

Back Parlor From here Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton began investigating Lincoln's assassination. Stanton and others sent guards to protect Vice President Andrew Johnson, questioned witnesses, ordered Booth's arrest, and set in motion the arrest and trial of Booth's conspirators. Stanton also broke the tragic news to the nation.



Front Parlor



Back Parlor