

On The Day Lincoln Was Shot

Booth's Accomplice in Elmira, Canandaigua

By MARGARET K. BEARDEN

Everyone knows John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln one hundred years ago, but not everyone knows that the alleged chief accomplice of Booth was within the present Rochester Diocese at the time of Booth's attack. He was John Harrison Surratt. Surratt was in Elmira on the night of the Lincoln shooting, and in Canandaigua on the day Lincoln died. Witnesses in both these towns, plus signatures on cash-books, give us proof positive that John Surratt was not within three hundred miles of Washington on that tragic Good Friday of 1865.

His mother, Mary Eugenia Jenkins Surratt, a widow aged 45, was the first American woman to go to the gallows for a Federal crime: the Lincoln assassination. She was a descendant of the man who once owned Jenkins Hill in Washington — today known as Capitol Hill.

Mrs. Surratt's husband, John Harrison Surratt, Sr., died in 1862. At one time he had owned 2400 acres of land, in Prince George's County, Maryland, about 10 miles from the District of Columbia line. In 1865, the three Surratt children were: Isaac, aged 23, a member of Magruder's Confederate Texas brigade near Brownsville; John, aged 20 (a member of General E. G. Lee's Confederate Signal Service); and Anna, aged 16, at home.

Mrs. Surratt, unusually well-educated for a woman of her day, had become a Catholic convert while at Miss Winifred Martin's School in Alexandria, Virginia. Isaac and John had attended St. Matthew's and Gonzaga schools in Washington, and Anna had studied music and French in Bryantown, Maryland. John Surratt, Jr. had received the equivalent of a Junior college education under the Sulpician Fathers at St. Charles College, Ellicott's Mills, Md.

Although those students at St. Charles who, like John Surratt, Jr., had completed their course with distinction, would usually go on to the priesthood, John Surratt denied that he ever thought himself worthy of that vocation. His sister Anna left a statement: "John was never, at any time, a candidate for the priesthood."

In November of 1864, Mrs. Surratt moved from her country home at Surrattsville, Maryland, to her Washington town house at 541 "H" Street, only three blocks from Ford's Theatre. Mrs. Surratt had developed a severe myopia, but Ann insisted that her mother "was too young-looking for spectacles" — and Mrs. Surratt never owned a pair of glasses of any kind.

Hence she never in her life attended any theatre, for she was unable to see the characters on the stage. Anna and John, however, enjoyed the theatre in Washington, attending whenever Booth gave them free tickets to the Presidential box.

In the ten-room town house, Mrs. Surratt invited four friends to take rooms. She rented her farm to an expellee, John M. Lloyd. The crops on the farm had been trampled by Federal troops. Some of her slaves had left, although a number had stayed with her. Her husband and son had both served as postmaster at Surrattsville. Like most of the people of lower Maryland, the Surratts had Southern sympathies during the Rebellion, and were particularly cooperative in passing mail, packages of medicine, and messages from the North to the South. Still, Mrs. Surratt had also shown compassion to the Union troops. We have documentary proof that at her farm she fed and quartered Union troops and horses without pay.

Two days before Christmas, 1864, John Surratt and a schoolmate from St. Charles, Louis J. Weichman, were introduced to the actor, John Wilkes Booth, on the streets of downtown Washington, by Dr. Samuel A. Mudd. Weichman, employed as a clerk in the War Department office of the Commissary-General of prisoners, insisted all ways that he never knew why Dr. Mudd, a physician and farmer from near Bryantown, Md., should have arranged such an

Margaret K. Bearden (Mrs. LeMoyné D. Bearden) is a Rochesterian who has made a profound study of the events surrounding the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. She has focussed her attention particularly on John Harrison Surratt, who, like his ill-starred mother, was tried for complicity in the crime of John Wilkes Booth. This article is a summary of John Surratt's exciting career. Mrs. Bearden has kindly furnished the accompanying photographs.

War Department Washington April 20, 1865

\$100,000 REWARD

THE MURDERER

Of our late beloved President Abraham Lincoln

IS STILL AT LARGE

\$50,000 REWARD

\$25,000 REWARD

\$25,000 REWARD

Will be paid for the apprehension of JOHN H. SURRATT, who is believed to be the murderer of our late beloved President Abraham Lincoln.

Whoever will give information that shall lead to the arrest of either of the above-named criminals, or their accomplices, and who will furnish any other information of value, or assist in their capture, or in their conviction, or in their execution, shall receive the above reward, to be paid by the War Department.

