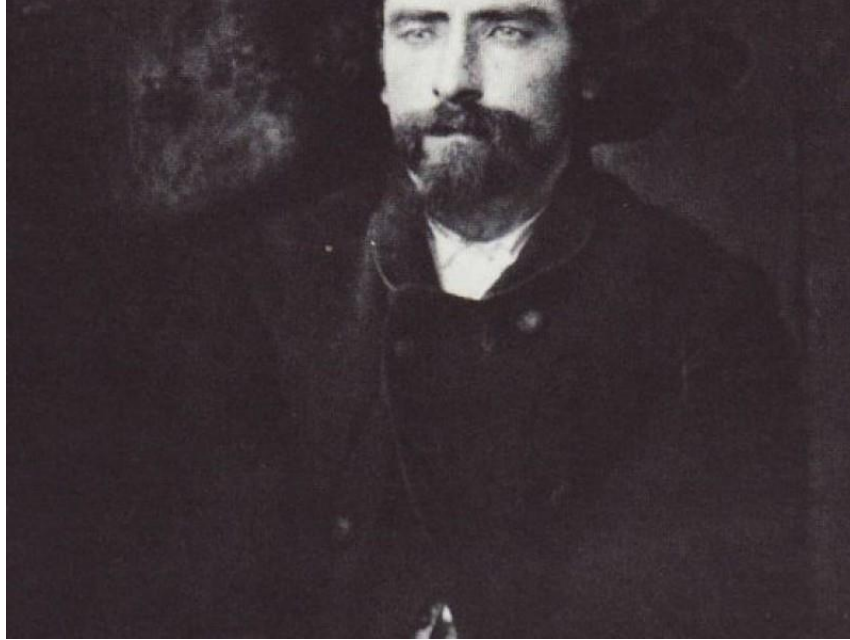


# The Lincoln Assassination Connection

Germantown's link to the assassination of President Lincoln  
Germantown, MD

By SUSAN SODERBERG April 23, 2011





Many of you who have seen the recent movie *The Conspirator* will know that George Andrew Atzerodt (alias Andrew Atwood), was one of the Lincoln assassination conspirators executed on July 7, 1865. Atzerodt was arrested in Germantown, the town where he had spent many years as a boy. How he got involved with the Booth gang and why he ended up back in Germantown is a compelling story.

This story begins in 1844 when Atzerodt, age 9, arrives in Germantown with his family, immigrants from Prussia. His father, Henry Atzerodt, purchased land with his brother-in-law, Johann Richter, and together they built a house on Schaeffer Road. In the mid-1850s, Henry sold his interest in the farm and moved to Westmoreland County, Va., where he operated a blacksmith shop until his untimely death around 1858. At this time Atzerodt and his brother John opened a carriage painting business in Port Tobacco, Md.

After the Civil War broke out the carriage painting business was not doing well, so John went up to Baltimore and got employment as a detective with the State Provost Marshal's office. Atzerodt stayed on at Port Tobacco, but his main business was not painting carriages, it was blockade running and smuggling across the Potomac River.

It was on one of these clandestine trips that he met John Surratt, son of Mary Surratt, who was acting as a courier for Confederate mail. In November 1864 Surratt convinced

Atzerodt to join the group, led by John Wilkes Booth, planning to capture President Lincoln, take him to the South and hold him for ransom. Since they planned to take their hostage through Southern Maryland and across the Potomac River, Atzerodt's knowledge of the land and the river was indispensable.

Surratt took him to Washington where he met John Wilkes Booth and other conspirators. One plan to kidnap Lincoln on his way to the Veterans Hospital on March 17, 1865 failed when the President changed his plans at the last moment. The surrender of General Lee, however, had convinced Booth that more drastic measures were needed. The plan he presented was to immobilize the federal government by removing the top three heads. Booth would assassinate Lincoln, Lewis Powell would take care of the Secretary of State William Seward, and Atzerodt's assignment was to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson.

