WEICHMANN, LOUIS J.
(trial witness)

DRAWER 14.

Personalities

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The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Louis J. Weichmann

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

BY ALVA O. RESER.

GEN. ROBERT S. FOSTER and Gen. Lew Wallace were the Indiana members of the military commission that tried those who conspired to take the life of Abraham Lincoln. Gen. Foster once told me that Louis J. Wiechmann was the most important witness in the trial. Wiechmann, at that time, was a clerk in the office of Gen. Hoffman, commissary general of prisoners.

Wiechmann boarded and roomed at the home of Mrs. Mary E. Surratt. He testified with reference to the conspirators making many visits to the home of Mrs. Surratt on H street in Washington, and that Booth visited her home on the afternoon of April 14, 1865, the day of the assassination.

Wiechmann was born in Baltimore, the son of a German tailor. His father moved from Baltimore to Washington in 1844, and in 1853 moved to Philadelphia. Wiechmann attended Central high school in Philadelphia and was graduated Feb. 10, 1859. He then attended a Catholic school in Maryland. It was there that he met Surratt.

After the war Wiechmann became an employe of the custom house at Philadelphia, a position he obtained because he could speak eight languages. His duty was to interpret communications addressed to the custom house, in foreign languages. He lost his position in 1885 because of a change of administration and influence of Southern men. He came to Anderson, Ind., the same year, where he had a brother who was a Catholic priest. Wiechmann started a business college in Anderson which he conducted until his death, June 2, 1902.

Two Sisters Living.

Wiechmann has two sisters, Miss Tillie Wiechmann and Mrs. C. O. Crowley, a widow, both living at 1403 West Eighth street in Anderson.

Mrs. Crowley, in speaking of her brother, said:

"He was hounded to death, by the secessionists because he was in that trial. The prejudice at the time of the assassination was awful. At that time I lived in Philadelphia with my father and mother. After my brother was graduated from the Philadelphia high school, he went to St. Charles college, Ellicotts Mills, Md., where he studied for the priesthood. It was there he met John Harrison Surratt, son of Mary E. Surratt. My brother had finished his first course in the college, and was to take the theological course, for the Richmond diocese, under Bishop McGill. He could not finish, as the blockade prevented him going to Richmond. So he went to Washington, and accepted a position in the War Department.

"While employed by the War Department, Mrs. Surratt's son came to him and said his mother was moving from Surrattsville to Washington, and he wanted my brother to board with him at his mother's home. My brother went to the Surratt home in December, 1864, and boarded with her up to April 14, 1865, when Lincoln was assassinated.

"When my brother was in high school in Philadelphia he started to learn the Pitman system of shorthand writing. He had good success with it, and, during the time he was boarding with Mrs. Surratt, wrote Milton's "Paradise Lost" in shorthand. When the government took possession of his wearing apparel, books and papers, they wanted to know what that shorthand was. None of them could read shorthand and thought it was something connected with the assassination. They had Benn Pitman, chief stenographer of the commission, examine the work. Pitman said that a young man who would sit down in the evening, after he had worked in the War Department all day, and copy Milton's "Paradise Lost," would have no thoughts of assassination in his mind.

Loses Customs Job.

"My brother was a good young man. After the tragedy the government gave him a position in the custom house at Philadelphia. He was there seventeen years. He was discharged through politics and because of prejudice the secessionists had against him. We had another brother in Indiana, located in Anderson, as a Catholic priest. Afterward this brother was located as a priest in Gas City. He is dead now. After my brother Lou got discharged from his government position in Philadelphia he came to Anderson, started a business college and taught shorthand. He worked hard in his business college work, but worried a great deal because of what he had gone through in that harrowing military trial, and because of several attempts to kill him after the trial. When he died the doctor said it was caused by his extreme nervousness. He was only sick a very short time. Just a half hour before he died he asked for a piece of paper, wrote the following and signed it:

" 'June 2, 1902. This is to certify that every word that I gave in evidence at the assassination trial, was absolutely true; and now I am about to die, and with love I recommend myself to all truth-loving people.

" 'LOUIS J. WIECHMANN.' "

"He was shot at in Philadelphia many times. One evening he was coming home, and a lady called to him to come into her house. He rushed in and just as he had slammed the door, a shot was fired from the outside, which struck the door. The man who fired the shot escaped. This woman had seen the man following my brother, with a pistol, and for that reason asked him into the house.

"Lady" Asks for Wiechmann.

"My father had a tailor store, with a private dwelling attached. One evening we were all in the store and the doorbell to our private residence rang. My father went outside. There was a 'lady' standing on the sidewalk. 'She' asked if Lou was home. Father said, 'Yes,' but that he had retired. 'She' asked if he couldn't come down and see 'her.' Father asked her to step inside the door, and said to 'her' that he would call Lou. 'She' refused to step inside. Father said 'Unless you come into the store, I will not call him.' 'She' started away. Father followed 'her' to the next corner, at Sixteenth street. There was a cab standing there with four men in it. She got into the cab and it was driven away. We knew it was a man in disguise, and if Lou had come down he would have been shot. These incidents were shortly after the war had closed, not later than the early seventies.

"Such things and experiences he had undergone made my brother, while yet a young man, a nervous wreck. He was born in 1842. He could speak eight languages.

"When the officers came to the Surratt home, about 3 o'clock of the morning after the assassination, my brother was in bed, but Mrs. Surratt had not retired. There was a violent ringing of the doorbell. My brother got up and came down. Mrs. Surratt was standing on the stairs. He said to her: 'Mrs. Surratt, what does this mean?' She said, 'Go, and open the door.' When he opened the door there were a couple of thousand people surrounding the house. One of the officers stepped into the door. My brother said to him: 'What does this mean, coming at this hour of the night to a widow lady's home? And what does this mob mean?' This officer took a cravat of Lincoln's out of his pocket, which was stained with blood. 'That is the cravat of Abraham Lincoln with blood on it,' he said. 'He has been assassinated; haven't you heard about that?' Lou held up his hand, and said, 'So help me God, I have not heard of it before this minute, but I see now the meaning of all these clandestine meetings that have been going on here.'

Father Is Held.

"My father was, as I have said, a tailor, and was, at this time, cutting soldiers' clothing in the arsenal at Philadelphia. When he came home on the evening of April 15, 1865, he saw the notice in the newspaper with reference to the assassination of Lincoln, and that the Surratt family had been arrested on suspicion. Knowing Lou boarded there, father took the first train for Washington. He went direct to the Surratt house. As soon as he entered the officers told him that he was a prisoner. Father knew before he went that he would be made a prisoner. He had been in the army in Germany, and knew just exactly what would be done.

"The next morning two ladies came. One of them had left a little baby three weeks old at her home. They had come to the Surratt home out of curiosity—and when they wanted to leave, the officers wouldn't let them. That night at about 9 o'clock all were taken to the provost marshal's office. They were to give father a hearing first. Father said for them to hear the ladies first, because he understood one of them had an infant at home. So they heard the two ladies first and dismissed them.

"They grilled father until he was almost out of his mind. My brother at that time had been sent to Canada to identify Surratt. He was not in Washington at the time father got there. Finally, after they had grilled father until he was almost distracted, Gen. Wallace said: 'We are going a little too far with this man.' They dismissed father.

"There was a young man by the name of Henry St. Marie, who had been in St. Charles school with my brother and Surratt. St. Marie said he would follow Surratt until he found him. Surratt got out of the country and into the Pope's army. St. Marie also enlisted in the Pope's army. One day while they were on dress parade they came together. St. Marie said: 'Hello, Surratt.' Surratt denied his identity. St. Marie said, 'I am going to report you to the American minister.' Surratt threw away his gun, jumped over a precipice sixty feet deep and made his way to a boat sailing for Egypt. St. Marie notified the American consul, and the American government cabled to have Surratt arrested as soon as he arrived in Egypt. This was done, and Surratt was put in irons and brought to the United States. Surratt was not tried by a military court, but by a civil court. There were a lot of secessionists connected with the trial and he was not convicted, the jury voting, 8 to 4, in favor of acquittal. He was never tried again. He went to Baltimore and got employment with the Adams Express Company and a little over a year ago—about 1922—he died. Surratt married and had seven sons. The daughter of Mrs. Surratt, Annie H. Surratt, was married and had several children. She died about 1903 or 1904."

LOUIS J. WIECHMANN.

DIVISION HEADQUARTERS,
NATIONAL GUARD OF PENN'A.

Philadelphia, Mar 29 1886.

To Whom it May Concern.

I take more than ordinary pleasure in bearing testimony to the character and capacity of Mr. L. J. Weichmann, whom I have known for many years in personal, official and business relations.

Educated, intelligent, energetic and reliable, I most unreservedly recommend him for any position in which clerical, official or business skill and experience and accuracy and trustworthiness are especially required

Very Truly

J. H. Hartranft

THE CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
CATHEDRAL SQUARE
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

MSGR. THOMAS M. CONROY

My dear Mr.Warren,

The accompanying typescript is sent you because I think it will fit in with the purposes of your Lincoln museum.I have had many requests to make this statement from the authors who have been writing on Lincoln and the Surratt trial.I hesitated because, incidents in which priests were involved,and I did not care to make them public.

But Mrs.Surratt is entitled to justice,eve n though it is given after her death.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

Conroy

17 October 1943.

THE CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
CATHEDRAL SQUARE
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

MSGR. THOMAS M. CONROY

My dear Mr.Warren,

In the account of the Lou Wiechmann-Surratt episode in the Lincoln assassination trial where the name Wichman appears,substitute the name Wiechmann.Father Wichman at times used the anglicized form in spelling the name, but not often.The Wiechmanns were of German stock-hence,Wiechmann.

Yours truly,

T M Conroy

18 October 1943.

October 20, 1943

Msgr. Thomas M. Conroy
The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Cathedral Square
Ft. Wayne, Ind.

My dear Msgr. Conroy:

It was very thoughtful of you to contribute your very interesting manuscript to the Foundation collection and it should settle for all times the controversy about the Wiechmann testimony against Mrs. Surratt.

Although I do not know as I have ever heard anyone deny the fact that Mrs. Surratt suffered unjustly at the hands of the military court, yet I think it is well to have on file all of these bits of evidence which help to clear her from any direct complicity in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln.

You are probably aware that a book is just from the press entitled "The Case of Mrs. Surratt" by Helen J. Jones Campbell.

Thanking you again for your manuscript, I am

Very truly yours,

LAW:EB

Director

LOU WICHMAN AND THE TRIAL
OF MRS. SURRATT

CONCERNING LOU WICHMAN AND HIS LIFE IN ANDERSON, INDIANA, AND HIS EVIDENCE AT THE TRIAL OF MRS. SURRATT

Statement of Msgr. Thomas M. Conroy, Pastor of the Cathedral of The Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Statement made October 16, 1943.

My knowledge of Lou Wichman, who gave evidence against Mrs. Surratt in her trial as an accomplice in the assassination of President Lincoln, and his family (his two sisters and a brother-in-law, Charles Crowley) goes back to 1904, the year I was appointed Assistant Pastor of St. Mary's Church, Anderson, Indiana. Lou Wichman was dead at this time and had been buried a few years before in the Catholic Cemetery in Anderson, Indiana. His two sisters, one a Miss Wichman and the other Mrs. Charles Crowley, were living in Anderson, Indiana at the time of my appointment as Assistant Pastor, and continued to live there until my appointment to St. Rose's Church, Monroeville, Indiana a few years later.

The main source of my information concerning the Wichmans was the Reverend D. J. Mulcahy, appointed Pastor of the Catholic Church there in 1891, succeeding the Reverend Ferdinand Wichman who had been Pastor since 1884. Father Wichman was a brother of Lou Wichman. I was told that the Wichman family had come to Anderson, Indiana for residence after Father Wichman's appointment to the charge in 1884. Father Wichman's tenure was not a happy one, owing to the presence of his brother, Lou Wichman, in the city. It seems that the community in general resented his presence because of his connection with the trial of Mrs. Surratt. Lou Wichman was a sort of solitary person and the only social life he knew was in the company of his sisters and his brother-in-law and with Father Wichman so long as he remained Pastor of the Catholic Church in Anderson. The Wichmans made themselves obnoxious to the community in general on account of their habit of trying at every opportunity to prove that Lou Wichman had told the truth at the trial of Mrs. Surratt. The brother-in-law particularly was shunned because of his habit of trying to open a debate with almost everyone he met on the street to establish his point that Lou Wichman had not perjured himself at the trial of Mrs. Surratt. Of course the community was not in agreement with the Wichmans on the question of Lou's innocence.

