

# LINCOLN HERALD



*A Magazine of Education and Lincolniana*

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*Page*

**Features . . .** LINCOLN THE POLITICIAN . . . . . 2  
Reinhard H. Luthin

RE-DISCOVERING THE SUPPOSED GRAVE  
OF LINCOLN'S BROTHER . . . . . 12  
R. Gerald McMurtry

A GROUP OF LINCOLN ITEMS . . . . . 20  
F. Lauriston Bullard

COVERING THE BOOTH ESCAPE TRAIL . . . . . 25  
Claude E. Simmonds

**Lincoln Lives In  
The Cumberlands** IV. RALLY OF FRIENDS OF LIBERTY . . . . . 30  
Robert L. Kincaid

**In The L. M. U.  
Collection . . .** WARD H. LAMON'S WATCH . . . . . 39  
LINCOLN CATHEDRAL . . . . . 42

**In The Literary  
Field . . .** NEW BOOKS . . . . . 45  
BOOK REVIEWS . . . . . 46

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*A Magazine devoted to historical research in the field of Lincolniana and the Civil War, and to the promotion of Lincoln Ideals in American Education.*

# COVERING THE BOOTH ESCAPE TRAIL

By

CLAUDE E. SIMMONDS

"Be at the Ford's Theatre at nine-thirty Saturday A. M. if you want to go on a Lincoln jaunt," was the message I received the afternoon before. And I made the grade. A hurried night trip from Boston to Washington and I was the first one at the Theatre. There at the Theatre entrance I deposited my dime in the meter and gave my two cent tax to the attendant. Then as soon as I made myself known, the fare and tax were promptly returned. Poor Uncle Sam.

Shortly in came Bert Sheldon and he spotted me across the Exhibition Room, I know not how, but he said he had a way of knowing Lincolnians at a glance.

After Robert Lincoln O'Brien arrived, (he was to be the host of the day) and with Congressmen Chauncey W. Reed of Illinois and J. Edgar Chenoweth of Colorado, we all left by the rear door of the Theatre. This is not the same door through which Booth made his hurried exit. That old doorway was in the corner of the back wall of the Theatre and has been walled-up since those days, a window now taking its place. However, our exit, though not quite as hurried as the assassin's, was by a door just a few feet away from the old exit. After we stood for a while in the alley, discussing the location of Booth's old stable and the various old negro cabins, now gone, our "Cadillac" came up. Entering the car, we turned left out of the alley, using the same route, so far as is known, that Booth used that fateful night.

Travelling up and around the Capitol building, we made a slight detour, to take on a passenger, Rev. Monsignor Edward P. McAdams, who as a young man had known John and Anna Surratt and their famous "Boarder" Louis Weichmann, as well as other members of the families of the various Marylanders mixed up in the

conspiracy. Through this acquaintance, Father McAdams has made an intensive study of the assassination period and has many times covered the Escape Trail. This turned out to be our rare good fortune, as he made a very competent guide.

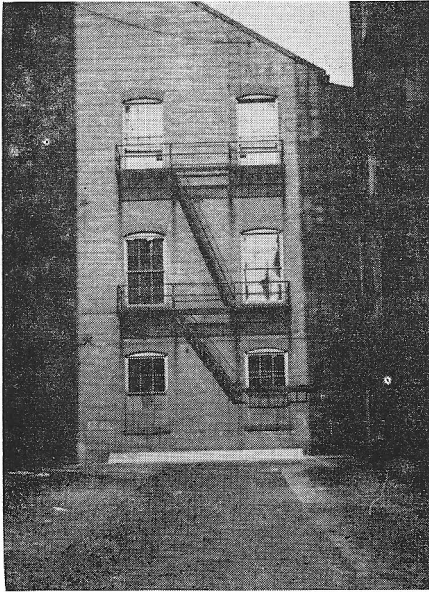
While the good Priest did not do a great deal of talking at first, what he had to say later was both impressive and instructive.

After taking on this capable guide, we returned to the route taken by Booth and soon reached the Navy Yard bridge. Only one of the old buildings that was at the approach to the bridge that night of nights still stands. Far to the right we could see the remnants of the old landing place where the *Montauk* deposited Booth's remains when they were taken back to Washington.

Reaching Uniontown on the Maryland shore, we turned left up Good Hope Hill, at the top of which Booth halted in the moonlight, to wait until Davy Herold caught up with him.