Atzerodt's courage evaporated when the time came, however, and he spent the evening drinking and wandering around Washington. In his confession he would claim that he never intended to kill the vice president and that he threw away the knife and pawned the gun that were given to him. Yet he did accept the knife and gun, and he did not turn in the other conspirators when he knew that the plan had changed from kidnapping to murder. These two things were what convinced the Military Commission that he should be executed.

After he heard that Booth had actually carried out his part in the plot, Atzerodt decided that he should leave Washington as soon as possible, and not in the direction of his home in Port Tobacco since that is where he knew Booth had gone. He would go to a place where he had friends and family, where they would welcome him without questions – his old home in Germantown. The following morning he managed to get through the blockade around Washington by buying the guards a few drinks. Then, catching a ride with William Gaither, he made his way to Gaithersburg and, after stopping for a drink at Mullican's tavern, he proceeded on foot toward Germantown on the Barnesville Road (now Clopper Road). It was very late when he crossed the wooden bridge over Seneca Creek and saw a light in the Clopper Mill. He asked the miller,

Robert Kinder, if he could stay the night, and Kinder, who knew Atzerodt from his previous visits to the area, showed him hospitality (for which he would later receive six weeks in jail).

In the morning Atzerodt started on his way to his cousin, Hartman Richter's house just two miles away. He was very hungry, though, and, it being Easter Sunday, he decided to stop at the Metz home which was on his way. The family invited him to stay for dinner. The Leaman brothers, Somerset and James, were also visiting the Metz family. Of course, the assassination was the topic of conversation of the day, and Atzerodt must have let a few things slip to arouse the suspicion of the Leaman brothers who later testified against him. A neighbor, Nathan Page, was also at the Metz's that day.

After dinner Atzerodt cut across the field to drop in on his cousin Hartman Richter, son of Johann. Knowing nothing of Atzerodt's part in the assassination conspiracy, the Richters took him in and gave him a job on the farm. For the next three days Atzerodt did odd jobs at the Richter farm. On April 19, Atzerodt was sound asleep in an upstairs bedroom of the house. He was awakened at 5 a.m. by soldiers, one of whom was pointing a revolver at his head. He was quickly arrested and taken to Washington.

The soldiers, stationed in Clarksburg, had been alerted of a "suspicious character just up from Washington" by a tip from one of their local informants, James Purdom. Purdom had run into Nathan Page earlier and Page had told him about Atzerodt and what he had said at the Metz home. Purdom and Page would end up splitting the \$25,000 reward for the capture of Atzerodt. Atzerodt was a goner anyway. A few hours after Atzerodt was arrested another group of soldiers arrived at the Richter home looking for him. This second posse had been sent by the Provost Marshal after receiving information from Atzerodt's brother, John.

Hartman Richter, the Leaman brothers, as well as the old miller, were also arrested and imprisoned on a ship in Washington until the trial, after which they were released. Atzerodt was tried and convicted by a military court. He was hanged in the yard of the Arsenal in Washington along with Lewis Powell, David Herold and Mary Surratt.

The ruins of the Clopper Mill can be seen on the west side of Clopper Road just to the north of Seneca Creek opposite Waring Station Road. The home of Hartman Richter on Schaeffer Road in Germantown accidentally burned down in 1982.

Much of the information on Atzerodt's arrest came from the book, "Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," by Edward Steers.

<http://patch.com/maryland/germantown/the-lincoln-assassination-connection>

## **George Adzerodt Captured in Germantown on April 19, 1865**

### Germantown's Connection to the Lincoln Assassination

Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on the night of April 14, 1865. George Adzerodt, was one of the Lincoln Assassination conspirators hanged for their crimes on July 7, 1865. Adzerodt had been arrested in Germantown, Maryland, the town where he had spent many years as a boy.

This story begins in 1844 when George, age nine, arrives in Germantown with his family, immigrants from Prussia. They were related to the Richters with whom George's father bought a farm in Germantown and helped build a house on Schaeffer Road. Sometime in the 1850s the Adzerodts moved to Westmoreland County, Virginia where George's father operated a blacksmith shop until his untimely death around 1858. At this time George and his brother John opened a carriage painting business in Port Tobacco, Maryland.