Shortly after his arrival in Anderson, Indiana, Lou Wichman opened a school of business practice, a mild forerunner of our modern business college. The courses given at the school consisted of shorthand, typewriting, etc. The

school was not at any time large in the matter of enrollment. The young man who acted as Wichman's secretary in the operation of the school, in return for his tuition, told me a few years afterward that Lou Wichman in all the years of the school's life never stood with his back to a door. He was always alert to notice those who came into the room where he was. This young secretary, who was later engaged in selling office supplies in the city of Anderson, Indiana, said that Lou Wichman was in fear that John Surratt would kill him or that some friend or agent of the Surratt family would do away with him. He rarely left his home after dark and never without one of the family accompanying him. The ghost of Mrs. Surratt was on the wing and Lou Wichman was pursued to the end by fear of retribution or vengeance. His fear of standing near an open door, his care not to go out in the dark unless Charley Crowley was with him or some member of the family accompanied him are sure signs that an evil conscience was drawing its barbed wire over the soul of Lou Wichman.

When the Wichmans were living in Anderson they were not at any time paupers but they never had an excess of money in their possession. Lou Wichman felt that his income was not sufficient to law away or save an adequate amount of money against future needs. He conceived the idea of writing a book. This information came from the young secretary of the business school days. This young man told me later, after Wichman's death, that he had copied the whole manuscript on a typewriter. He remarked at the time that the book would make an 8vo. volume of about two hundred and fifty pages. The title of the book was "The Pope and The Southern Confederacy." The purpose of the book as interpreted by the secretary was to prove that the Pope had instigated the Southern rebellion and supported it to the end. Whether Wichman claimed that he represented the Pope in any conspiracy looking to the overthrow of the Northern government, the young man did not say. Wichman might have claimed that he had a connection with the papal plot and then show an eagerness to disclose the plot to the Northern government and occupy the place of a hero. The Wichmans were, from what I learned about them, ever spectacular. They were exhibitionists, not of course in the offensive sense of the term. They were merely annoying in this exhibitionism. Whenever Father Wichman got a chance to recite a patriotic poem he was on his feet without much urging, going through the recitation with all the known tricks of the elocutionist. Whether this was the motive that impelled Wichman to write the book, is not known. This seems to be the more

explanation - Lou Wichman was out to make some money and to take revenge on the Catholic Church and on its priesthood, which considered Lou Wichman beyond the pale for his connection with the Surratt trial and which had a very strong and unchangeable conviction that Lou Wichman had brought in false testimony against Mrs. Surratt in the trial before the military tribunal set up to try the accused conspirators against Lincoln's life. His secondary purpose, perhaps his primary purpose, was to make money and save it against the rainy days of the future. He felt that there was probably enough bigotry in the country, especially in the Southern states, to warrant the hope that the volume would have a wide and profitable sale. Fortunately, the book was never published. Perhaps he was able to secure a publisher, perhaps not. The secretary told me that the manuscript was locked in a closet of the business college when he withdrew from Wichman's employment. If the manuscript came into the possession of Father Wichman after Lou Wichman's death, he would for obvious reasons destroy it at once.

According to Father Mulcahy, Lou Wichman never attended mass or went to the sacraments after the Surratt trial. Father Mulcahy was of a judicial mind and not in the habit of making rash statements. He was at least a competent witness when he stated that Lou Wichman never went to the sacraments or to mass while Father Mulcahy was Pastor of the Catholic Church in Anderson. This is very significant and has almost the force of a direct argument to recall that Lou Wichman had spent some years in a Catholic seminary preparing for the priesthood - in a seminary where the order of the day and the routine called for attendance at mass daily and for the frequent reception of the sacraments. He had gone so far in the direction of the priesthood that he had been adopted by the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia. This adoption assured him a place as a priest in that diocese after his ordination. There surely must have been a radical reason for his refusing to continue the daily religious life, at least partially, that he had practiced over many years while a student at a Catholic seminary in Philadelphia. By eliminating all the possible reasons, one remains for consideration. And that is his knowledge that he had done Mrs. Surratt a deadly injustice by testifying against her falsely. The worm was eating into the very vitals of his soul. Why should he continue with the practices of an earlier period when these practices would have only the effect of feeding the worm and making it stronger for its deadly work? The Wichmans at times would try to justify Lou's absence from mass and the sacraments during the later years of his life during the pastorate of Father Mulcahy by saying that Father Mulcahy was

hostile to Lou. That Father Mulcahy was hostile to Lou Wichman in the sense that he believed him guilty of causing Mrs. Surratt's death by false testimony at her trial is true. Father Mulcahy, so far as I know, never spoke of Lou Wichman except with undisguised contempt. But that was not the reason why Wichman threw all his church connections and duties to the winds while Father Mulcahy was Pastor of the Catholic Church in Anderson. Why did he not attend mass and go to the sacraments when his own brother was Pastor of the church? There could have been no hostility on the part of the Pastor to scare him away - his own brother. What prevented him from going to mass and the sacraments in Philadelphia and Washington? Surely not the hostility of Father Mulcahy, of whose existence Lou Wichman was ignorant at the time. Of course Father Mulcahy was Father Wichman's successor in Anderson after Father Wichman's removal, and naturally there could have been, and probably was, some feeling about that. But Father Mulcahy was not instrumental in Father Wichman's losing the Andsrson parish. The odium that rested on and clung to Lou Wichman for his vicious part in the Surratt trial made his brother very unpopular with the parish in Anderson. The Bishop of Fort Wayne (at that time Bishop Dwenger) honored the protests of the Anderson parish by removing Father Wichman and installing Father Mulcahy. Lou Wichman never went to church after the Surratt trial, and this on the testimony of Father Mulcahy who was deeply interested in the Surratt trial and all its ramifications. Lou Wichman never went to church after the Surratt trial, not because of any hostility on the part of the clergy or the Church - he never went because there were too many things in the church to remind him that some time, in some way, he would have to atone for the evil that he had heaped on an innocent woman. He knew of the inevitable judgment that he must face, not at the hands of some military tribunal which was under coercion to supply victims to appease the fury and the prejudice and the revenge of the North and to satisfy the blood thirsty appetite of the Secretary of War, Stanton. This one-time student for the priesthood whose early ambition was to ascend the altars of the Catholic church to say mass, this candidate for the priesthood turned his back on the altar of his early ambitions for one reason, and one reason only: every candle burning on the altar would have revealed to Wichman's conscience the picture of Mrs. Surratt in infamy and desperation on the scaffold in the jail yard at Washington, a victim of the perfidy and dishonor of a Lou Wichman who had broken bread in her house many times as a guest and then turned against her with the open, flaming mouth of a hyena at the trial before the military tribunal.

The end is not far off for the gaunt and haggard Lou Wichman. His conscience and his stomach ailments have wrecked him. It is his time now to appear before the judgment seat where no mistakes are made and where prejudice has no effect. Two days before Wichman died a message was sent to Father Mulcahy at the Catholic rectory that Lou Wichman wished to prepare for death by receiving the last sacraments of the Church. Wichman's conscience, or the concern of Wichman's relatives for his Christian burial, had not vanished completely. Father Mulcahy, not wishing to intrude where he had reason to know he was not wanted, sent his assistant, the Reverend Raphael Pacquet, to the Wichman home. Father Pacquet carried the Sacred Host for administration to the dying man. Customarily the confession of the sick person is heard before the administration of Holy Communion, and by the priest who gives Holy Communion. Just inside the door of the sick room where Lou Wichman was preparing to breathe his last stood Father Wichman, Lou's brother, who said to Father Pacquet as he passed into the sick room, "You will not have to hear his confession - I have done that." So Lou Wichman surrendered his soul into the hands of its Maker, and poured into the ears of his own brother the secrets of a lifetime. The secrets, as Lou Wichman well knew, would never be revealed. Their confession had annihilated them. But the usual procedure in the administration of the last rites of the Church had been reversed or changed. Why? Was Lou Wichman fearful that Father Pacquet would have refused him absolution if he admitted that he had sworn falsely against Mrs. Surratt? Did he admit to his clerical brother that he had done Mrs. Surratt a grave and hideous injustice, knowing that his brother could possibly form his conscience and demand no revelation of the truth for the public ear in order to save the name and peace of a whole relationship? We may conjecture and guess as we will without result. The world must wait until the Judgment Day for the correct answers. In the absence of positive proof the world insists on guessing. Did Lou Wichman tell his brother that he had brought in false testimony that sent Mrs. Surratt to her doom by a hangman's noose? It may be that he did and it may be that he did not. Nobody knows with any certainty.

Under the Church's law Lou Wichman was laid away in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Anderson, Indiana, where his grave still remains. He had received the last sacraments of the Church. That is the sole determining factor for Christian burial in consecrated ground. One day I stood near the grave of Lou Wichman as a group of young high school pupils was wandering through the cemetery reading

the names on the tombstones, dates of birth and death, of the persons crumbling to dust beneath the stones. Some of them had history books in their hands. They were probably studying the civil war period in American history and had perhaps been given the assassination of Lincoln as a class theme. When the group approached the grave of Wichman, I heard one of the pupils say, "This is Wichman's grave. He is the man who murdered Mrs. Surratt." Perhaps the young student had one of those youthful intuitions which separate the truth from the fogs of error. But who will have the assurance to say that the young pupil was wrong? The world insists on guessing in the absence of positive proof.

The above is what I know about the connection of Lou Wichman and the trial for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. I am inclined to believe that Lou Wichman brought in false testimony at the trial of Mrs. Surratt and used it against her.

M. Greene

Chicago Tribune November 3, 1975

A witness reconstructs the tragedy of 1865...

By Peter Gorner

LOUIS WEICHMANN knew that evil lurked within Mary Surratt's rooming house, but he didn't know what it meant.

Shadowy figures flitted about the three-story building at 541 H. St. The air hung sulphuric with hate.

Elsewhere, Washington City was a saturnalia of glee. "The very heavens were resonant with jubilation and luminous with the fires of patriotic rejoicing over the successes that had crowned the Union cause" is how Weichmann described that April of 1865. The end of the Civil War was near: Richmond had fallen, Lee's army had surrendered, the South was on its knees.

"BUT A FIEND with a heart as black as hell was lying in wait to destroy it all and make his name and that of Surratt a hissing reproach for all time throughout the civilized world.

"That fiend was John Wilkes Booth!"

History buffs are abuzz over Weichmann and his hitherto unpublished words, so piquantly coated in Victorian colors. Not only was he a roomer in Mary Surratt's nest, where the conspiracy to kill Abraham Lincoln was hatched, but he also served as key government witness against the conspirators and helped piece together the plot.

THERE WERE those who felt he testified to save his own skin, that he knew of Booth's desperate plot to kidnap Lincoln, if not the later decision to kill him. But Weichmann denied involvement and Booth apparently felt he was too patriotic to be trusted.

Weichman also sparked deep hate because his word sent Mary Surratt to the gallows—the first woman to be hanged in the United States. The bookish, unassuming Weichmann spent the rest of his days protesting his innocence.

But it didn't help. Hounded, defiled, and slandered, Weichmann finally fled to Anderson, Ind., where he founded the local business school and spent 10 years meticulously reconstructing and documenting his memoirs, dedicating them to history and "in personal vindication of myself."

THE MANUSCRIPT stayed within his family from his death in 1902 until a niece placed it for sale three years ago. Floyd Risvold, a Minneapolis collector of Americana, purchased and edited the huge work.

And now, in the age of assassination, Weichmann's remarkable eyewitness story of the nation's first assassination conspiracy has been published. "A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Conspiracy of 1865" [Knopf, $15] reads like a thriller, sales already have reached 42,500, and a film is likely.

Scholars say the manuscipt provides many insights into the personalities of Booth and the other conspirators. The actor is depicted as a profligate of uncommon magnetism who cast a bizarre band of characters and used Mrs. Surratt's home as a theater to rehearse them in his melodrama to kill Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State William E. Seward, and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in order to "dismember the Union" so that the Confederacy might still triumph.

CONSPIRACY speculation over the years has mentioned the Roman Catholic Church [since many of the 10 were Catholics, and Mrs. Surratt's son, John, escaped capture and found refuge as a Papal Zouave], the Confederate goverment, Vice President Johnson, and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.

Many moves have been made to clear the name of Mrs. Surratt, whose home reeently was dedicated as a monument, and Dr. Samuel Mudd, the Maryland physician who set Booth's broken leg. Dr. Mudd later was sentenced to life imprisonment, though pardoned after his heroic efforts during a yellow fever epidemic in 1869.

But the pair really did it, Weichmann claims. They both were eager conspirators, inflamed by secessionist zeal, he says. Besides, Mrs. Surratt was dazzled by John Wilkes Booth.

WEICHMANN WAS 23 and a college friend of John Surratt [known to history as a "wheelheaded and frothy" young man of 20] when he moved into Surratt's mother's boarding house on Nov. 1, 1864. He paid her $35 a month rent. Two months later, he met Booth.

"While Christmas shopping, Surratt was Lewis Powell, alias "Payne," 21, a gigantic savage, stagestruck by the eloquent actor.

