

The Surratt Courier

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It was wonderful to see so many of you at our annual conference on March 28-30. We had ninety-three people in attendance – our largest number to date. Eighteen states were represented, including Wisconsin, Arizona, Oregon, and California.

Our thanks to Terry Alford, Thomas Craughwell, Tamara Johnson, Fred Hatch, Michael Hurwitz, Tom Mudd, and Anthony Pitch for coming to share their insight and expertise with us. I heard numerous comments praising the presentations of these speakers. The fact that there is something to be learned at each conference is a testament to the large amount of information that is out there on the subject.

Many of us remarked on how encouraging it was to see so many young people. Several college and graduate students, as well as a middle school student, Jon Robert Pancoast, attended. It's reassuring to know that the subject we enjoy so much is appreciated by young people and that our history will be handed down to future generations.

Wouldn't it be great to have more than one hundred people next year to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the annual conference? We've scheduled the 2009 conference for March 27-29, so mark your calendars now and plan to attend. I hope to see you then.

MARY KAUFFMAN, President

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Surratt House is open for guided tours on Thursdays and Fridays from 11 am to 3 pm and on Saturdays and Sundays from 12 noon to 4 pm, with the last tours beginning one-half hour before closing. Members receive free admission by showing their current membership cards.

May 3-4 – **Annual Spring Open House** at the museum with free tours offered from 12 noon to 4 pm each day.

May 6-8 – **Exploring Upstate New York**, a bus trip sponsored by the museum. Call 301-868-1121 for details.

May 31 – **Life of Leisure: Victorians at Play**, noon to 4 pm. Come join in an afternoon of fun and games from yesteryear on the grounds of Surratt House. No reservations required.

June 22 – **Senior Sunday**, noon to 4 pm. Are you a recent graduate from high school or college or a card-carrying senior citizen? Bring proof of either status and receive a free tour at the museum.

August 2 – **Life of Leisure: Let the Music Begin**, 4-5 pm. Come enjoy the tunes of the 1800s that will get your toes a'tapping. Free. No reservation required.

This newsletter is a monthly publication of The Surratt Society, a non-profit volunteer affiliate of Surratt House Museum a historic property of The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission., 9118 Brandywine Road, PO Box 427, Clinton, Maryland 20735. 301-868-1121, Visit surratt.org. Annual membership is \$7 per person.

A special thank-you is due the executive committee of the Surratt Society for the extra work that they put into our annual conferences. Not only do they seek out speakers and negotiate with the hotel. They stuff conference folders, accompany the bus tours held in conjunction with the event, host the opening reception, arrive at the conference at 7 am and depart about 10 pm.

Conference duties are on top of their monthly meetings and their regular work as active volunteers at the museum. They always have new ideas and work exceptionally well together. They do this for no personal gain – just the love of Surratt House Museum.

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

William Nash – Sterling Heights, Illinois
 Jacqueline White – Chesapeake Beach,
 Maryland

Rockford Toews – Annapolis, Maryland
 Rev. Dave Sedgley – Pittsboro, Indiana
 Ralph Baker – St. Petersburg, Florida
 Bill Goldstein – Fredericksburg, Virginia
 George Cawthon – Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
 Donald J. Smith – Whitehall, Ohio

We are deeply saddened to learn of the recent death of Life Member Helen Surratt Heisler of Baltimore, a direct descendant of Mary Surratt.

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WELCOME A NEW EMPLOYEE

After thirty-two years of being open to the public with tours offered entirely by volunteers, we have found it necessary to hire our first, salaried tour guide. We are pleased to welcome Ms. Julie Snyder, who will be working each Thursday and Friday and weekends as needed to supplement our program.

For the past several years, many of our volunteers have worked by themselves. On heavy tour days, they were getting no break – working one tour after the other for four hours or more. Hopefully, this will help us better serve the public as well as spare our guides.

Julie will also be working with our education coordinator to supplement our student tours and programs. She especially has experience in dealing with children with special needs, which comprise a portion of our regular school tours.

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NEW BOOKS WILL SOON BE AVAILABLE

We are eagerly awaiting the release of two new books on the subject of Mary E. Surratt. The first is due out in mid-May and is authored by our own member, Dr. Kenneth J. Zanca of Marymount College in California. Entitled *The Catholics and Mrs. Surratt*, it explores not only the Catholic background and feelings of Mrs. Surratt, but the role that Catholics of the day played in politics, and ultimately, the reaction of the church to the execution of Mrs. Surratt. We are hoping to convince Dr. Zanca to be a speaker at the 2009 conference.