After the Civil War broke out the carriage painting business was not doing well so John went up to Baltimore and got employment as a detective with the State Provost Marshal's office. George stayed on at Port Tobacco but his main business was not painting carriages, it was blockade running -- rowing goods, spies and agents across the Potomac River.

It was while engaged in this secretive business that he met John Surratt, son of Mary Surratt, who took him to Washington where he met John Wilkes Booth and other conspirators. According to his testimony at the trial George thought that the plan was to kidnap the President and hold him for ransom, the plot they had talked about many times before. The surrender of General Lee, however, had convinced Booth that more drastic measures were needed. Adzerodt's assignment was to kill Vice-president Johnson at his hotel room in the Willard Hotel in Washington at the same time as Booth shot Lincoln, and Lewis Paine killed Secretary of State William Seward.

Adzerodt's courage evaporated when the time came, however, and he spent the evening drinking and wandering around Washington. In the morning he managed to get through the blockade around Washington by buying the guards a drink. Then, catching a ride with William Gaither, he made his way to Gaithersburg arriving around dusk. After being let off by Gaither, Adzerodt stopped for a drink at Mullican's tavern (at the northeast corner of Rt. 355 and old Redland Rd.).

Adzerodt then proceeded on foot toward Germantown on the Barnesville Road (now Clopper Road). It was very late when he crossed over the wooden bridge over

Seneca Creek and saw a light in the Clopper Mill. He asked the miller, Robert Kinder, if he could stay the night, and Kinder, who knew George from his previous visits to the area, showed him hospitality. In the morning George started on his way to his cousin's, Hartman Richter's house just two miles away. He was very hungry, though, and, it being Easter Sunday, he decided to stop at the Metz home which was on his way. The Metz farm was a popular place for socializing since there was a lovely eligible young lady in the family. The Leaman brothers, Somerset and James, were also visiting the Metz family. The assassination, of course, was the topic of conversation, and George must have let a few things slip to arouse the suspicion of the Leaman brothers who later testified against him. Also, a neighbor, Nathan Page, a Union spy, may have been at the Metz's that day. After enjoying Sunday dinner with the Metz's, George cut across the field to drop in on his cousin. Knowing nothing of George's part in the assassination conspiracy, the Richters welcomed him and gave him a job on the farm.

For the next three days George did odd jobs at the Richter farm. On April 19th he was sound asleep in an upstairs bedroom of the house when he was rudely awakened at 5 a.m. by soldiers, one of whom was pointing a revolver at his head. He was quickly arrested and taken to Washington.

The soldiers had been alerted by a tip from Nathan Page. George was a goner anyway, though, for just a few hours after he was arrested another group of soldiers arrived at the Richter home looking for him, this second posse had been sent by the Provost Marshal after receiving information from George's brother, John.

Hartman Richter, the Leaman brothers, as well as the old miller, were also arrested and imprisoned on a prison ship in Washington until the trial, after which they were released. George Adzerodt was hanged in the yard of the Arsenal in Washington along with Lewis Paine (who had not succeeded in killing Mr. Seward), David Herold and Mary Surratt.

The ruins of the Clopper Mill can be seen on the west side of Clopper Road just to the north of Seneca Creek. The home of Hartman Richter on Schaeffer Road burned down in 1982. The Metz house was torn down for development.

<http://www.germantownmdhistory.org/node/12>

## Lincoln assassination has connections to Germantown

June 20, 2001

**Peg Coleman**

*Special to The Gazette*

---

George Andrew Atzerodt was a long way from his childhood home of Germantown in 1865. Maneuvering the Union blockade out of Port Tobacco, he made a good living rowing agents for both sides across the Potomac. A frequent customer was a man named John Surratt. At the Surrattsville boarding house run by John's mother, Surratt introduced Atzerodt to John Wilkes Booth, Lewis Powell Paine and Davy Herold.

Soon a dreadful conspiracy was conceived: On April 14, 1865 at 10:15 p.m., Booth was to assassinate President Lincoln, Paine and Herold would kill Secretary of State W.H. Seward and George Atzerodt would murder Vice President Andrew Johnson. John Surratt went to Canada.