ON GOOD FRIDAY, the day Lincoln was to attend the theater, someone had rigged the Presidential box, boring a hole in the door from which a bullet might be fired from the hallway, placing a wooden wedge inside the box so it could be braced to prevent entrance from without, and moving Lincoln's chair so as to allow the assassin to escape easily.

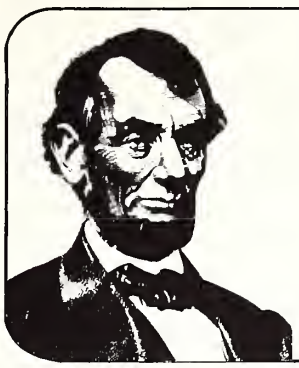
That night, Booth entered the theater, where he was well known. Lincoln's bodyguard had found a seat and was enjoying the comedy, "Our American Cousin." Booth fired a soft-shelled lead ball into Lincoln's brain, slashed madly at others in the box, and leapt to the stage, catching a spur on the American flag, causing his leg to break as he hit.

AS SOON AS he heard of Lincoln's death, Weichmann went to the police and told of the visitors he'd seen. Except for John Surratt, the plotters quickly were caught. Surratt fled to Canada and then to Europe. After the controversial military trial, Mrs. Surratt, Payne, Herold and Atzerodt were hanged, this country's biggest hanging. Dr. Mudd, Arnold, and O'Laughlin were sentenced to life imprisonment; Spangler got six years.

By the time Surratt finally was captured and tried in 1867, the country was tired of the conspiracy, and he was freed after a hung jury.

But there was to be no peace for any of the principals in the story. President Johnson failed to give clemency to Mrs. Surratt, and three years later when he tried to dump Stanton from his Cabinet, Johnson's enemies claimed he was trying to wash Mary Surratt's blood from his hands. This issue figured prominently in his near impeachment.

And even as he died in 1902, Louis Weichmann still was testifying in delirium that he had done the right thing, that he was an honest man. His memoirs now eloquently ask that he be judged in fairness, and his memory finally be laid to rest.



Lincoln Lore

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Barondess/Lincoln Award to Floyd E. Risvold for Weichmann Assassination Account

Editor's Note: The Civil War Round Table of New York established the Barondess/Lincoln Award in 1962 to honor persons or institutions for significant contributions to the study of the life and works of Abraham Lincoln. Authors like Paul M. Angle, Kenneth A. Bernard, and Louis A. Warren have received the award, as have Frankie Hewitt (for her work with the Ford's Theatre Society) and Lincoln Memorial University (for its publication of *Lincoln Herald* and for maintaining a Lincoln collection). This year's award went to Mr. Floyd E. Risvold, a manuscripts collector, who bought and then carefully edited Louis J. Weichmann's manuscript, *A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and of the Conspiracy of 1865,* published last year by Alfred A. Knopf. The Civil War Round Table of New York is to be commended for this service to the Lincoln field in general and for the choice of this book in particular, which was certainly the most significant Lincoln book of the year and may be the most significant book in the field published in several years. The following is a brief review of this interesting eyewitness account of the conspiracy to assassinate Abraham Lincoln, of the trials of the assassins, and of the witness's own struggle to vindicate his testimony.

I want to thank Mr. Risvold for his assistance in supplying the photographs used in this *Lincoln Lore;* they are unique, and we feel privileged to use them.

M.E.N., Jr.

Poor Louis Weichmann, he is one of the most despised men in Lincoln literature. Even temperate writers on the assassination suggest that his character was weak, that he was cowardly (or at least easily intimidated), that he was a hypocrite who traded his testimony for exemption from prosecution, and that he was a lickspittle who received a government job as his pay for doing the government's hatchet work at the trial of the assassins. At last he has been heard, and though his character remains enigmatic and still somewhat unappealing, it is only fair to have the story told as Louis Weichmann saw it.

From the Risvold Collection

FIGURE 1. Louis J. Weichmann as he looked in 1892, about the time he wrote his *True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln.* Weichmann was living in Anderson, Indiana, where he ran a business school. He left his patronage job in the Philadelphia customshouse when Democrat Grover Cleveland took over the White House. He moved to Anderson to be near his brother, who was a Catholic priest.

Sensation mongers have not taken to this book. In his *apologia pro vita sua,* the government's star witness at the trial of Lincoln's assassins works so hard to prove the validity of his own testimony that he leaves little room for speculation about unpursued leads or involvement by elusive "higher-ups." The overall effect of the book (besides pleasure — it is what book editors, I think, refer to as a "good read") is to narrow the reader's field of vision, to focus his attention on the tough questions of degree of guilt or innocence among those people whom Weichmann saw at Mary Surratt's boarding house in Washington, D.C. Weichmann concludes flatly that "it can be truthfully said that Booth himself was the author of the whole scheme, both as relates to the plot to abduct, and the plot to assassinate Mr. Lincoln, in the laying of plans, in the securing of accomplices, and in the furnishing of the necessary funds. It was Booth's conspiracy, and that of the foolish young men whom he drew into his schemes along with him. In fact, it may very properly be designated as a conspiracy of foolish and misguided young men." His appraisal of

their motives is disarmingly simple and straightforward:

> What the potent influence was that induced these men and this woman to enlist under Booth's black banner, I cannot comprehend, but in my own mind, I have been satisfied long ago that they were mainly actuated by cupidity — the desire to make money — to gain a large fortune. Indeed, all their talk proves this. When Booth approached Chester [to induce him to join the conspiracy], he told him their money was in it, that he could let him have three thousand dollars, and when Surratt induced Atzerodt to join the Conspiracy, and furnish the boat on which the President was to be ferried over the Potomac, it was under the promise of a fortune, and thereafter whenever Atzerodt talked about the scheme, it was always with the idea of making money. Booth himself may have been actuated by what he considered nobler motives, the desire, perhaps, to pose as the Charlotte Corday of the nineteenth century; to gain a name for himself as the avenger of the South, or by his deed to attempt to revive its dying cause; but his followers, it is safe to say, were actuated by no such motives. They were too commonplace and were not of the material out of which heroes are made.
>
> Surratt's mother was in debt and was keeping a boardinghouse to sustain herself and family, but the son when in the city could be often seen with fine gloves and leggings on, riding on sleek and well-fed horses, and girdled around his waist with a brace of well-loaded revolvers. He kept two horses at Howard's stables on G Street which he claimed as his own, but Brooke Stabler, an employee there, testified that Booth paid for their keeping . . . .

Weichmann stresses Booth's charisma, charm, and verbal talent as keys to his success in recruiting, for example, a "country boy" like John Surratt for his plot to kidnap the President.

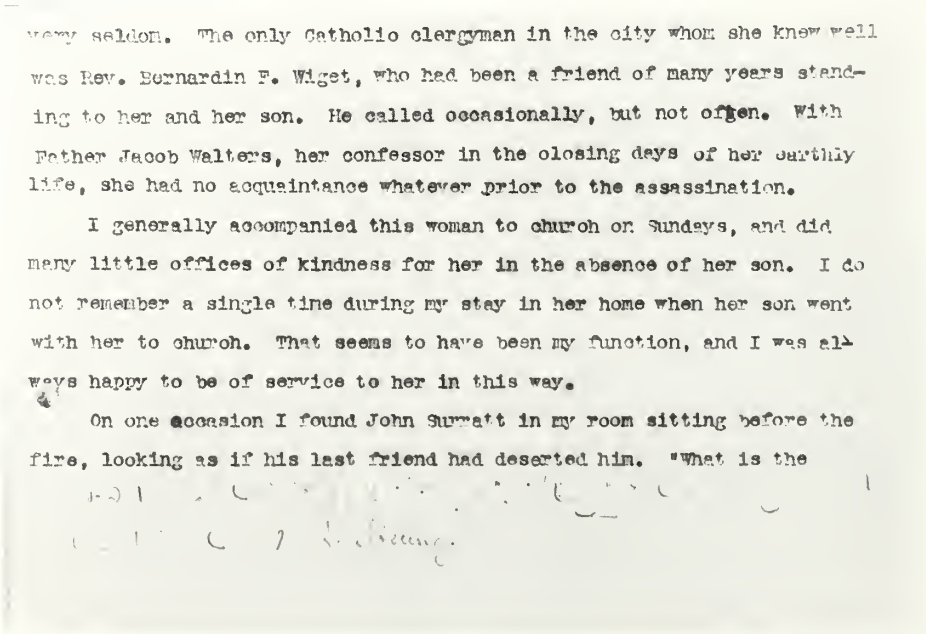
Only occasionally does Weichmann seem to be insufferably self-righteous. When he tells us that he regularly escorted Mrs. Surratt to church on Sundays (both were Roman Catholics), but that he could "not remember a single time during my stay in her home when her son went with her to church," he may be reporting the facts. This scene, however, seems a bit hard to take now, and the least that can be said about it is that there is little wonder that Surratt grew to hate Weichmann:

> On one occasion I found John Surratt in my room sitting before the fire, looking as if his last friend had deserted him. "What is the matter, John?" said I. "Why are you so dejected?" "Weichmann," was his reply, "I can't tell you; you are a Yankee." Then I informed him that if he did not wish to trust me with his secrets, he had better go to his church, attend to his religious duties, and live as a Christian man should, and all his worriment would cease.

A lawyer who once tried courtroom criminal law but found that he lost weight from anxiety during trials told me that criminal lawyers are a peculiar breed. He said that it does not matter much how well they know the law, how logical their minds are, or how learned and careful their briefs are. All the careful preparations in the world and all the legal learning would be utterly useless if the jury did not understand the pitch or if a key witness clammed up on the stand or changed his story altogether. Criminal lawyers must be astute judges of character above all else. There seems to be some truth in this, for one finds oneself inexorably drawn into a discussion of personalities when one studies a criminal case. Is one witness or another to be believed? Is a person capable of such a crime? These are finally the questions juries answer, and these are questions which historians like to avoid but cannot when studying events like the trials of Lincoln's assassins. The argument *ad hominem* seems not to be avoidable.

What kind of witness is Louis Weichmann? It is still very hard to say, but surely the case for his plausibility is stronger now than ever before. He combines a careful reporter's eye and moral simplicity with a studied ability to piece together complex facts of time, place, and circumstance. To be sure, he seems occasionally susceptible to surface deception, as when he tells us what "an exceedingly fine-looking body of men" the officers of the military commission that tried the conspirators were. One cringes to find him reporting the superficial fact of what "a good impression [they made] on all who visited the court during the hot and exciting days of the trial." On the whole, though, such moments are rare and serve ultimately to lend credibility to Weichmann's story. After all, if he were not capable of being deceived by appearances, then he was a well-wisher to the conspiracy rather than an uncomprehending eyewitness.

His case is stronger now, but not ironclad, partly because he is so secretive about his own life and character. He tells us about Louis Weichmann only insofar as he had contact with the assassins, the men who tried the assassins, and the writers who attacked him or vindicated Mrs. Surratt. Otherwise, Louis Weichmann exists only as a dull shadow who goes to his job with the government bureaucracy (he was a War Department clerk) and returns home to eat, read a bit, and sleep. What are Weichmann's own political opinions? We do not know. He conversed affably enough with a Confederate block-


very seldom. The only Catholic clergyman in the city whom she knew well was Rev. Bernardin F. Wiget, who had been a friend of many years standing to her and her son. He called occasionally, but not often. With Father Jacob Walters, her confessor in the closing days of her earthly life, she had no acquaintance whatever prior to the assassination.

I generally accompanied this woman to church on Sundays, and did many little offices of kindness for her in the absence of her son. I do not remember a single time during my stay in her home when her son went with her to church. That seems to have been my function, and I was always happy to be of service to her in this way.

On one occasion I found John Surratt in my room sitting before the fire, looking as if his last friend had deserted him. "What is the

From the Risvold Collection

FIGURE 2. This is part of a page of the Weichmann manuscript. There are multiple typewritten copies of most of the chapters of the book; Weichmann sent copies of the manuscript to be read by various people, including Ida Tarbell. At the bottom of this page can be seen some marginalia written in shorthand by Weichmann, who counted mastery of a system of shorthand among his clerical abilities. The last word is in German.

ade runner in the Surratt house. On the other hand, by the time he wrote his memoir of the event (about thirty years later), he could say of southern Maryland that "The only true friends the Union had down there were the colored people." His gratitude to that race, which he seems otherwise to have known only as servants, was doubtless increased when, during the trial of John Surratt in 1867,

> One day, I was waited on by two ladies, Mrs. Griffen and Mrs. Thomas L. Tullock, representing a committee of the loyal ladies of Washington, who stated that they had come to me from Secretary Stanton to say that I should in no way feel alarmed during my attendance at court; that the Secretary had taken the precaution to have a number of colored men in the court room every day who would take care that the Government witnesses should not be insulted or subjected to bodily harm.
>
> This wise precaution of Mr. Stanton was an actual fact; there were three rows of benches which were occupied as long as the trial lasted by colored men. They were always orderly and polite in their behavior, but their presence was a great restraint on the element which sympathized with Surratt, and, I believe, was often the means of checking an outbreak in the court room.