The second book is set for release this summer. *The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln* has been written by Kate Clifford Larsen. Advanced publicity says that it is "based on long-lost interviews, confessions, and court testimony...reveals Mary's deep complicity in the murder plot. It explores how Mary's actions defied 19th-century norms of femininity, piety, and motherhood, leaving her vulnerable to deadly punishment historically reserved for men." Ms. Larson has already accepted our invitation to be a speaker at the 2009 conference.

Both of these books should make for some lively debates and Q&A periods at the conference...

When last we left you... In the April issue of this newsletter, museum guide Rick Smith wrote of his futile attempt to find "Lock Eleven Farm" that Richard Mitchell Smoot had written of in his memoirs regarding his role in the planned escape of John Wilkes Booth's gang with the kidnapped President Lincoln in March of 1865. Member John F. Stanton of King George, Virginia, however, did not let the subject drop. He writes:

Since I live within a reasonable traveling distance from the area where the farm was said to be located, I felt it to be an obligation to find the "Lock Eleven Farm," and to clear up the mystery. It resulted in a pleasant challenge. I drove to LaPlata, Maryland, seat of the government of Charles County and headed for the Land Records Office.

I didn't know the farm owner's name, so to get started I used Peregrine Davis [who owned "Indiantown" in the same general area in 1865], to no avail. The "General Index to Deeds" is arranged alphabetically by the owner's name. I tried the Tax Records – I still needed a name. I looked at more records trying to find a listing of properties that included the farm name. Next, would "Grantee Index" help? VOILA! In 1881, Barnes Compton and Adele Ferguson each bought one-half of the 669-acre "Loch Leven" farm. (Note that? "Loch Leven." Once again, phonetic spelling in old papers had us on the wrong track.) The farm had been acquired by John Neale in 1857. There was also a reference in this item to a Plat Book and to an "Equity" case.

The Plat Book provided a good representation of the shape of the farm and how it straddled the "road from Blossom Point to Port Tobacco." It showed where the house was located. The road is now known as the Cedar Point Neck Road. There is no mention of King's Creek.

I then looked at the Equity Case. Here they provided the metes and bounds of the farm and a few landmarks, but the landmarks are of no help at all. Those old-time surveyors marked corners with vague references to "the small White Oak tree on the hillside" from which "the line runs to a stone beside the road." Needless to say, these monuments are no longer extant.

The measurements are antiquated and barely manageable, due to the use of "perches" and "links." A "perch" was a pole of given length, 16 ½ feet, and the surveyor flopped it end over end along the ground, counting the flops. A "link" was one link of a surveyor's chain – 1/100 of a 60-foot chain or 7.92 inches (20.1 cm). This mess does not prevent us from finding the location and orientation of the farm. The most reliable method that I found was to draw the farm on a scrap of paper to the same scale as the U.S. Department of the Interior – Geological Survey, King George Quadrangle, VA – MD, 7.5 minute series. Then with a few known monuments, such as roads or streams, etc., you can position a cut out of the farm fairly accurately, on the Quadrangle. I have not done this, as yet, as I don't see a need for that much work, unless there is someone who really needs to know the location, with such a degree of accuracy. After all, the farm was not called into use by the kidnap party. If you do need to know, e-mail me at spycamp@crosslink.net or contact the Surratt Society, and I'll get going on the sketch.

[NOTE: The name of "John Neale" as the owner of Loch Leven as of 1857 is intriguing since that name appears in Surratt genealogy. John Harrison Surratt, Sr., husband of Mary Surratt, was raised as a foster child by a Neale family. When his son, John, Jr., was working with Booth on the kidnap plan, we wonder if he solicited the help of a relative.]

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MORE ON THE FATE OF THE HORSES

The April issue of this newsletter also carried an interesting article regarding the fate of Booth's and Herold's horses. Were they shot in Zekiah Swamp, their throats cut in the Potomac River, or did they undergo the technique of "horse faking" and live out their lives in Charles County, Maryland?

Illinois member Richard Petersen e-mailed us that April's article was a direct contradiction to what was said in the 1989 Sept/Oct/Nov issue of the *Courier*. "In the article, 'The Pursuit and Death of John Wilkes Booth' by Col. Prentiss Ingraham he quotes M.B. Ruggles as saying, 'It is generally believed that Herold shot his own and Booth's horse; but Booth **told me** that after weighting them down they led them into the Potomac the night they embarked in the boat to cross, and drawing their heads over the gunwale cut their throats and saw them sink from sight. This would account for the fact that their bodies were never found.'

"The April issue is a direct contradiction. Do you believe that Major Ruggles's testimony was another exaggeration given by J.W.B.?"

We passed Mr. Petersen's e-mail along to the author of the April article on horse faking, Rick Smith, and here's his reply:

My thanks to Surratt Society member Mr. Richard Petersen for his interest in and his response to the "Horse Faking" article I wrote that appeared in the April 2008 issue of the Surratt Courier. His question regarding the fate of the horses ridden by Booth and Herold during their flight is most valid and may be one that many readers have in mind; at least I hope that others besides Mr. Petersen and I have it in mind.

