

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln ^[1]

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On the evening of April 14, 1865, while attending a special performance of the comedy, "Our American Cousin," President Abraham Lincoln was shot. Accompanying him at Ford's Theater that night were his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, a twenty-eight year-old officer named Major Henry R. Rathbone, and Rathbone's fiancée, Clara Harris. After the play was in progress, a figure with a drawn derringer pistol stepped into the presidential box, aimed, and fired. The president slumped forward.

The assassin, John Wilkes Booth, dropped the pistol and waved a dagger. Rathbone lunged at him, and though slashed in the arm, forced the killer to the railing. Booth leapt from the balcony and caught the spur of his left boot on a flag draped over the rail, and shattered a bone in his leg on landing. Though injured, he rushed out the back door, and disappeared into the night on horseback.

A doctor in the audience immediately went upstairs to the box. The bullet had entered through Lincoln's left ear and lodged behind his right eye. He was paralyzed and barely breathing. He was carried across Tenth Street, to a boarding-house opposite the theater, but the doctors' best efforts failed. Nine hours later, at 7:22 AM on April 15th, Lincoln died.

At almost the same moment Booth fired the fatal shot, his accomplice, Lewis Paine, attacked Lincoln's Secretary of State, William Henry Seward. Seward lay in bed, recovering from a carriage accident. Paine entered the mansion, claiming to have a delivery of medicine from the Secretary's doctor. Seward's son, Frederick, was brutally beaten while trying to keep Paine from his father's door. Paine slashed the Secretary's throat twice, then fought his way past Seward's son Augustus, an attending hospital corps veteran, and a State Department messenger.

Paine escaped into the night, believing his deed complete. However, a metal surgical collar saved Seward from certain death. The Secretary lived another seven years, during which he retained his seat with the Johnson administration and purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867.

There were at least four conspirators in addition to Booth involved in the mayhem. Booth was shot and captured while hiding in a barn near Bowling Green, Virginia, and died later the same day, April 26, 1865. Four co-conspirators, Paine, George Atzerodt, David Herold, and Mary Surratt, were hanged at the gallows of the Old Penitentiary, on the site of present-day Fort McNair, on July 7, 1865.

Source Citation:

"Assassination of President Abraham Lincoln." From Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Digital Collections. Accessed July 09, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/articles-and-essa...> ^[2].

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COURIER--EXTRA.

National Calamity!

Lincoln & Seward Assassinated!!

WASHINGTON, April 15, 1865.

President Lincoln was shot through the head last night, and died this morning.— The Assassin is supposed to be Wilkes Booth the Actor. About the same time a desperado called at Secretary Seward's, pretending to be a messenger from his physician. Being refused admittance, he attacked Frederick Seward, son of the Secretary, knocking down the male attendant, he cut Mr. Seward's throat, the wound was not at first considered fatal. Letters found in Booth's trunk shows that this assassination was contemplated before the fourth of March but fell through from some cause, or other. The wildest excitement prevails at Washington. Vice President's and residences of the different Secretaries are closely guarded.

LATER—Seward died this A. M. 9:45. E. M. STANTON, Sec'y of War.

This sad intelligence falls like a dark pall on the hearts of the people so joyous and hopeful, yesterday, so terribly overwhelmed to-day. What rebels in Richmond dare not do, their accomplices and sympathizers have accomplished in our own capitol.

NOTICE.

All who abhor assassination, deplore murder, and detest the "deep damnation" of the taking off of our Chief Magistrate and Secretary of State, and who sincerely grieve for the great and good men gone are called on to meet

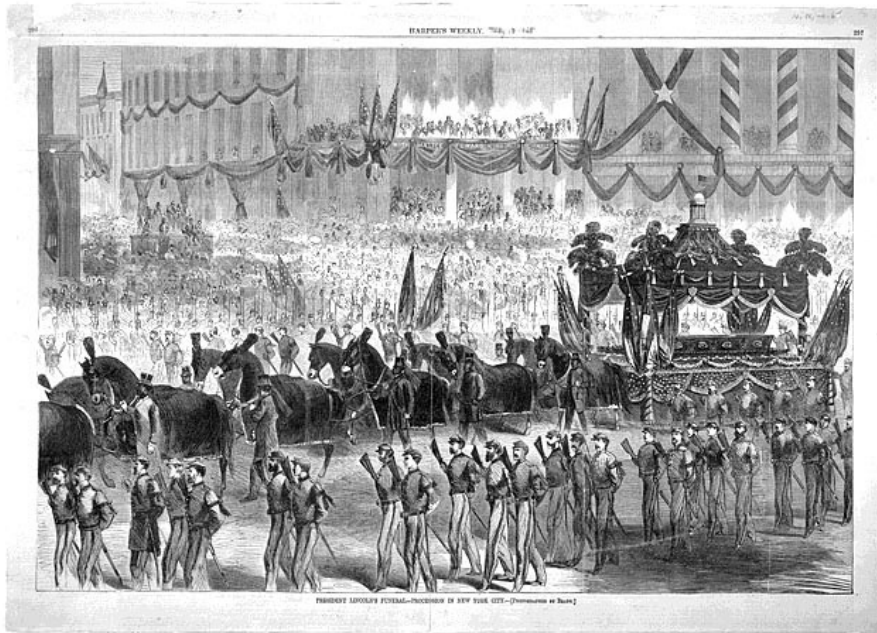
ON THE PUBLIC SQUARE,

AT

3 O'clock, this afternoon, April 15, 1865.

This broadside announcing the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was published before it was known that Secretary of State William Seward had survived.

Artifacts:



[15]

Illustration of President Lincoln's funeral procession in New York City.

3 January 2018

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