Otherwise, we know only that he regularly held a patronage job from all Republican administrations till 1885 and that whenever the Democrats gained control, he was turned out in the cold.

There is enough information in Weichmann's account to suggest a book on the disputes having to do with Catholicism that grew out of the trials of the assassins. Indeed, this is almost a subplot of the book. Payne was a Baptist; Booth, an Episcopalian; Atzerodt, a Lutheran; and Weichmann, a key prosecution witness, was a Catholic himself; nevertheless, it did not take long for the anti-Catholic agitators to dream up allegations that Lincoln's assassination was a papal plot. To a surprising degree, Weichmann suggests that Catholics themselves had much to do with bringing on the hatred and suspicion. At the trial of John Surratt, twenty students from St. Charles College (where John and Louis both had studied for the priesthood) came with a professor (Louis's former father confessor) and shook hands with the accused prisoner, the priest sitting at Surratt's side all day. None so much as acknowledged Weichmann's presence.

> Out of such actions as these, and out of the doings of Fathers Boucher and LaPierre, who secreted Surratt in Canada and who arranged and facilitated his escape to Europe, coupled with the fact that some of the priests and other prominent Catholics in Washington, have persistently and unscrupulously maligned the Government, the Military Commission, the witnesses for the prosecution, because of the verdict in Mrs. Surratt's case, more than from any other circumstances, has grown the charge that the assassination was the outcome of a Catholic plot.

He does go on to say that "the charge is too ridiculous for a moment's consideration." But so little attention to the forces of bigotry that raised the charge seems curious in a Catholic. True, he admits asking Stanton for a job when his Bishop refused to answer his letter (in the summer of 1865) requesting permission to resume his religious studies. This incident typifies the great weakness of the account. It is only from Weichmann's obituary, carefully added by Risvold in the useful appendix to the account, that we learn that Weichmann left the Church altogether (until just before his death).

He does not bother to tell us this interesting biographical tidbit, and he is not by any means required to by the rules of evidence. Still, it certainly alters our understanding of his perception of the causes of the Catholic plot theory. We still do not understand the man behind the testimony.

By today's standards, the standards of the nineteenth-century justice system often seem appalling. Weichmann received a government job for his part in the trials of the assassins. Writers have never forgiven him (or the government) for this. Yet something else comes to mind. Weichmann wrote this manuscript justifying his role in the trials late in his life, some thirty years after the event, and even then only in response to frequent newspaper stories that impugned his testimony. He did not rush out of the courtroom door of this, the most famous state trial in American history, get a large advance from a publisher, and try to get rich off his dutiful participation in the trial. Standards of justice have not necessarily changed all for the better.

Recent Acquisitions: A Presentation Copy of the *Debates*

Abraham Lincoln's education was, in his own estimation, "defective." The frontier environment of his youth prevented his owning many books in the years when he had much time for reading. He regretted his "want of education," as he said in his autobiography written for John L. Scripps in 1860, and tried throughout his life "to supply the want." He studied grammar after he was twenty-three years old and "had separated from his father." He studied geometry after he was forty years old and had already served a term in the United States House of Representatives.

The habits of youth nevertheless leave indelible traces, and Lincoln showed no special fondness for books as such. He never accumulated a library like Jefferson's or Washington's. He was not, like Rutherford B. Hayes or Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a book collector. Unlike Woodrow Wilson or Theodore Roosevelt, he never wrote books. Therefore, books that are directly associated with Abraham Lincoln are extremely rare. He almost never wrote marginalia in his books; in fact, he rarely wrote his name in a book.

For these reasons, and others, a signed copy of a book for which Abraham Lincoln supplied almost half the text himself is considered a major rarity. The only book that Lincoln in any sense "wrote" was the *Political Debates Between Hon. Abraham Lincoln and Hon. Stephen A. Douglas in the Celebrated Campaign of 1858, in Illinois. . . .* (Columbus: Follett, Foster and Company, 1860). Lincoln thought he won the great debates, and he was careful to preserve a newspaper clipping of every speech. He pasted these into an attractive scrapbook. Lincoln turned down one publication offer in 1858, probably thinking it would be too early to have political effect. In 1859, his campaign tour to Ohio seems to have brought the scrapbook to the attention of Republican leaders in that state, and Oran Follett, editor of the *Ohio State Journal,* early Republican, and owner of the Follett, Foster publishing house, printed the book in 1860. Lincoln received, it is said, one hundred copies, and to date eighteen copies which he signed and presented to friends have been found. The Lincoln Library and Museum is happy to announce the acquisition of one of these presentation copies, bearing the pencil inscription, "Capt. J. S. Bradford From A. Lincoln."

Only one copy of the *Debates* is inscribed in ink, the copy Lincoln gave to his former law partner Stephen T. Logan. On it, the ink is badly smeared because the endpapers are porous and soft, and book collectors assume that, from then on, Lincoln knew to inscribe the books in pencil.

Captain John S. Bradford seems at first glance to be an unlikely recipient of Lincoln's book. He was a life-long Democrat who led a restless and varied life. Born in Philadelphia in 1815, he was trained to be a bookbinder. He apparently decided he wanted to see Mexico and started working his way west from Philadelphia. In Richmond, Indiana, he joined the

f Engineers in building the National
ted in Vandalia, Illinois, in 1840, and
yment on the project. He then moved
ame year. In 1841, he bought half of a
ndery which became the firm of John-

him as "Captain" betokened Brad-
ilitary interests. He joined a militia
ngfield Cadets and went to Nauvoo in
s with the Mormons in that area led
to call out the militia. In 1846, he en-
Fourth Illinois Infantry, the unit com-
hig friend Edward D. Baker, and went
ecame a Commissary of the United
resent at the capture of Vera Cruz, the
and other battles in the Mexican War.
linois regiment in September of 1847,
ly in 1849 to seek gold in California.
d went to California with his brother-
who had been United States Senator
) and Associate Justice of the Illinois
They engaged not in mining but in
ith goods and food. They began with a
ying goods from Sacramento. Later
nd opened a store, forming the firm of
d Company, for the transaction of
ey even purchased a ship with a cargo
nd disassembled it to make a wharf.
successful, for Bradford was elected
nicia (Sonoma) district when the mili-
Department of the Pacific ordered a
d for a new state (even before Califor-
, when California gained admission to
ected to the first state legislature. A
home to his family, which he had left
He remained in partnership with John-
d in 1857 became Superintendent of
Sangamon County.

broke out (and probably after he al-
copy of the *Debates* from Abraham
Governor Richard Yates recognized
ns despite his party identification and
sary with the rank of Lieutenant Colo-
rst military commission for the war.
ford served as mayor of Springfield,
tion measures when a smallpox epi-
as noted for his involvement in chari-
tutions. He served on the board of the
ity, a Lutheran college which flour-
gfield, and he raised money for the
he Friendless, a charitable institution
nd children.

ded his connection with Johnson and
a book store. Then his restless spirit
e sold the store in 1873 and moved to
where he remained for two years. He
gfield, where, in 1876, he became Crier
ed States Commissioner. He was an
n, and a Knight Templar. He was
launch Democrat as well. Why did Lin-
his *Debates?* Probably because Brad-
ghbor, living across the street from the
n and Jackson in Springfield. It was an
were political speeches, but Abraham
is neighbor.

ontains a tipped-in affidavit on the fly-
coln signature. It reads:

being first sworn on oath says that he is the son of Capt. John S. Bradford, at one time Mayor of Springfield, Ill., and a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln, living across the street from Lincoln's home. (See reference page 428, Sandberg's [*sic*] Life of Lincoln,Vol. 1) Capt. John S. Bradford died in 1892 and among his effects was a library containing the within book which came to affiant at that time, and which has been in his continuous possession ever since. That affiant knows from his father's personal statements to him that this book had been in the continuous possession of his father from the time that he received said book from Lincoln with his name inscribed on this page, viz: "A Lincoln" That affiant knows that said signature is genuine and the signature of A. Lincoln as it purports to be.

Affiant is the youngest son of Capt. J. S. Bradford and resides in Seattle, Wash. That formerly, in 1890, he was mayor of Helena, Mont., and publisher of the Rocky Mountain Magazine.

[signed] *Donald Bradford*

Subscribed & Sworn to before me this 11th. day of May, 1934.

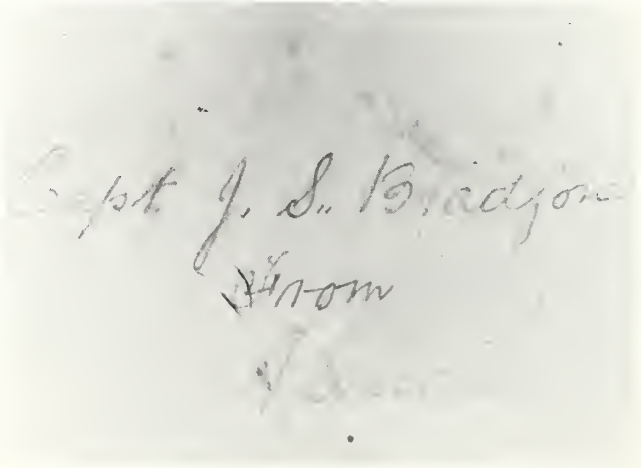
[signed] *A. M. Booth*

Notary Public at Seattle, Wn

William H. Herndon recalled that Lincoln "had failed to induce any publisher in Springfield to undertake the enterprise [of publishing the debates], thus proving anew that 'a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.'" In fact, Herndon wrote in 1889:

> A gentleman is still living, who at the time of the debate between Lincoln and Douglas, was a book publisher in Springfield. Lincoln had collected newspaper slips of all the speeches made during the debate, and proposed to him their publication in book form; but the man declined, fearing there would be no demand for such a book. Subsequently, when the speeches were gotten out in book form in Ohio, Mr. Lincoln procured a copy and gave it to his Springfield friend, writing on the flyleaf, "Compliments of A. Lincoln."

The inscription is not the same as the one made to J. S. Bradford, but one wonders whether this might not be the very copy to which Herndon referred. If it is, then Bradford doubtless kicked himself for his decision. The *Debates* were a nineteenth-century best seller; over 30,000 copies were sold in 1860.

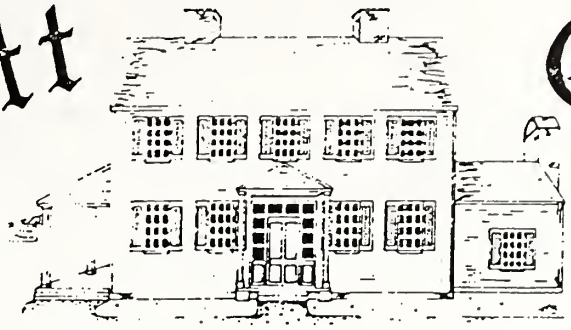


From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 3. An old list locating the signed copies of the *Debates* indicates that Lincoln most often inscribed the copies with the recipient's name followed by "from" on the next line and his signature ("A. Lincoln") below that. Other inscriptions are in the form "A. L." or "A. Lincoln" followed by "to" and the recipient's name. In others, Lincoln wrote "Presented to," the recipient's name, and "by A. Lincoln" on the next line.

File: Weichmann, Louis J.

Surratt Courier



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Ellen Watson, Editor

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PO Box 427 - 9110 Brandywine Road
Clinton, Maryland 20735

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am warning everyone in advance that my aviation background is again coming out, but I thought you might find the following fact interesting. I recently found out that Abe Lincoln was not the only one in his family interested in the military possibilities of aviation (remember Thaddeus Lowe and his balloon in a previous issue?). Over 20 years later, his son Robert would also become involved.

According to the story, a man by the name of Russell Thayer of Philadelphia sent a letter on January 7, 1885 to then-Secretary of War Robert Lincoln. It suggested that a large airship powered by "a jet of compressed air ejected from the rear of the craft" would be useful to the military. (Airships were developed to solve the problem of aerial navigation, but soon became a means of entertaining the public.) Lincoln was impressed by his proposal and invited Thayer to bring it to the attention of the Ordnance Board. After giving its approval, the Board suggested that an appropriation of $5000 for construction of a prototype be sought from Congress, but after a year-long discussion, the War Department decided to drop the proposal. Just think, had Lincoln carried through with the suggestion, the U.S. might have developed an airship to rival the German Zepplin.

LOUISE OERTLY

!!!MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!!

Oct. 5 **BOOTH ESCAPE ROUTE TOUR (Reservations filled)**

Oct. 12 & 13 **VICTORIAN CRAFT FAIR** at Surratt House, 10am-4pm Saturday & 11am-4pm on Sunday. Handcrafted items from afghans to caricatures to tinted Godey's prints.