There are three accounts that I know of (and there may be more) concerning the fate of the horses ridden by Booth and Herold. It is also worth noting that all of the accounts contradict each other. When reviewing the differing accounts, the reader should consider each with the following in mind:

- Who is the person(s) relating the narrative?
- What does the narrator hope to gain or avoid by the relating of his narrative?

Here are the three accounts regarding the horses ridden by Booth and Herold for your consideration. Which do you favor?

1. Colonel Prentiss Ingraham/Mortimer B. Ruggles Account:

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham was born near Natchez, Mississippi, in 1843. A very colorful character, he served in the 1st Mississippi Light Artillery Regiment during the War, and afterwards became a soldier of fortune. He subsequently served as publicity agent for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and became one of the most prolific and popular dime novelists of the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

Mortimer Ruggles was one of three Confederate soldiers who met Booth and Herold on the north side of the Rappahannock River, assisted them in their crossing, and then guided the fugitives to shelter at the Garrett Farm.

In January of 1890, *The Century Magazine* ran an article written by Colonel Ingraham in which he cites Mortimer Ruggles, whom he refers to as a particular friend, as saying that, "It is generally believed that Herold shot his own and Booth's horses; but Booth told me that after weighting them down they led them into the Potomac the night they embarked in the boat to cross, and drawing their heads over the gunwale cut their throats and saw them sink from sight. This would account for the fact that their bodies were never found."

2. Thomas A. Jones's Account:

In his book, *J. Wilkes Booth*, Thomas A. Jones, chief Confederate signal officer on the Maryland shore of the Potomac, relates that due to the danger they posed in giving away their place of hiding, he insisted that Booth's and Herold's horses be destroyed. Here is the account in his own words: "I mentioned to Booth that I had seen a horse grazing near by, and he said it belonged to him. I told him and Herold that they would have to get rid of their horses or they would certainly betray them; besides it would be impossible to feed them." Jones continues: "I may as well insert here the sequel to my advice concerning Booth's and Herold's horses. During my week's attendance on the two men I never once saw Herold's horse, and saw Booth's only on the one occasion already referred to. I had no hand in the disposition of them; and do not remember, if I ever knew, the exact day that Herold removed them." Jones concludes his narrative: "After the fugitives crossed the river, and just before I was arrested, Cox told me that he stood on the hill near his house and saw Herold taking the two horses down toward Zachia [sic] Swamp and heard two reports of the pistol that killed them."

3. James Owens's Account:

James Owens was a young man in the employ of Austin Adams at Newport, Maryland, which is two miles east of Allen's Fresh and six miles east of Pope's Creek. In a statement given to Colonel Henry Wells, Provost Marshal for the Military District of Washington, in Bryantown on April 28, 1865, Owens reported that on a Thursday night (which would make the date of the event he relates on or about April 21) "...it was pretty late, nearly supper time, when two men came there (Newport) on horseback, accompanied by a white boy, they got off their horses, and the boy took them and went away." Owens goes on to describe in detail not only the men, one of whom had an injured leg and carried a crutch, but the horses on which they rode. "One of the horses was a roan, or iron gray, and the other was a light bay with a small star on the forehead." He also relates that the two men, "...stayed in the pines near the house until next evening which was Friday night and were at the house off and on at different times; they did not lodge at Mr. Adams's, but only got meals there."

After a stay of twenty-four hours or so, Owens says the two unnamed men, "...left in the evening after dark, and went towards Pope's Creek where Thomas Jones lives."

Although he has much more to say about the two men and several others that he refers to by name in his statement, this is James Owens's final reference to the horses, "Their horses came back this way in charge of the boy, if I were to try to find them, I would inquire of the people there who saw them, Mr. A(?)bey or Oliver who keeps a store there."

WHY DID EVERTON CONGER BURN DOWN RICHARD GARRETT'S TOBACCO BARN?

by Rob Wick

Of all the stories regarding Everton J. Conger and his successful capture of John Wilkes Booth, one that has always intrigued me is why did Conger decide it was time to fire Richard Garrett's tobacco barn after hours of making what seemed empty threats to do so?

From Conger's own testimony, all we get is that after David Herold's surrender, he decided that Booth wasn't going to come out and hence decided it was time to fire the barn. Conger took this action on his own, without discussing it with his partner, Luther Byron Baker, or with Edward P. Doherty, commander of the detachment of the 16th New York Cavalry.

Most historians have accepted Conger's words at face value, but I think there's much more to this than Conger was willing to admit, especially later in life. It has to do with the two war wounds that Conger suffered.