Surratsville, now renamed Clinton, is eight miles out along this road. The old village, given the new name shortly after the crime, is often called by the old name.

An elderly Mrs. Curtin now occupies the old Surratt Tavern, little changed since the old days. Mrs. Curtin welcomed us in and showed the way into her little parlor that used to be the old Tap Room. The old door through which Lloyd's patrons used to find their way in and out (if they were able) still remains in the corner of the room. Timid Mrs. Curtin has drawn her piano across the corner as a means of protection. Through this old doorway John Lloyd carried out the brandy to Booth (who did not dismount) and which the assassin gulped down in quantities to ease the pain in his foot and to deaden his mental agony.



*Rear of Ford's Theatre showing old door through which Booth fled, at lower right window.*

On the long rides between the historic stopping places, Robert Lincoln O'Brien and Father McAdams regaled us with their reminiscences. Mr. O'Brien told us much of his experiences since living in Washington and Father McAdams gave many sidelights about the conspirators and their relatives. One anecdote was about the experience a few years ago, while Stanley Kimmel's was taking Ella Mahoney (of Booth's Bel Air) in his car to vote for Ritchie for Governor of Maryland. She then requested him to drive over the Potomac and near enough to the Lincoln Memorial so "that she could spit on it." The Civil War is not over yet.

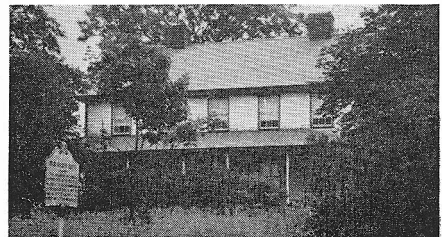
"Judge" Chenoweth, who is an honorary member of the Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia, did much questioning, while riding along, from a legal view-point, bringing out questions and answers of unusual interest.

When we reached T. B. we turned left on Bumpy Oak Road, leaving the "planned route" of Booth, as by the time he had reached this point his injury was giving him so

much pain that he needed the attention of a doctor. Here Father McAdams offered more information as to the condition of the broken bones in Booth's instep. When horse back riding at a terrific pace, the rider puts all his weight in the stirrups, whereas riding at a more leisurely gait he hugs the side of the horse with his legs, relieving the weight in the stirrup. Riding at a gallop had caused Booth such agony that he had to make a detour to visit the nearest doctor to be had in that section of the country. This caused much delay in his escape and proved to be his undoing.

From Bumpy Oak Road, Booth took a left road at the little Episcopal Church and down what is now a gravel road until he reached the home of Dr. Mudd, whom he had met in Washington a few months previous.

When we reached the driveway to Dr. Mudd's home, I got out of the car to unfasten the chain-tied gate, after which we rode up the driveway to the house, which remains the same as 80 years ago, except that a porch has been added over the front door. Another gate leading into the enclosed door-yard was well wired up and took some little patience to open the way in. The present Mrs. Mudd, wife of the grandson of the Doctor, made us welcome and took our party into the parlor and showed us the family portrait of the Doctor and the old square piano, all that is left of the original furnishings. Everything else has been sold to tide them over various periods of depression. She did not take us to the second floor room occupied by Booth and Herold, as did the wife of Dr. Mudd's



*Surratt Tavern as it appears today. Booth tablet shown in front.*

son, when I visited the place a few years ago. It was in this room that Booth shaved off his mustache and where was found the tell-tale boot a few days later.

The floor beams of the old house creaked and trembled under our tread, as if nervous to have such Lincoln students about. In view of the fact that we were all Lincolnians, Mrs. Mudd waived the usual price of admission. On reaching the dooryard again, Father McAdams took us around the corner of the house and pointed out the path taken by the fugitives to reach Zechiah Swamp, where they are supposed to have shot their horses, for fear that their neighing would divulge their hiding place. A tradition still prevails in this neighborhood, that the horses were not thus disposed of and were later put to good use in a neighborhood where there was a scarcity of them, and they were much needed for the spring planting. It is said, had the horses been shot in the swamp, the buzzards would have made their whereabouts known and the assassins would have been taken sooner. And curious as it may seem, all during the day of this interesting jaunt the buzzards were hovering overhead.