Oct. 15 **SURRATT SOCIETY MEETS** with a special program on early Washington DC history by author Tee Loftin. 7:30pm at St. John's School, 8912 Old Branch Ave., Clinton. (NOTE: Different meeting day.)

Oct. 17 -Dec. 1 **A STITCH IN TIME**, a special exhibit of antique sewing paraphernalia during regular tour hours at the museum.

Nov. 12 **SURRATT SOCIETY MEETS** (Note: Change of day - Tuesday - due to holiday.)

Nov. 16 & 17 **MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE**, with free tours, and special gift shop offerings--12 noon to 4pm each day.

Dec. 14 -16 **VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT.** Special evening tours of the museum.

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WEDDING BELLS

Congratulations to Michael Kauffman, Honorary Member of the Society and brilliant narrator of our Booth tours, and Mary Patten, volunteer hostess at the museum, who were married on September 21. If you want an appropriate love story, they met on one of our Booth tours. We don't guarantee dating services through our bus tours, but this is the second marriage that we know of resulting from meetings along the Booth trail! The amorous Mr. Booth would be pleased.

MONOCACY NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

A Civil War battlefield near Frederick, Maryland was recently dedicated as a national park site. On July 9, 1864, Confederate forces under General Jubal Early defeated Union forces under General Lew Wallace at the Battle of Monocacy and marched to the outskirts of Washington, D.C. The Battle of Monocacy, however, had cost the Confederates 1300 casualties and one days time--enough to thwart chances to capture the capital. The rebel army was forced to withdraw to Virginia.

Now administered by the National Park Service, the site is forming a volunteer group, The Friends of Monocacy National Battlefield. For further information, contact the group, c/o Monocacy National battlefield, PO Box 158, Sharpsburg, MD 21782.

WE RECEIVE A THANK YOU

Member Jack Floyd wrote recently asking for help in researching Kate Chase Sprague, a Washington belle during the Lincoln years. Several of our readers were quick to respond, and Mr. Floyd has sent the following note:

I want to thank you and all the readers who replied with very helpful information to my quest for answers regarding the Salmon P. Chase - Kate Chase Sprague mysteries I was encountering. Nearly all of the missing pieces have been put into place and I am very grateful.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Robert Long - Columbia, SC
Andy Hill - Kalispell, MT
Russell Merrifield - Irvine, CA
Janice Carol Alcorn - Bowie, MD
Teresa Sperry - Catonsville, MD
Jay L. Smith - Washington, DC
John Joerschke - Stillwater, OK
Helen Baker -Baltimore, MD
George Boellner - Baltimore, MD
Charlie Knight - Richmond, VA
Robert G. Robertson - North Canton,OH
Martha E.Brockner - Ellicott City, MD
William G. Taylor - Hollywood, MD

Special welcomes to our newest Life Members:

Gen. William Tidwell, Fairfax, VA
Miriam Flatt, Alexandria, VA
Walter Burke, Ft. Myer, FL
Dean Warner, Reston, VA
John W. Surratt, Campbell, CA

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THANK-YOU'S ARE IN ORDER

First, a large thank-you is due to all our members who have been making some very generous donations as they renew their memberships in the Society.

A special thank you goes to C&P Telephone Company of Maryland, who recently contributed $125 to our museum as part of their community affairs giving.

And finally, Life Member Louise Taper of California has arranged to have our 1861-1862 series of letters from Anna Surratt to a school friend professionally cleaned and preserved and facsimiles made for permanent exhibit. These letters are special treasures to the museum because Anna talks of her brother Isaac's service to the Confederacy, her family's sympathies, and in one poignant, black-bordered letter, of her father's sudden death following a visit from "... a gentleman from across the Potomac"--a veiled hint at a visit from a Confederate espionage agent.

We are blessed with a wealth of friends at Surratt House, and we thank you all for your continued support.

FROM THE GIFT SHOP

Several new publications are now available by mail through our gift shop. Member Elden Weckesser of Ohio has recently written a book entitled His Name Was Mudd, a biography of Dr. Samuel Mudd which also includes extensive excerpts from the 1865 Trial. It is available at $24.50 ppd.

We are also carrying The Great Abraham Lincoln Hijack, which outlines the 1876 attempt to steal the body of President Lincoln. Written by Bonnie Stahlman Speer, it sells for 19.50ppd.

An intriguing biography on a prolific quilter is also available for those who love old quilts. Legacy: The Story of Talula Gilbert Bottoms tells of a woman whose life spanned from the Civil War through the 1930s. In the course of this life, she produced nearly 300 quilts, many of which have been photographed for this book. It is available at 21.50 ppd.

Our local members might want to check out the gift shop periodically. We have a wide array of charming gift items and are now beginning to display many Christmas ideas. We are especially well-known for our "antique" Santa Clauses and ornaments, but we also have plenty of history-oriented stocking stuffers.

MUSIC FOLLOW-UP

We recently told you of a musical offering of Civil War songs, including the ill-fated "Honor To Our Soldiers." We still do not know prices, but member Frank D'Aquila advises that CDs, cassettes, or LPs are available through the Musical Heritage Society, 1710 Highway 35, Ocean, NJ 07712.

VIDEO PRODUCTION PLANNED

Member and author William Hanchett was recently in town as location production began on his script "Black Easter, The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln." Producer Gary Beebe foresees not only television production of this documentary, but also video production sales, specifically for use with college programs. We will keep you posted on the progress of this project.

LINCOLN COLLOQUIM

The Sixth Annual Colloquim will be held on Saturday, October 26, at Sangamore State University in Springfield, Illinois.

The theme of this year's conference is "Abraham Lincoln and the Crucible of War." Speakers will include James M. McPherson, Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton University and recipient of the 1989 Pulitzer Prize in History; Dr. McPherson will discuss the question of "Who Freed the Slaves?" Richard N. Current, Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, will analyze "Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy." John Y. Simon, Professor of History at Southern Illinois University, will speak on "Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and Fort Sumter." Frank J. Williams, President of the Abraham Lincoln Association, will examine and illustrate "Lincoln and His Contemporaries: The World's Statesmen Compared and Contrasted." Paul Findley, former United States Representative from Illinois' 20th Congressional District, will discuss his personal experiences in "Legislating the Authorization of Lincoln Home National Historic Site: A Twenty-Year Perspective."

Registration is $20 per person and includes a luncheon. Make checks payable to Eastern National Park & Monument Association with a memo of "Colloquim" and mail to:

Lincoln Colloquim
Lincoln Home National Historic Site
413 South Eighth Street
Springfield, IL 62701-1905

MAY WE RECOMMEND...

"Pathways," the revived journal of the Preservation Association of Tudor Hall, Inc. Under the able editorship of Jeannine Clarke Dodels, this quarterly publication focuses on Booth family history and their role in 19th-century theatre. A recent issue carried a fine article by Michael Kauffman on 'The 1864 and 1865 Diaries of Junius Brutus Booth, Junior'. The annual subscription rate is $15. For further information, please contact P.A.T.H. at Tudor Hall, Tudor Hall, Tudor Lane, Bel Air, MD 21014.

THE WITNESS AND THE YOUNG BOY: NEW INFORMATION REGARDING THE TESTIMONY OF LOUIS J. WEICHMANN

By Erich L. Ewald

Members of the Surratt Society are fully appreciative that one of the most perplexing and controversial questions in American history is whether or not Mary Surratt was a part of, or at least knowledgeable of, the conspiracy to abduct or assassinate Abraham Lincoln. The historiographical record of the debate on this issue is quite lengthy, having commanded the attention of many writers and historians. The caliber of material published on the subject ranges across a broad spectrum embracing research by legitimate, respected historians to hacks pandering to the tastes of a gullible, sensationalist-minded public. However, the consensus among modern historians appears to be that regardless of her possible involvement and/or knowledge, Mrs. Surratt was at least innocent of the formal charges lodged against her by the Military Commission appointed to try the conspirators.

It will be recalled that the most incriminating evidence was brought against Mrs. Surratt by two principal witnesses whose credibility, then and now, is open to question--John Lloyd and Louis J. Weichmann. It is reasonably certain that Lloyd was coerced and intimidated prior to testifying before the Commission and it is a fair assessment that his testimony weighed most heavily against Mrs. Surratt.(1) However, it is equally probable that Louis Weichmann, John Surratt's former schoolmate and intimate companion, removed any remaining doubts which may have existed in the minds of the Commission members. An intelligent, educated and seemingly úpstanding young man, Weichmann presented a marked contrast to the drunken, disreputable tavern-keeper, Lloyd. With a steadiness, courage and seeming reluctance to implicate the woman who, in his own words, had treated him like a member of the family, Weichmann impressed at least two other members of the Commission--Generals Lew Wallace and T. M. Harris--of the truthfulness of his testimony.(2) Again, in the subsequent John Surratt trial of 1867, Weichmann reiterated his testimony (with previously undisclosed details and elaborations not mentioned in the 1865 trial) with such vigor and authority that he weathered quite well a very rigorous cross-examination by counsel for the defense.(3)

The owner of the theatre in which Lincoln was shot, John T. Ford, who was incarcerated with both Lloyd and Weichmann prior to the trial, claimed that the young man had been definitely coerced into bringing damaging evidence against the accused. In fact, after having overheard statements made by Weichmann during his confinement, Ford was amazed at the dramatic shift in Weichmann's testimony to the Commission.(4) Members of the Surratt Society are familiar with the writings of a long line of respected historians, from Lloyd Lewis to Dr. Joseph George and Alfred Isacsson, who have concluded, to one degree or another, that much of Weichmann's testimony was fabricated or distorted and that he, in essence, turned "state's evidence" to avoid prosecution, himself. Since this distorted testimony resulted in Mrs. Surratt's inglorious end, Weichmann has been the subject of much censure by historians.(5) Furthermore, if John Surratt can be believed, Weichmann was not only knowledgeable of the plot to abduct Lincoln, but was only prevented from active participation in the conspiracy by Booth's mistrust of the young man who could neither shoot a gun nor ride a horse.(6)

However, the most damning statement disparaging Weichmann's credibility was made only four days after Mrs. Surratt's execution, by one of his acquaintances, John Brophy. In a lengthy article published by the Washington "Constitutional Union", Brophy claimed, among many other things, "...That since this trial closed, he told me that he was arrested as a conspirator and threatened with death by Mr. Stanton and Mr. Burnett unless he would at once reveal all about the assassination--they [Mr. Stanton and Mr. Burnett] alleging that he [Weichmann] knew all about it." Additionally, Brophy stated, "...That since the trial closed, he told me he thought Mrs. Surratt to be innocent, saying her son John was the guilty one...".(7)

Weichmann immediately denied these charges and began what would become a life-long obsession with defending his testimony before the world. As detractors surfaced at regular intervals in later years, Weichmann would eventually devote

a great deal of time and energy to refuting the allegations of perjury lodged against him. Indeed, if family accounts can be trusted, Weichmann's obsession ended, literally, on his death bed when he allegedly dictated a statement to the effect that everything he had testified during those great trials was the absolute truth.(8)

After having been removed from a custom-house position in his native city of Philadelphia in 1886, Weichmann moved to Anderson, Indiana where his sisters lived and where his younger brother, Father Fred Weichmann, would eventually serve as assistant pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church. After holding some teaching positions in this community, he opened a well-respected business school teaching languages, shorthand, typing and accounting.(9) It was during this period, apparently, that Weichmann began a manuscript defending his testimony given during both assassination trials. Not published in his lifetime, the manuscript was discovered and published by Floyd Risvold in the 1970's under the title, "A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and of the Conspiracy of 1865". Purporting to be a full and frank exploration of the assassination as witnessed by a loyal, innocent bystander, this "True History" can only be considered a rehash of assassination material already existent in print at the turn of the century. Far from providing original and intimate insight into the inner workings of the conspiracy, Weichmann's manuscript contributes nothing of great value to the historian beyond a few irrelevant details.

But, was this manuscript a true reflection of Weichmann's thoughts on the conspiracy? Had he really told the truth during the trials, or was he still--despite his continued avowals--hiding something from the world? Specifically, and to the point of this instant article, did Weichmann's later career in Anderson contain any additional, spontaneous "confessions" similar to those he was alleged to have made at previous stages of his life? As mentioned above, much excellent material has already been written on Weichmann. Yet, it seemed to me that his career in Anderson had been relatively unexplored by previous researchers and it was to answer these questions that I recently embarked upon a study to see if any material existed in this community which has escaped other writers and which might contribute to a better understanding of the witness and his testimony.