The first came on October 23, 1862, on a reconnaissance mission Conger spearheaded when he rode as captain of Company A, 3rd West Virginia Cavalry. Near Bristoe Station, Virginia, Conger's group of forty men came under attack by a larger Confederate force of 125 horse soldiers. Conger's little group routed their opponents, but not before Conger was shot off his horse with a hip wound. Lying on the ground, Conger was struck in the wrist by a rebel soldier's sword. His men, who were in a hurry to get out of there, decided their commander was dead and left him. But he wasn't. Conger spent the frigid October night lying on the ground. How he didn't bleed to death is hard to fathom.

He was discovered to be alive the next day and taken to a local doctor's home, where he was treated. His whereabouts were discovered by Captain Ulric Dahlgren and eventually Conger was paroled as a POW back to his command. However, he wasn't ready to return to the field until nearly a year later. With little chance of promotion, Conger asked for and was given the Major's slot in the First District of Columbia Cavalry.

In 1864, while riding with the 1st D.C., Conger, who by now was Lieutenant Colonel and had de facto command of the regiment, again was wounded on the Wilson-Kautz Raid. As fate would have it, he was again shot in the hips (while his men were dismounted, Conger had to ride his horse because he couldn't walk very quickly. How it was determined that he was fit for duty is beyond me). This time he was left behind when General James H. Wilson was forced to retreat after the Battle of Ream's Station, but he later was brought to headquarters where again he was hospitalized. This time, however, he was declared unfit for military service and given a discharge.

The colonel of the 1st D.C. was the notorious Lafayette Baker, who was also the head of what he called the "National Detective Police," which was an arm of the War Department. In what I believe to be an attempt to keep Conger from becoming destitute, Baker gave him a job as a detective. It was in this role that Conger became involved in the manhunt for Booth.

For the remainder of his life, Conger suffered from these wounds immensely. In fact, he once said that he was never able to sleep lying down, instead having to get rest in a seated position in a chair. Why Conger was allowed on the manhunt is another question I will have to answer in my biography. Walking was a major ordeal for Conger, who lived his life addicted to both morphine and alcohol in an attempt to mask the pain he constantly felt.

My theory as to why Conger decided it was time to burn the barn is that he simply could not physically take it anymore. He took it on his own initiative to set the barn ablaze because his

war wounds were aggravating him to the point of intense physical pain. Conger never mentioned this, however, because he knew it would add to the controversy of him receiving the largest chunk of the reward money issued by the government for Booth's capture. Indeed, during the trial of John Surratt, Conger testified that he was "a little lame" when he went into the field. Saying that Conger was "a little lame" is like saying the war was "a little bloody." When Luther Byron Baker, who received much less of the reward money than he felt was due him, began to lecture on his role in capturing Booth, he painted Conger as an invalid who had no business being there, and was only there because Conger begged Baker to let him ride, which simply put, is nonsense. But Conger was sensitive to this attack, so he never mentioned it for the remainder of his life.

THE "LOST" HAS BEEN FOUND

Nearly since opening day on May 1, 1976, we have heard persistent rumors of the 1865 police blotter of the Metropolitan Police Department that was thrown away in the 1960s or 70s. It seems that it was retrieved from the trash bin and circulated among retired police officers for decades until a former police chief recently convinced the then-owner to donate it to the police department. It is now secured in the department's museum on the sixth floor of police headquarters.

It appears to have been written between the time of the assassination -- around 10:30 pm on April 14, 1865 -- and the first arrest of the next day. It is written in flowery prose and reads nothing like what one would imagine amid the chaos that must have been swirling around the precinct station then at E and Fifth Streets SE. The department's historian, Sgt. Nick Breul, quickly responded to our director's call for a transcript, and it now resides in the James O. Hall Research Center. Here is the transcript:

Between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock at night a telegram was received at the 8th precinct station from headquarters that Abraham Lincoln president of the US had been shot while sitting in a private box at Ford's new theatre on tenth street west between E+F streets north. Also that the Honorable William H. Seward secretary of State had been stabbed and seriously injured in the neck and his son F.W. Seward Assistant Secretary of State and Major A. Seward U.S.A. had been fatally injured. The assassin or assassins are at this time unknown. At a later hour it became currently reported that J.W. Booth was the person who shot the president. The excitement was great throughout the Precinct but the people were orderly and decent. The whole force was immediately put on duty by order of Supt. Richards and were vigilant in the discharge of their duty. The sad intelligence was received by them with feelings of deep regret and an [difficult to read] was manifest to avenge the death of their beloved chief magistrate. The gloom that overshadows the nation by the sad occurrence deeply affects the whole force and brings forth many heartfelt sympathies for the nation's loss.