Leaving Dr. Mudd's home we retraced our route down the gravel road to a spot where stands the little St. Peters Church of one Dr. Wilmer, whom Booth had interviewed a few weeks previous, while going over the territory planning his route of escape. It is in the churchyard of this place where in an unmarked grave lies Ed Spangler, the "Crab catching fisherman of Ford's Theatre" who was taken to Dry Tortugas with Dr. Mudd, and later, when pardoned by President Johnson, was given a home by Doctor Mudd and there ended his days.

Reaching Five Points or Dogtown, a triangle is reached from which we back-tracked for a short way to Malcolm and then traveled over the road which Oswald Swann guided the fugitives to the Cox Farm.

We passed Newmarket and on to Rich Hill, set well back from the highway. At this



*Dr. Mudd's home, Bryantown, as it appears today. Piazza built since the Booth episode.*

house, the owner, Col. Cox refused the assassin admission, and engaged them in a misleading conversation in order to deceive the old Ducky, so that he would have no reason to be suspicious of the strange night visitors. Here they hid for a time in the old tobacco beds nearby. These tobacco beds, at this time of the year, were covered with cheese-cloth to protect the young plants. It was while hidden here, that Cox ordered his foster brother Thomas Jones to keep the men supplied with food and the newspapers of the day.

Rich Hill is a large and comfortable old farm house, painted white, with a wide entrance hall running from the front to the back of the house. Here in the "breeze-way" it was customary for the family to gather for their meals and rest during the heat of the day. In the large living room to the left off the hall, is a huge fire place, connected by a double chimney, to another fire place in the room at the rear. A small closet, with a tiny window, is built in between these two fireplaces, and it was in this closet that Booth was hiding, during a visit of the detectives. and according to tradition, he dared not draw his breath for fear of being heard, as the detectives were so close to his hiding place. This interesting double chimney drew us around the side of the house, when leaving, to see its construction. It shows much evidence of having been rebuilt or restored.

Rich Hill is now owned by Mrs. Neal, granddaughter of Col. Cox, and we were shown some of his old books and furnishings.

Leaving Rich Hill we traveled to Bel Alton where Booth hid until it was safe for him to try to cross the Potomac. Soon we passed the little Catholic cemetery, where lies buried Father Wiget, spiritual advisor of Mrs. Surratt, and who tradition tells, died during a furious snowstorm.

Our road now took us on to Pope's Creek and to the left we saw Huckleberry, the home of Thomas Jones, the source of supply of all the food Booth had these last days on the Maryland side of the river.

Where Pope's Creek empties into the Potomac, stands an old oyster bar, run by a negro. A short distance up the stream is the spot where Jones hid the boat to be used by the assassin. At the oyster bar, Mr. O'Brien, our host, had us stop to partake of large Potomac oysters in the half shell.

Turning left we followed River Road about three miles along the shore until the new bridge over the Potomac was reached. From the height of this bridge we were given a good view of the route that was covered by Booth on the night he made the crossing, when he was nearly discovered by the scouts from the gunboat.

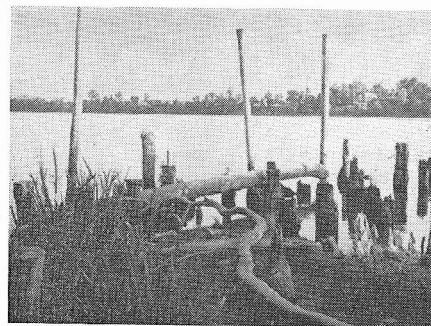
After crossing to the Virginia shore we took our way to the right, up another bumpy gravel road, which brought the wise-crack

from one of our party that this must be a "Republican" road, as it was so rough to travel over. Soon the summer home of Dr. Stewart was reached and this is where Booth met with the inhospitality that brought forth the curt note which he wrote later, that saved the Doctor from being implicated. The tradition here is that Booth arrived much intoxicated, but after some little argument, was *not* refused shelter. Mrs. G. D. Richardson the present occupant of the fine old mansion says that Booth was welcomed in. Mrs. Richardson is an ardent student of the assassination and the escape of Booth. However history has it that Booth, on being refused shelter in Stewart's home, left the well-ordered estate and turning left when reaching the main road, soon came upon the cabin of the old Darky Lucas. Brandishing his revolver, he demanded that Lucas get his sick wife out of the only bed in the cabin, then throwing aside the bed-clothes, spread his own blanket on the bed and spent the night there, threatening to shoot the elderly darkies if they did not cease their clamor. The old Lucas cabin stands in a grove of trees and underbrush not far from the road, but various members of our party did not care to stop to see the place.