And so it was that George Atzerodt found himself walking along Pennsylvania Avenue with a knife in his pocket, looking for the Kirkwood Hotel. It was close to 10 p.m. and Atzerodt was right on time.

Finding Johnson's room was no problem for the well-dressed young man and he booked the room next to the vice president. Atzerodt stood in the hallway, separated from his assigned victim by one wall.

But then he hesitated. He needed a drink. Stepping into the bar, Atzerodt ordered a whiskey. It had all sounded so easy, so right somehow in the tension-filled Surrattsville boarding house, listening to Booth. But here in the hotel bar of the war-weary city, surrounded by other men relaxing with a Friday night drink, George Atzerodt found his hatred slipping away.

Vice President Johnson slept on and Atzerodt left the Kirkwood Hotel.

But Booth achieved his mission. Word of the attack spread rapidly and a crowd gathered where the president lay dying. Atzerodt joined the throng. He followed the crowd, later checking into his regular hotel, the Pennsylvania House, about 2 a.m.

The next morning, Washington was ripe with rumors of conspiracy and Atzerodt decided to flee. He caught a ride with his acquaintance William Gaither who was returning home from market with his empty wagon. Chatting amiably, the two rode past the sentries who were searching all travelers on the roads out of town. They ambled north on Rockville Pike. At the entrance to Gaither's farm, Atzerodt jumped out and headed west across the county on foot. About 11 p.m. he reached Clopper's Mill and the miller, Robert Kinder, agreed to let him spend the night.

The next day was Easter Sunday. Quiet, soft-spoken Atzerodt strode along Clopper Road and turned left between two large trees, taller now and still standing across from the Gazebo Garden Spot and Nursery. Strolling the long lane, past the small house of Nathan Page, his thoughts may have been for Elizabeth Metz who was more than just a casual friend. Hezekiah Metz welcomed him to Easter dinner.



There were two other guests, Somerset and James Leaman, sons of Joseph Leaman who lived in the home purchased later by Andrew Baker, founder of the Germantown Bank, later still converted to The Marylander nursing home, and finally razed to make way for townhouses on Liberty Mill Lane. Page dropped in, too.

According to rumors passed through several generations, Atzerodt surprised his old friends with his knowledge of the hot news item of the day, tickling their curiosity. In mid-afternoon he left the Metz home and set out for the nearby farm of his cousin, Hartman Richter, where he had lived as a youth. For three days he worked on Richter's farm, feeding his hogs and milking his cows.

Long before the FBI or CIA, there was The Pinkerton Detective Agency. One of the Pinkerton detectives lived in a large, Victorian house on Clarksburg Road near Black Hill Road. Page gave him a tip and he blew the whistle.

At 5 a.m. on Thursday, April 20, the Richter home was surrounded by troops of Union soldiers. First to arrive was the First Delaware Cavalry out of D.C., followed by another set of troops stationed in Frederick. They broke into the house and asked for George Atzerodt. No one here by that name, they were told. Richter would pay for that mistake. Swarming through the house, they found Atzerodt in an upstairs bedroom and took him and Hartman Richter to a prison ship anchored in the Potomac.

Kinder was arrested too, and spent several weeks in the Old Capitol Prison. Richter was released, but he developed illness in the damp, dark ship cell and never regained his health.

On July 7, the conspirators were hung: Atzerodt, Paine and Herold alongside Mary Surratt. All are buried at Fort McNair. As a sad touch of irony, neither the sole murderer, Booth, nor his major conspirator, John Surratt, stood for trial.

Years went by. Surrattsville changed its name to Clinton. Herbert and Eleanor King bought the Richter farm. One fine day in the very room where Atzerodt was arrested a daughter was born to them. The child, Jean King Phillips, queen of Germantown history, runs the popular Phillips Farm on the hillside overlooking the Leaman farm.

Today, three Germantown roads bear the names of Richter, Leaman and Metz, touching back in time to the day President Lincoln died.

[http://www.gazette.net/gazette\\_archive/2001/200125/germantown/news/59611-1.html](http://www.gazette.net/gazette_archive/2001/200125/germantown/news/59611-1.html)