Early in the endeavor, I was struck by a paragraph in Wanda Meryle Fredricks' unpublished Master's thesis on the history of St. Mary's Church. While researching the early days of the parish, Mrs. Fredricks became peripherally interested in Father Weichmann and his famous brother. In 1965, Mrs. Fredricks interviewed an elderly member of the parish, Joseph Abel. Fredricks wrote:

> "Besides owning the business college, Louis Weichmann also taught night school, and two of his pupils were Kate Flanigan and Joseph Abel. One night in 1898, during a blizzard, Joe was the only pupil who showed up at the school, so Louis told him the story of Mary Surratt and his association with her. He had already finished one book which was still in manuscript form, and he was working on the second. Louis let the young boy take the manuscript home to read. The books were written in order to tell Weichmann's story AND TO CLEAR THE NAME OF MRS. SURRATT. The first book gave the history of the plot up to the time of the trial, and the second was on the trial itself."(10)

This statement aroused my curiousity; had Mr. Abel, who was 83 years old at the time of the interview(11) simply misunderstood the manuscript given him by Weichmann? Was his memory understandably faulty after the passage of nearly seventy years, or was it possible that the original draft had been a belated cleansing of Weichmann's conscience and an acknowledgement that he has perjured himself on the stand in 1865 and 1867? Nagged by this question, I contacted Mrs. Fredricks to see if the Abel interview transcript still survived; Mrs. Fredricks wrote back to inform me that she, unfortunately, no longer had that material. Unwilling to give up, it was my eventual good fortune to learn through one of Mr. Abel's surviving relatives that he had written several informal articles on his early life and of the early days of St. Mary's parish. Accordingly, I examined the archives of St. Mary's Church to determine if any of these documents still survived. To my delight, and to the surprise of the Rectory assistant, Mrs. Joan

Sauter, buried in the files were several articles written by Abel which he placed there in 1972, four years before his death.(12) One of these pieces is entitled, "A History Of The Trial Of Mrs. Surratt As Told To Me By A Lewis Weichman At The Time Of President Lincoln's Assassination". This manuscript, consisting of six typewritten pages, is a confirmative account of what Weichmann apparently told Abel during that snowy evening in 1898. I am enclosing a complete copy of this document for the files of the Surratt Society and for the benefit of any future researchers into the life of Louis Weichmann. For the purposes of the article, I will extract only a few of the most pertinent sections.

For this is a most curious document and one which needs to be examined with great care. In it, Abel reiterates that Weichmann had testified to him, a roughly educated fifteen year old boy, that he had testified under duress during the trials and that Mrs. Surratt was innocent. As it is extremely doubtful that Mr. Abel was even aware of John Brophy, it is of great significance that Abel's narrative resembles, in its few clear points, Brohpy's major allegations. Abel's version of his encounter with Weichmann is as follows:

> "About the year 1894, Mr. Lewis Weichman came to Anderson. He had two sisters living here and our Pastor, Father Weichman, was his brother. He age was about 55.
>
> A Mr. and Mrs. Curan ran a business college in the Grand Hotel at the corner of Main and 11th Streets, and Weichman went with them as a Professor of Mathematics. About the middle of the term Mr. Curan died and his widow carried on until the end of the term when it folded. At that time Mr. Weichman started a college of his own in the Decker Block on Meridian Street between 10th and 11th.
>
> Since I had to quit school at 14 years of age, I did not have much education so I signed up for night school 3 nights a week. Mr. Weichman, had about 8 or 10 students in his night classes. One stormy night I was the only student to show up, so instead of classes he said, 'Joe how would you like to hear about the trial of Mrs. Mary Surrat in the assassination of President Lincoln?' So he told me all about the trial and HOW HE WAS FORCED TO TESTIFY AGAINST HER UNWILLINGLY, as it was mainly on his testamony that they found her guilty. He also said he was writing a book about the trial. In fact, two books. He had finished one in manuscript form and asked if I wanted to read it. I said sure, so I took the manuscript home to read. He was writing this book TO EASE HIS CONSCIENCE AND SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT. If the book had been published it would have created quite a furor in Washington and the Country. As I was only 15 years old, I did not realize the importance of it, and I only listened to him and read the manuscript only to please him, but the memory still lingers, especially on Lincoln's birthday. In his book HE CLAIMED THAT MRS. SURRAT WAS INNOCENT. Why was Weichman not indited the same as Mrs. Surrat, as he was a spectator at these meetings, as was Mrs. Surrat? I can only surmise that Stanton wanted a witness who knew of the meetings, and desperately wanted a victim."(13)

Upon reading the entire Abel manuscript it will become immediately apparent that the balance of the document represents Abel's limited understanding of the assassination as he interpreted it through the few secondary sources he may have read. It is readily apparent, also, that this is a most confusing document in that it is difficult to ascertain exactly what Abel had gathered from other sources and what he had actually heard from Weichmann and had read in the latter's manuscript. In this context, one of the most curious passages refers to the meetings to which Mrs. Surratt was, according to Weichmann, a spectator:

> "John Wilkes Booth was a very good actor with quite a reputation, as was his father, and he was a hero among the younger generation. He had collected quite a following and picking out the most radical, of whom John Surrat was the leader, he told them of his plan to assassinate Lincoln. The meetings were held at the Surrat home. Now at these meetings, Mrs. Surrat chided the boys, and at one time when Booth gave a knife to young John to kill Seward, who was Secretary of State who was to be assassinated with Lincoln, she took the knife away, but Booth retrieved it again. Now why was this not

reported to the officials? Well, Washington majority were in favor of the south and there were many rumors to assassinate Lincoln, and no attention was made of the rumors."

In what secondary works available to Abel could he have read this? Was this what Abel understood from Weichmann's manuscript, or did he pick this up from other sources?

Another curious passage is as follows:

"...Mrs. Surrat had a lawyer, but was not allowed to say anything. Mr. Weichman was the main witness, and when asked if Mrs. Surrat had the knife in her hand, he tried to tell of the circumstances, that she had taken it away from her son, but they would not let him. They said answer yes or no. He was asked who attended the meetings and he told them. When they asked Mrs. Surrat why her son was not in the army, she said he was sickly and could not volunteer. So that gave the court another point. When the boys were interrogated they were confused and frightened and blamed it all on Booth and gave conflicting evidence. So in the end Mrs. Surrat and the 4 boys were found guilty and sentenced to be hung. The first woman to be hung."

This is followed by what may be more reasonably determined as coming from Weichmann or based upon Abel's own personal observations:

"During the trial Weichman received many letters threatening him, calling him a government stooge, and they would kill him. But as we know he could not help it and IN HIS BOOK HE SAID THAT HAD IT BEEN A CIVIL TRIAL MRS. SURRAT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND INNOCENT, AS HER LAWYER COULD NOT BRING OUT THE REAL FACTS. But of course Stanton did not want that. After the trial Weichman was afraid and disappeared from Washington, and was not heard from until he arrived in Anderson in 1894. And even then he was still afraid. He had a room in the building where he had his business college and would not go out only when necessary, and then only on well-lighted streets."(14)

After attempting to summarize the capture of John Surratt and other later Reconstruction events, Abel concludes his manuscript with the following remarks:

"Now in writing the memoirs of Lewis Weichman, I have added some historical facts. And had I known at that time when I read the manuscript how important it would have been today, I sure would have had a copy of it. So I have just written what I remember of the main features."

Then, perhaps shedding new light on whether or not Weichmann ever became reconciled to the Church before his death, Abel states:

"Lewis Weichmann was so troubled in conscience that he left the Church because of what he had done unwillingly, but with the help of Father Moran our assistant Pastor, he returned before he passed away."

Unevenly educated as Joseph Abel may have been, he was nobody's fool; he asks why Weichmann was not indicted and, in asking that question, deftly summarizes decades of debate within the historical community. After making all allowances for its obvious factual errors, I believe that this is a most important document. Unlike Brophy, John Surratt and Henri Ste. Marie, Joseph Abel cannot be considered as having had an axe to grind with Louis Weichmann, as Abel's treatment of Weichmann leans toward the sympathetic side. Additionally, it is obvious from the other historical pieces that were found with this instant manuscript that Abel's memory was quite good. Alfred Isacsson has written several perceptive articles dealing with Weichmann's internal struggle and his mental need for reconciliation with his God. It seems to me that what Weichmann told Abel in 1898 was yet another in a broken, periodic series of attempts to make a clean breast of things and a belated attempt by the aging witness to make atonement. If Abel's memory can be trusted (and I am fully aware that this is a big "if"), it is obvious that the first draft of "A True History" was radically different from its final form as discovered by Risvold.

At any rate, I am submitting this information in the hope that it will add to the works in progress on that most elusive of characters, the mysterious Mr. Weichmann. I would be pleased to hear from any members of the Surratt Society

in connection with this subject and will continue my research in the confident expectation that more information might possibly be unearthed in the Anderson community which could contribute to a better understanding of that witness and his testimony.

NOTES

1. Of Lloyd and Weichmann, John T. Ford wrote that they "...were early conspicuous in their expressions of terror to most inmates of Carroll Prison. Many yet living may recall their fright...". John T. Ford, "Behind the Curtain of a Conspiracy", North American Review, Vol. CXLVIII (April, 1889), p. 484.

2. Wallace's admiring tribute to Weichmann's steadfastness is too well known to be repeated here. General Harris wrote, "His bearing before the court made it manifest that he felt very deeply the delicacy and gravity of this position; but that he could not shrink from a frank disclosure of the facts that had come within his knowledge, in connection with the case." T.M. Harris, (Rome's Responsibility for the Assassination of Lincoln", as reprinted by Heritage Manor, Incorporated, 1960, p. 25.

3. In the John Surratt trial, Weichmann was viciously attacked by counsel for the defense through the testimony of both John Ford and Louis Carland. See G. Moore's excellent "The Case of Mrs. Surratt", University of Oklahoma Press, 1954, pp. 86-87.

4. "I was affected by his (Weichmann's) evidence at the military court. It rather startled me that he should contradict to such an extent his statements made to me.", as quoted by Moore in "The Case of Mrs. Surratt", pp. 87-88.

5. Lloyd Lewis, "Myths After Lincoln", Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1929; Joseph George, "The Days Are Yet Dark", The Lincoln Group of Washington, Ft. McNair, March 15, 1983; Alfred Isacsson, "The Status of Weichman Studies", Surratt Courier, Vol. XI, no. 1, (January, 1986).

6. As stated in his 1870 Rockville, Maryland lecture, as reprinted in Floyd Risvold, ed., "A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and of the Conspiracy of 1865", Alfred Knopf, New York, 1975, p. 435. The erstwhile friend of both John Surratt and Louis Weichmann, the fabulously strange Henri Ste. Marie whose alleged experiences are the stuff of romance, offered his services to the government in 1865, stating: "...I have heard Weichman and Surratt say in my presence that they wished somebody would kill Lincoln that he would die one of these day[s] by the hands of an assassin, that he was a tyrant, a base and vulgar man. I would tell him [Weichmann] so in his face and he won't deny it...". (sic) Letter of May 23, 1865. Copy of the original is in the Weichmann file, Anderson Public Library.

7. As quoted by Moore, who includes the complete statement in "The Case of Mrs. Surratt", pp. 62-64.

8. As stated to Lloyd Lewis by two of Weichmann's sisters; see "Myths After Lincoln". This is a most controversial topic in that Weichmann's "deathbed statement" has never been discovered. The most knowledgeable Anderson authority on Weichmann is Mr. Kurt Lortz who has reason to believe that Weichmann could not have physically made this statement, or at least not in the time frame it was alleged to have been made. This writer is hopeful that Mr. Lortz will publish his research on this subject in the near future.

9. The Anderson Directory for 1902-1903 lists Weichmann as the "Propr. Anderson School of Business, Expert Accountant and Stenographer, Decker Elk., 1007 Meridian, h. 1403 W. 8th". See "R.L. Polk & Co.'s Anderson

City and Madison County Directory, 1902-1903", R.L. Polk & Co., Indianapolis, vol. 2, p. 413.

10. Emphasis added. Wanda Meryle Fredricks, "The Growth of the Catholic Church in Anderson, Indiana in Relation to National, State, and Local History", unpublished Master's thesis, Ball State University, Marcie, Indiana, 1966, p. 91.

11. B. 2/10/82 d. 121/30/76.

12. The other articles are entitled, "History of the Catholic Church in Anderson"; "The Prisoner Of Shark Island"; "The History Of The Knights of Columbus In Anderson, Indiana". Paper-clipped to the articles is a handwritten note stating, "June 21 - 1972 My Memory and impressions of the early days of the Catholic Church and people of Anderson Ind".

13. As mentioned above, Weichmann actually came to Anderson in 1886; his age in 1898 was 55. As with all following quotations from Abel's manuscript, emphasis has been added; spelling, punctuation, etc., has been unchanged by this writer.