Farther on up the road formerly stood the dilapidated home of Mrs. Quesenberry, who also was afraid to give the fugitives food and shelter.



*Rich Hill, home of Samuel Cox, showing double chimney with a closet in between where Booth hid while detectives were in the house.*



*Ruins of Ferry Boat landing where Booth crossed Rappahanock.*



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Travelling along Route 301 we reached Port Conway where Booth and Herold signalled across the river for the ferryman to come and take them over. This the ferryman refused to do until the tide came in. It was while they were compelled to tarry here, that they met the three Confederate soldiers, to whom Herold indiscreetly divulged their identity. After some discussion amongst themselves, the Confederates agreed to assist the fugitives. The old Rollins house on the river bank at Port Conway still stands the wear and tear of the years, while the old ferry house at Port Royal leans crazily over the water, as if anxious to hide itself in the river, which it will do ere long.

The fugitive party now five in number, on leaving the ferry at Port Royal, proceeded to the home of a Mr. Garrett where, after some bargaining with the elderly man, it was agreed that Booth could rest there awhile. From here, the restless Davy Herold, on a borrowed horse, went to Bowling Green to buy himself a much needed pair of shoes. While in the village he learned of the presence of the troop of soldiers and detectives inquiring about the fleeing pair. Rushing back to the Garrett farm, he warned Booth of their presence in the village, and shortly, when hearing the soldiers coming up the road, the two beat a hasty retreat to the woods in back of the house. This sudden move aroused the suspicion of the elder Garrett, who, on their return to the house, questioned them as to the reason of their hurried retreat. From this incident, and the suspicion it caused, came the refusal to have them in the house another night and they were compelled to spend the night in the old tobacco shed.

In the evening, when apparently all danger was past, one of the Confederate soldiers, Willie Jett, drove back to Bowling Green to see his sweetheart, the daughter of a Mrs. Goldman, who kept the hotel in the village. Persuaded to stay for the night, he was suddenly awakened from his sleep by the detectives, and dragged unceremoniously from his

bed, he was taken out of the hotel, struggling to get into his trousers. He then requested the soldiers to "arrest him" before they took him back to the Garrett farm, so it would seem that he was forced to tell where the conspirators were hiding. With Jett tied thus to his horse, this strange band of people drove to the Garrett farm, and what then happened is now history.

When our party reached Bowling Green, we drove up to an attractive roadside eating place called the Bowling Green Grille. While having refreshments here the owner told us the new building was constructed from the bricks of the old Goldman Inn, and the beautiful panelling inside the Grille was made from the original woodwork of the old hostelry. The new owner, on request, presented me with the printed menu of the day, which all of our party inscribed and this now forms an interesting reminder, in my Lincoln Room, of a very pleasant juant with a group of ardent and distinguished Lincoln students.

*Editor's Note:* Mr. Claude E. Simmonds, author of the foregoing article, is a member of the Boston Lincoln Group and has an interesting personal collection of Lincolniana. His address is The Lincoln Room, 14 Ripley Terrace, Newton Centre, 59, Massachusetts

Communication No. 2, issued by Bert S. Sheldon, secretary of the Lincoln Fellowship Group of Washington, D. C., gives an account of a similar trip over the Booth Escape Route, made by another party in July, 1945. Anyone interested may secure a copy of this mimeographed article, by writing Capt. Bert S. Sheldon, 4827 43rd Place, N. W., Washington, D. C. A log of the route in this communication is as follows:

	Miles
Lincoln Museum (speedometer reading)	0
Navy Yard Bridge	3
Clinton, Md.	14
Grimes Corner	24
Horsehead	27
Malcolm	30
Intersection near Dr. Mudd's house	33
St. Peter's Burial G.	34.3
Marker Dr. Mudd House	36
Dr. Mudd's House	40
Bryantown	49
La Plata	64
Bel Alton (Cox's)	70
Potomac River	89
Stuart Place	100
King George County CH	109
Rappahannock River	117
Garrett Farm, Virginia	121
Bowling Green	131
Lincoln Museum, D. C.	208