All persons harboring or secreting the said persons, or either of them, or aiding or abetting their concealment, or escape, will be treated as accessories in the murder of the President and the accomplices and abettors of the Secretary of War, and shall be liable to a trial before a Military Commission and the punishment of DEATH.

Let the stain of innocent blood be removed from the land by the arrest and punishment of the murderers.

Poster advertising reward for arrest of John Surratt

introduction. Research will show us that Weichman had far more knowledge of what was transpiring than he was willing to confess.

It was well known that by the winter of 1864, the planters of lower Maryland had collected a fund of over \$3000 to fight the Radical Republicans. This fund was given to the charge of Patrick Martin, Dr. William Queen, and to John Wilkes Booth — in that order, in Bryantown, Md. It was hoped that the money might somehow be used to capture Abraham Lincoln, take him to Richmond and hold him hostage, so as to be able to dictate terms to the North. The money was spent to provide for men, horses, a carriage, a boat, arms and ammunition for "the enterprise."

Into the scheme Booth drew John Surratt, Lewis Thornton Powell, David Herold, George A. Atzerodt, Samuel Elard Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin. It is probable that Louis Weichman and John Lloyd were also members of the group of would-be kidnapers. The Confederate government always maintained that it never approved of, nor supported, any such scheme.

At no time during January, February, and March, 1865, when John Surratt was at home in Washington, did all of the so-called conspirators gather at Mrs. Surratt's house, as legend so often reports. Booth did call often, and Mrs. Surratt always welcomed him — as she did all the friends of her son John. Powell and Atzerodt came on three different occasions; David Herold; once; Arnold, O'Laughlin, and Dr. Mudd, never.

Whether Mrs. Surratt knew that her son was in on a plan to abduct Lincoln is a debatable question. She denied that she knew of it. So did her son. So did Powell. Herold said she did not know if Herold was right; she may have thought, when John mentioned it, that he was indulging in a passing fancy, or some kind of youthful bragadoct. She knew her son missed the horses he had on the farm, and that he enjoyed riding in the city in the company of the dashing actor, John Wilkes Booth.

Booth left a diary that gave his explanation of his wicked murder. He reported that he

"had worked to capture" — and that "the cause being almost lost — something great and decisive" had to be done. The surrender at Appomattox forced a change in plans. Now Booth's enterprise could no longer dictate terms; so he decided to kill Lincoln on the very day he carried out his evil deed.

Only one attempt was made before Appomattox to get the riders together to capture Lincoln — and it failed miserably. Lincoln was not in the carriage, nor was it seized. The band broke up on that day March 12, 1865. They agreed the plan was a failure, so it was completely abandoned. Booth was severely disappointed. Arnold and O'Laughlin returned to Baltimore. Only Powell, Herold, and Atzerodt saw him after the month of March, 1865.

Early in April, John Surratt was ordered to Richmond to carry despatches and bank drafts for the Confederate Signal Corps to Montreal. On his way from Richmond to Montreal, he stopped in Washington and was aware that detectives were looking for him, suspecting that he was a Confederate agent. Louis Weichman, zealous for attention in the War Department, and stung by rebuffs from Anna Surratt, had reported to Capt. Gleason that a "conspiracy was afoot" in the Surratt house, involving John Surratt and John Wilkes Booth. Gleason, having heard such a rumour two months before the Lincoln assassination, would remember it.

A month before Lincoln's death, the tenantfarmer, John Lloyd, had hidden arms and ammunition at Mrs. Surratt's country-house in preparation for the abduction plan. Weichman knew this, too, and was disappointed that he had not been part of Booth's romantic group. He had been left out because he could neither manage a horse nor firearms. The Surratts had teased him for his wearing the Blue of the Washington City Guard, and working for the Federal War Department, while at the same time arguing that he wanted to study in Richmond under Bishop McGill, and helping the Confederacy by handing over records to the agent, Gus Howell.

He would "get even" with those who had laughed at him!

John Surratt arrived at St. Lawrence Hall, Montreal, seat of the ex-Confederate government which was trying to retrieve what it could. Gen. E. G. Lee ordered Surratt to Elmira to survey the large Confederate prison there, and report on conditions, and make sketches. Surratt was at the Brainard House (later called the Rathbun) in Elmira on April 14, 1865, when Booth fired the fatal shot.

At the same time, Powell attacked Secretary of State William H. Seward. First reports named Surratt as Seward's assailant. Surratt entrained on April 15th for Canandaigua, and his name was soon listed in the register and cash-book of the Webster House (now the Hotel Pickering) in that village. Hoping to go by ferry from Rochester to Coburg, Ontario, he was disappointed to learn that the boat did not run on Sunday!