14. This corresponds with Msgr. Thomas Conroy's letter to L. H. Warren of the Lincoln Museum Library, dated October 17, 1943. Basing his statement on testimony by Father Denis Mulcahy and Weichmann's unnamed personal secretary, Conroy wrote, "...in all the years of the school's life Wichman [sic] never stood with his back to a door.". Copy of the original is to be found in the Weichmann file, Anderson Public Library.

The Tragic Career of Louis J. Weichmann

by Erich L. Ewald

When John Wilkes Booth pulled the trigger of his derringer on Abraham Lincoln that fateful evening of April 14, 1865, he shattered whatever hopes there may have been for a rapid reconstruction of a nation torn by four years of bloody civil war. The magnanimous policy toward the ruined South expressed by Lincoln in his second Inaugural address was victimized by the assassination. Wracked by terror and infused with the spirit of revenge, the grieving North placed the fate of the country into the hands of lesser men who would stop at nothing to treat the Southern states not as entities returning to their proper relationship with the union, as Lincoln so regarded them, but as traitorous provinces to be subjugated to Congressional will.

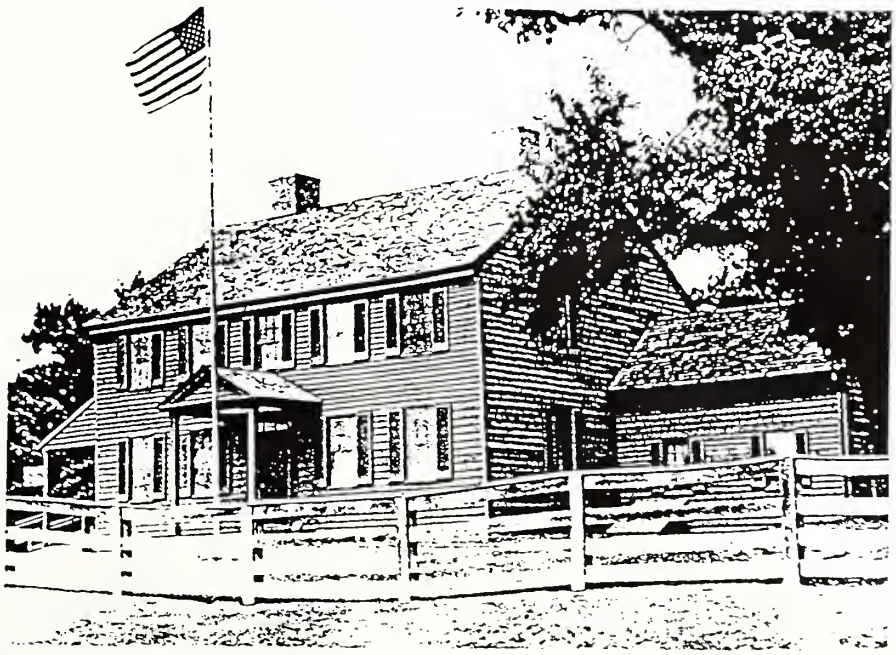
One radical Republican, frustrated by Lincoln's known wish for clemency, shook the hands of his Presidential successor and bluntly stated, "Johnson, we have great faith in you. By the gods, there will be no trouble now in running the government!" And, although the subsequent Reconstruction was not as harsh as the myth implied in the history books, it is a fair assessment that Booth's deed was as tragic as anything experienced by this republic in that it greatly retarded the reconciliation process between the two sections.

Apart from the tragedy imposed upon the nation and its destiny, Booth's act ruined the lives of many individuals who had been associated with him. Mrs. Mary E. Surratt - whose son, John, was definitely an accessory to the crime - operated the Washington, D.C. boarding house used as a meeting place by the conspirators, and was executed for her alleged complicity in the scheme. It was primarily upon the testimony of Louis J. Weichmann, John Surratt's friend and resident of the same boarding house, that Mrs. Surratt was hanged with three other conspirators on a hot summer's day in 1865.

Louis J. Weichmann - Circa 1865

What many Madison County residents may not know is that this witness, whose testimony was so crucial in the conspiracy trial conducted by military commission, died in Anderson in 1902, the subject of much censure by many people in the community. For, it was believed - then and now - that he gave perjured testimony upon the witness stand to save himself from implication in the plot, thereby sending a probably innocent woman to the gallows. How

The Surratt House & Tavern



Louis J. Weichmann came to live in Anderson, and the private hell he suffered during his fifteen year residence here, is a long story which illustrates both the human tragedy resulting from Booth's act as well as the connection of local history to national events.

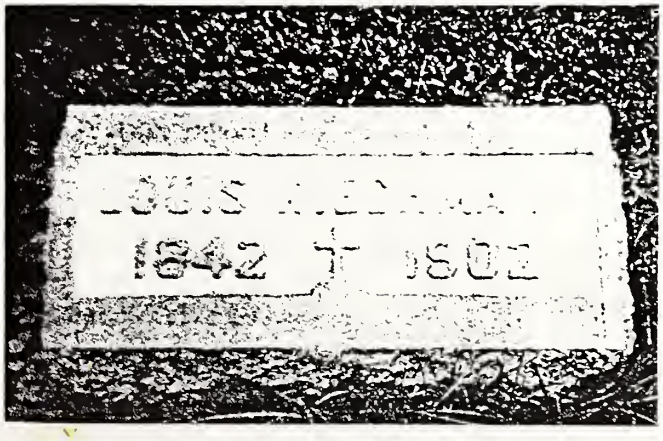
His real name was not Louis J. Weichmann, but Aloysius H. Wiechmann; he professed to be a loyal clerk in the War Department, but was probably instrumental in funneling confidential information to Confederate messengers, such as John Surratt; he reluctantly claimed that Mrs. Surratt was guilty, but was probably more knowledgeable than she of the original and earlier conspiracy to abduct Lincoln; he claimed to the very end that he had testified truly during the conspiracy trials, but told a fifteen-year-old Anderson boy that he had been coerced by the government into giving damaging evidence against Mrs. Surratt. Such was the paradox of the mysterious witness who carried many secrets to his grave in a midwestern town whose citizens alternately defended and pilloried him.

Son of hard-working German immigrants who eventually gravitated to Philadelphia, Weichmann entered St. Charles' preparatory Catholic seminary in Ellicott City, Maryland, near Baltimore, in 1859, hoping to become a priest. At the age of seventeen, Weichmann was a promising student whose intellectual gifts would develop at a later date into a remarkable aptitude for languages, stenography, and accounting. During that first seminary year, Weichmann met another new seminarian, John Harrison Surratt, Jr., a fiery southern sympathizer from Prince George's County, Maryland, who soon became his fast friend. After the war started, both friends continued their studies at the seminary, but neither could stay aloof from that conflict for long. After his father's death in 1862, Surratt left St. Charles' to fill out his father's term as postmaster, a business which was conducted at the family tavern in Surrattsville, (now Clinton) Maryland.

Not too long after his departure, Surratt entered into another occupation, that of a Confederate courier riding through the lines between Richmond and the secret rebel mission in Canada. Meanwhile, for reasons which remain unclear, Weichmann was refused entry to the major seminary of St. Mary's in Baltimore and left St. Charles' as a result. Still hoping to become a priest, Weichmann taught in various schools near and in Washington until 1864, when he secured a position in the War Department's Commissary of Prisons. In November of that year, while Lee and Grant were locked in a death grip near Richmond and Sherman's armies were devastating Georgia, Weichmann became reacquainted with Surratt who, by this time, had moved into his mother's boarding house on H Street. Weichmann moved into the boarding house with John and was treated like a member of the family.

Students of the Lincoln assassination will recall that Booth was introduced by Dr. Samuel Mudd to Surratt and Weichmann in late December, 1864, and it was not too long after that meeting that Booth became a frequent caller at

Mrs. Surratt's boarding house. Between that time and March of 1865, Booth, John Surratt, and others concocted a fantastic plan to capture Lincoln and spirit him away through the infrequently patrolled byroads of lower Maryland, via Surrattsville, to the Confederate capital in Richmond. After the abduction - so went the plan - Lincoln would be ransomed for the thousands of Confederate prisoners being held in the Northern states at such locations as Johnson's Island, New York and Camp Douglas in Chicago. Booth reasoned that this bold venture, if successful, would place large numbers of rebel veterans back into the ranks and give the Confederacy enough manpower to carry on the war until the North lost the will to fight.



After at least one abortive effort to capture Lincoln in March, 1865, Booth abruptly changed the plan to assassination. As Richmond had fallen and Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered by April 14th, it is not clear what Booth hoped to accomplish by this rash act. Some believed, and still believe, that this scion of the most illustrious theatrical family in America had inherited the partial insanity which had gripped his father and grandfather. Others believed, with much more supporting evidence, that Booth had been drinking excessively in the days immediately preceding the assassination and that his reasoning faculties were clouded by an alcoholic haze. At any rate, the letters and communications he left behind in his Washington hotel room after the assassination effectively compromised the small coterie of followers who had been involved in the original abduction plot. Anyone connected with Booth and Surratt in the months prior to the assassination, including Louis Weichmann - who had entertained both conspirators after hours in his War Department office - were immediately confined and examined by the military authorities.

During the conspiracy trial held before the Military Commission, which began its proceeding in May, and in the subsequent John Surratt trial of 1867, the government's case rested largely upon the testimony of John Loyd, a most disreputable character who leased Mrs. Surratt's tavern at Surrattsville, and Louis Weichmann, former student for the priesthood and current War Department clerk. The defense counsel in both trials openly accused Weichmann of supplying John Surratt with confidential information on the Confederate prisoners held in the North and of having had knowledge of the original abduction plot. John Surratt, who escaped to Canada and was later apprehended in Egypt, made this same accusation in his only public lecture in Rockville, Maryland in 1870, and most historians have come to the same conclusion. However, despite some rough handling by counsel for the defense, Weichmann testified with such an air of authority and sincerity that he impressed those who heard him. One of the members of the Military Commission, General Lew Wallace of "Ben Hur" fame, wrote in his autobiography a glowing tribute to the young man's steadfast, unshakable courage in testifying against his former intimate companions.

After the war, Weichmann was awarded a clerkship at the Philadelphia custom-house and held that position until his removal from office in the aftermath of the Democratic presidential victory of 1884. Leaving an estranged wife behind in the city, Weichmann moved to Anderson where his sisters lived and where his younger brother, Father Frederick Weichmann, would eventually serve as assistant pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church. Eventually, Louis opened a well respected business school in the city which he operated with uneven success until his death in 1902.

Continued on Page 34, Column 1

Weichmann worked in Anderson with little notoriety until April, 1896, when an event took place which would forever change his relationship with his Anderson neighbors. In that month Century Magazine, one of the most influential publications at the turn of the century, published a full article on the Lincoln assassination. In this article, written by Victor Louis Mason, some of the old questions regarding the truthfulness of Weichmann's testimony resurfaced and, once again, Weichmann was brought back under the public's eye. Despite the popularity of Father Weichmann, Louis was increasingly shunned by some members of the Catholic community and denunciations of his character began to circulate among local Democrats who, like their national party during various elections from 1865 onward, had used Mrs. Surratt's name as a rallying cry against Republican injustice.

Despite the attacks upon his character, Weichmann was not without friends in the community. Weichmann's business, while never extraordinarily successful, was well-conducted and his reputation among businessmen was quite good. He was bulwarked, also, by the local Republicans who believed that Weichmann was a loyal Union man who was being persecuted for having testified against rebel traitors. Among the local Republicans was Weichmann's brother-in-law, Charles O'Crowley who, according to Father Denis Mulcahy of St. Mary's Catholic Church, "... was particularly shunned ... " because of his loud and repeated defenses of Weichmann's testimony.

It was during this period, apparently, that Weichmann began composing his memoirs which he was unable, or unwilling, to publish in his lifetime. This manuscript was discovered by Floyd Risvold in the mid -1970's and was published by Alfred A. Knopf under the title, "A True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and of the Conspiracy of 1865." This book is now available in the Indiana Room of the Anderson Public Library. Those who seek a better understanding of the inner workings of the conspiracy should be advised that Weichmann's manuscript is a rehash of his earlier testimony and draws additional material from sources readily available at the turn of the century. In the manuscript, Weichmann repeated that Mrs. Surratt was guilty as charged and that he had told nothing but the truth during those great trails. However, a new document, recently discovered by the author, has surfaced which indicates that in 1898, during a blizzard, Weichmann told a fifteen-year-old Anderson student, Joseph Abel, who was enrolled in his night classes, that he had been coerced by the government and that Mrs. Surratt was innocent. This document, written by Mr. Abel in 1972, is a remarkable continuation of several other "spontaneous" confessions that Weichmann was alleged to have made after the execution of Mrs. Surratt.

Whether or not he was living a lie, there is no question that he suffered from great anxiety during his career in Anderson. Much testimony exists that during his residence in this city, Weichmann would never stand with his back to a door or go out onto the city streets after dark. Fear of reprisal from John Surratt, who lived in obscurity in Baltimore after his trial in 1867, or from friends of Mrs. Surratt, was undoubtedly heightened by the fact that other members of the Surratt family moved to Anderson in the mid-1890's and were engaged in the grocery business here.