After attending Easter Sunday Mass at St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, (the original church at Main and Saltonstall) he took the train for Montreal, by way of St. Alban's, Vermont. When he arrived in Montreal, he reported to the Confederate authorities and to his priest-friends. He told them all he knew of Booth and the plan to capture Lincoln and how shocked he was to learn of Booth's mad deed at Ford's Theatre.

Meanwhile, Weichman's tip to Captain Gleason was remembered. It was charged that Atzerodt "lay in wait to kill Vice-President Johnson," and that Gen-

ham Lincoln — Edward P. Doherty." Still others believe Booth killed himself.

John Surratt, with the sympathetic aid of friends, embarked for Liverpool, England, from Quebec, November, 1865. Ten days after his arrival, rewards offered by the United States for his apprehension were revoked. While staying at the Oratory of the Church of the Holy Cross in Liverpool, he was advised to procure a proper passport, and to go to Rome and enlist in the Army of the Pope. No one has ever written the story of how Surratt secured those papers which identified him as John Watson, and which were stamped by the Papal Nuncio in Paris. Having arrived in Rome he resided for a time at the Venerable Eng-



MARY E. SURRATT
hanged for alleged participation in Lincoln's murder

lish College, where the Reverend Dr. Frederick Neve was then rector.

Surratt served nearly a year in the 3rd Company, 1st Pontifical Zouaves. He had hoped to find some peace in this foreign legion, to learn Italian, and to survive on the salary of 3 cents a day. But now a friend of Weichman, Henri Beaumont-St. Marie, in hope of notoriety and reward, came to Rome, called in the Zouaves, and found Surratt stationed at Velletri. He reported him to the Papal Secretary of State Cardinal Antonelli and to Rufus King, United States Minister at Rome. St. Marie was libelous when the Cardinal ordered Surratt's arrest, even without an extradition treaty.

The Zouaves knew Surratt's story, and a Dutch Zouave, Henry Ligman, has left a record of how Surratt broke away from his captors at Veroli, jumped over a cliff, and succeeded in escaping to Naples, Malta, and Alexandria, Egypt. Here he was finally arrested by United States Vice-Consul Hale, and ordered back by gun-boat under Admiral Goldsborough. St. Marie boarded the same ship, but became so obnoxious to the sailors that he was put off before the ship left the Mediterranean. Admiral Goldsborough spoke with praise about John Surratt.

In 1867, Surratt was tried for the murder of Abraham Lincoln in a Washington, D.C. civil court. Result: a hung jury. During the trial he continued to wear the uniform of the Zouaves. While in prison, he labored to translate LaMartine's "Life and Times of Christopher Columbus," from the French. Twice again he was arraigned, but the case and charges were finally dropped, and Surratt went free.

Anna Surratt married Dr. William Tony of the Surgeon-General's office. Tony was famous as a toxicologist at both Johns Hopkins University and Loyola College in Baltimore. Isaac Surratt, always a bachelor, made his home with the Tonys. He had walked from Matamoros, Mexico, to Philadelphia where he was arrested and charged with having had a purse made up by his fellow-soldiers for the purpose of assassinating President Andrew Johnson. He, too, was finally let go.

John Surratt married Mary Victorine Hunter, a cousin of Francis Scott Key. They had seven children. Surratt served as chief auditor of the Baltimore Steam Packet Company, often called the "Old Bay Line." Neighbors who used to remember the tenant on Lanvale Street recalled that John Surratt was very quiet, reserved, and never spoke of the dreadful three months during which John Wilkes Booth had been close to his family. A son, William Hunter Surratt, who became a well-known Baltimore lawyer, persuaded his father to write his memoirs. This Surratt did.

To the son's disappointment, however, the father burned all his papers only a few months before his death in 1916, aged 72. Present-day members of the Surratt family prefer not to discuss the Lincoln tragedy. Their recorded memory lies engraved in a bronze plaque in the Maryland Room of the Confederate Museum which reads:

In Memory of
Mary E. Surratt of Maryland
An innocent woman, condemned and executed by a Military Commission at the City of Washington July 9, 1865
"Unto God would I commit my cause."



JOHN E. SURRATT
in uniform of a Papal Zouave

eral Grant and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had also been marked for assassination by Booth's group. Stanton, acting head of the government, put all of Washington under "military justice." He ordered the Surratt household searched and its members arrested.

Just as Mrs. Surratt and Anna were about to leave for prison, Powell, who had been lost when Booth and Herold fled the city, turned up at Mrs. Surratt's door, saying that he had been hired by Mrs. Surratt to dig a ditch. Neither Mrs. Surratt nor Anna recognized Powell as anyone whom they had ever seen before.

Surratt sent emissaries from Canada to Washington to inquire about the progress of the case against his mother and sister. They returned with word from her lawyers, Aiken and Clappitt, and a recommendation from Reverdy Johnson: "Have no fear. Your Mother is in no danger . . . remain quiet until the excitement is over, here." Surratt took their advice and remained in seclusion until too late.

His mother went to the scaffold along with Powell, Herold, and Atzerodt, less than twenty-four hours after the sentences had been passed. A petition for Presidential clemency for Mrs. Surratt had gone unnoticed by President Johnson.

Weichman and Lloyd, to save themselves from being accused as accessories to the plan to capture, had turned State's evidence and had implied that John Surratt aided and abetted the conspiracy and Booth. They alleged that she had ordered firearms given Booth and Herold after the assassination, and that she had also provided Booth with a field-glass.

A careful study of the evidence will show that the charges were untrue. Mrs. Surratt's last words to her priest were, "Father, may I not tell them I am innocent?"

Booth was dead in Virginia 12 days after Lincoln. Some say that Boston Corbett shot him. Some insist it was Everett Conger. A marker on a grave in Sligo, Ireland, reads: "To the Brave Avenger of Abraham Lincoln."

You can continue to help Bishop Kearney in his work for immortal souls.



More churches are needed

Include the Diocese of Rochester in your will. Phone, 454-1155, or write the Chancery, 50 Chestnut St., Rochester, for details.

Who Heeds Pope On Vietnam?

"Men are becoming more and more convinced that disputes which arise between states should not be resolved by recourse to arms, but rather by negotiation," Pope John said in his 1963 encyclical "Pacem in Terris — Peace on Earth."

Pope Paul repeated the theme in his Easter Sunday sermon to "all men of good will" by stating his hope that "discords among peoples will be resolved, not with the force of arms but rather in the light of reasonable negotiations."

Now how do we make these statements of our Popes jibe with the escalating U.S. war in Vietnam—with its fire bombs, nerve gas and jet raids?

Only the naive can think that the papal pleas and recent presidential proposals coincide.

President Johnson's offer of a billion dollar offer to southeast Asia is certainly a thrust in the direction of peace — but its attached strings have made both our friends and our enemies wary of accepting it.

Although he spoke of "unconditional discussions" he built into his offer conditions those on the other side of the elusive conference table are sure to reject at the outset—no discussions with the Vietcong and accepting the fact of an independent South Vietnam which runs counter to agreements made at Geneva in 1964 that Vietnam, North and South, is one nation.

Quite obviously, we can't solve our nation's problems from the vantage point of a side street in Rochester but neither should Americans swallow everything from Washington with a wave of the flag and a big gulp.

Our President certainly expects us to be thinking citizens, not blind sheep, and thinking about Vietnam leaves a lot of questions unanswered—why so many previous "solutions" failed to solve the problem: strategic hamlets, getting rid of Ngo Dinh Diem the Catholic, promoting (and then getting rid of) Buddhist General Khanh, helicopters, more Marines, bombing North Vietnam.

All these "solutions" seem to this writer to have put far more emphasis on "force of arms" rather than on "reasonable negotiations."

But a bigger question also stays unanswered.

If both Pope John and Pope Paul, at their vantage point at the crossroads of the world in Rome, stress the urgency of negotiation, how come Catholic spokesmen in this country have so totally failed to lift a voice to echo his plea?

School Courage In Irondequoit

In one of the best local examples of ecumenical action to date, clergy of several denominations in West Irondequoit went on record favoring their public school district's decision to seek a racial and cultural balance in classrooms there.

The school officials deserve more than just clergy commendation for the imagination and courage their decision required.

They need to have their decision translated into widespread grassroots endorsement — especially when the children of different racial and cultural backgrounds arrive at the West Irondequoit schools this autumn.

Announcement of the plan triggered the expected reaction from the inevitable critics of any new idea. Such is the hazard of democracy. Such is the price of progress in freedom.

These critics fail to realize that suburbs remain part of that complex community called the metropolitan area. Suburbanites can't shut themselves off in a lily-white vacuum—even if they want to, and to want to do so is certainly the most un-Christian of attitudes, as if our Saviour never said anything about loving our neighbor.

Old walls of ignorance and bias are tumbling across the nation these days—and not in the least too soon. It is good to see a community in this area prefers to ride elsewhere than in the caboose of this movement.

—Faber Henry A. Atwell

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Pickering Hotel, Canandaigua, where John Surratt registered (it was called the Webster House then) the day after Lincoln was shot.

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