Weichmann was a broken man, aged beyond his sixty years, when he died on June 5, 1902. It was written in the next morning's Anderson Herald obituary that in his final hours Weichmann was given the last rites by his brother and was reconciled to the Church. After a life of storm and controversy, Louis J. Weichmann rests in peace. ■

File Weckmann, Louis J.

Surratt Courier

A publication of the Surratt Society

Vol. XVII - No. 4
April 1992
Ellen Watson, Editor

Surratt House & Tavern - 868-1121
PO Box 427 - 9110 Brandywine Road
Clinton, Maryland 20735

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Surratt Society is an unusual organization. As a group, we don't attempt to take one stand on any aspect of the Lincoln assassination--except one, Lincoln was shot by Booth on April 14, 1865 at Ford's Theatre. If we polled our roughly 900 members, we would probably have about 900 variations on my original statement. (In fact, I will probably get at least one letter telling me that even that statement is wrong!) For example, several of our members have recently expressed in our newsletter their own theories on Booth's demise.

With the publicity about the Department of the Army's Board for Correction of Military Records' review of Dr. Mudd's trial and their focusing on the legality of the military court, visitors to the museum are asking how this will affect Mrs. Surratt's conviction. Will we pursue an exoneration? I thought that the time was right to reiterate the Society's stand on these historic events.

We are primarily a volunteer organization devoted to the preservation and interpretation of the Mary Surratt House and Tavern Museum with about 10% of our membership donating their time at the historic site. Those Society members who give tours at the Surratt House and Tavern Museum try to present an overview of the history and customs that prevailed during the Surratts' ownership. When asked about Mrs. Surratt's involvement in the Lincoln assassination,

(con't on page 2)

!!!MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!!

April 11 & 25--**JOHN WILKES BOOTH ESCAPE ROUTE TOUR** (filled - write or call the museum to be placed on fall mailing list)

April 13--**SURRATT SOCIETY MEETS** with a special program by Tee Loftin, author of Contest for a Capital, on early Washington, D.C. history. 7:30pm, St. John's School, 8912 Old Branch Avenue, Clinton, MD.

May 13--**BEHIND THE GATES AND DOWN THE LANE**, a special bus tour on manor life in 18th-century southern Prince George's County. Featuring Harmony Hall, His Lordship's Kindness, Darnall's Chance, St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, and Mattaponi. Call the museum at 301-868-1121 to receive complete details. Tour commemorates Historic Preservation Month.

May 26--**AN EVENING WITH A. LINCOLN** at the Society's 16th Annual Banquet. Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington DC. See March "Courier" for details and reservation form OR call the museum at 301-868-1121. Highlight of the evening will be a first-person presentation by famed Lincoln impersonator James Getty.

June 4-September 13--**THE RELICS OF WAR**, a special exhibit of Civil War memorabilia drawn from local collections. During regular public tour hours at the museum.

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NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE

Society member Stephen M. Archer is the author of a biography, Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus, highlighting the life and career of the volatile head of the Booth theatrical dynasty. Recently released by Southern Illinois University Press, this fascinating work will interest scholars of American theatrical history, the history of Shakespeare on stage, and American cultural history. It will be available after mid-May through our gift shop at $35 ppd. (Maryland residents add 5% sales tax.)

Our museum gift shop has stocked a new paperback entitled On This Spot: Pinpointing the Past in Washington, DC. Short, concise narratives and good photographs highlight the history, architecture, and culture of our capital city from the 1790s to present. This book is available at $12.50 ppd. (Maryland residents must add 5% sales tax.) Address orders to Surratt House Museum, P.O. Box 427, Clinton, MD 20735.

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ON THE LINCOLN FRONT

1993 will mark the centenary of the first statue erected to Abraham Lincoln outside his own country. The Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia, Inc. is planning to commemorate this historic milestone at the statue's site--the Old Calton Burying Ground in Edinburgh, Scotland--on August 21, 1993, the 100th anniversary of its dedication.

Preliminary plans include a speech at the rededication ceremony by former British Cabinet Member and Parliamentarian Lord Longford, a Lincoln biographer, and a luncheon address by Lincoln scholar Gabor S. Boritt. Attendance by distinguished guests from both sides of the Atlantic as well as Civil war reenactors based in the United Kingdom is also expected.

Interested persons may contact Paul Kallina at 301-933-3255 for further information.

* * * * * * *

OUR SYMPATHIES to the family of longtime Society member OK Johnson of Milwaukee, Wisconsin who passed away in January.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (con't from p. 1)

the Surratt Society does not take an official stand on this question, as there is not enough evidence yet available to show the true extent of her involvement. Our volunteers pride themselves on their professionalism and try to present only documented facts.

The Surratt Society also provides a forum for historians to present their theories and information on the Lincoln assassination. As members are still finding important clues, perhaps one day we will know what really happened. Until then, the Surratt Society will stay neutral and present only documented facts.

Louise Oertly

* * * * * * *

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sterling Springston- Falls Church, VA
Diana Speck - Kansas City, MO
Raymond E. Whitacre- Temple Hills, MD
Patricia & Joseph Russo- Wildwood, NJ
Charles E. Hoffert - Chester, VA
Kathi Hall - Falls Church, VA
Robert & Judy Rollman-Ellicott CityMD

* * * * * * *

A large welcome to our newest **LIFE MEMBER**, Dennis Hall of Falls Church, VA.

* * * * * * *

NEW YORK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE 1992 BARONDESS/LINCOLN AWARD

The New York CWRT has announced the recipient of the annual Barondess/Lincoln Award for 1992. Receiving this honor is Mark E. Neely, Jr., author of The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties. Mr. Neely has been the director of The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana since 1973 and has written numerous articles and books on our 16th President as well as having been involved with several major Civil War exhibits. The Barondess/Lincoln Award is presented in recognition of contributions to the greater appreciation of the life and works of Abraham Lincoln.

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1992 TUDOR HALL CONFERENCE

The Preservation Association for Tudor Hall will present the 1992 Tudor Hall Conference Weekend on May 2 and 3. Saturday will feature a bus tour, "Footprints of the Booths," under the direction of Michael W. Kauffman. Visits will be made to various sites in Baltimore and Harford County relating to the Booth family, the Lincoln assassination, and the Civil War, and will include luncheon at The Milton Inn.

On Sunday the Conference will take place at the Officers Club of the Aberdeen Proving Grounds and at Tudor Hall. Featured speakers include Dr. John K. Lattimer, Dr. Stephen M. Archer, and Dr. Terry Alford. An afternoon panel discussion will feature James O. Hall, Michael W. Kauffman, and Bob Allen discussing current topics relating to the Lincoln assassination, with active audience participation encouraged. Dr. John K. Lattimer will also present for display a number of items from his remarkable collection of Booth and assassination artifacts at Tudor Hall.

The weekend will end on a festive, but relaxing, note with a Sunday evening barbecue on the lawn of historic Tudor Hall. Period dress is encouraged, but not required. (For more information, contact Tudor Hall in Bel Air at 410-838-0466.)

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A REMINDER

The Surratt Society sponsors bus tours throughout the year, and interested members should request to have their names added to special mailing lists to receive information and reservation forms for these tours.

The next tour is scheduled for May 13, and information is given on the front page of this newsletter. Another is planned in September and will include a tour of the Antietam battlefield.

These tours are handled by mailing lists over and above the ones we maintain for the Booth tours. If interested in participating, send names and addresses marked "Special Tours" to the museum at the address listed on our masthead.

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DEAR EDITOR

I read Nate Orlowek's comments in a recent issue of The Courier. As a long time student of the case, and having read everything on the debate over the mummy's authenticity, I think it's ridiculous to entertain any belief that David E. George was really Booth. This debate was conducted years ago, and there is really little else to say. However, new proponents of the mummy legend have been stirring it up again for a new generation. Thanks for printing both sides of the case so that the new generation can see how really ridiculous the mummy story is!

Incidentally, Nate says that the statement of the doctors who examined the mummy has never been published. Not so!! I think Nate was one of my subscribers in 1976 when I published it in my old newsletter The Lincoln Log. It can be found in the Nov/Dec, 1976 issue. Richard Sloan

THE BIRTH OF THE EASTER PARADE

We are all quite familiar with New York's famous Easter Parade on 5th Avenue, but how many of us know the origin of it? Did you know that it dates to the 1860s? At that time, the Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion was located at 6th Avenue and 20th Street ("in town"). The church ran St. Luke's Hospital at 5th Avenue and 24th Street (on the outskirts of Manhattan) under the auspices of the Sisterhood of the Holy Communion which had been founded, along with the hospital, by the church's rector, the Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg. In an era where the Episcopal church was rather staid in its services and ceremonies, Rev. Muhlenberg restored flowers in the church, especially on Easter mornings. Rather than waste the flowers after service, the ladies of the church would gather them and, together with their husbands and other members of the parish, would walk across to 5th Avenue and then thirty-four blocks uptown to St. Luke's Hospital where the flowers would be distributed among the patients. This "parade" soon became an annual and unusual event in the life of Manhattan--a large group of finely dressed individuals walking with flowers--and people came out to watch them pass. And so was born the Easter Parade.

THE BUTCHER'S TALE: THE PRIMARY DOCUMENTATION OF "CHRIS RITTER'S" CONFRONTATION WITH LOUIS J. WEICHMANN

BY ERICK L. EWALD

EDITOR'S NOTE: Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...! Over the past several months, we have wrestled with the Booth escape theory as presented by members Nate Orlowek and Dr. Arthur Ben Chitty. Society member Erich Ewald of Anderson Indiana is now providing another angle with an 1897 article on Booth's "escape" to South America. We have been reminded that other theories place Booth in India, Mexico, and other sites in the U.S. Does it not seem that so many theories would cancel each other out and only serve to validate history's claim that the assassin did die at Garrett's Farm?

While researching the career of Louis J. Weichmann in Anderson, Indiana, I have come across a primary document which should be of great interest to the readers of the "Surratt Courier". It is curious that "Chris Ritter's" 1897 confrontation with Weichmann in an Anderson, Indiana restaurant has received little attention from previous historians. In the January 31, 1897 Anderson Morning Herald article, printed below, the reader will see that "Ritter" - if indeed, that was his real name - claimed to have helped John Wilkes Booth escape to South America. Dropped into Ritter's testimony, almost as an aside, is his inference that he and Weichmann had known each other in Washington and he strongly implied that they had been lodge brothers in the local "Knights of the Golden Circle." While this newspaper article is not unknown to previous scholars - its general contents having been previously noted by both Floyd Risvold and Alfred Isaacson -I do not believe that the full text has been printed prior to this time.

I am currently engaged in examining "Ritter's" motives in making these wild allegations, for it is my belief that he gave this story in order to harass Weichmann in the Anderson community. The publication of Ritter's story, then, is to serve as a base of reference to that future article.

Here is "Chris Ritter's" story, as reported by the Anderson Morning Herald, January 31, 1897:

"HELPED BOOTH"

Strange Revelation Made By an
Anderson Man

JOHN WILKES BOOTH YET LIVING

Edward Fox Was the One Killed - Anderson
Man Conducted Booth to South
America--The Romance of It.

The man lives in Anderson, who according to his own story, was more closely connected with John Wilkes Booth, after the assassination of President Lincoln, than any man living. He helped Booth to escape to South America, so he says, and tells a story so straight that despite the evidence to the contrary, is well nigh convincing. About the story too, there is a setting of romance that makes it of surpassing interest. This man was not a witness at the trials of the conspirators. He was then in South America. But at this late day he contributes direct testimony that would set at naught the records at Washington, or would stamp him as one of the most remarkable genuises of the time, in the art of constructing out of given circumstances plots that are freighted with most powerful significance.

The man is Christopher C. Ritter. He came to Anderson three months ago and started a meat shop on Nineteenth street. He operated it successfully until three weeks ago, when a distressing and painful carbuncle appeared on his neck and he is now at St. John's hospital. He is a stockily built German, apparently about fifty years old. He is possessed of a large fund of knowledge, mostly political, and though his accent is broken, he speaks in good English and has proven a companionable and interesting man. The carbuncle is now improving, and when well he expects to again take to his block, and in the quiet way that characterized him before, sell meat to the neighborhood in the south of the city. Ritter kept his story thirty years. He was bound to do this by an oath he took in the Knights of the Golden Circle lodge. The thirty years expired a year ago last April, and after considerable reluctance he gave to the Herald the statement of his history. He is engaged in writing a book, which will give it in greater detail. but [sic] the book will not be completed for some time.

FIRST MEETING WITH BOOTH

Ritter was born of noble parentage in 1849, in Wurtemburg, Germany. Three years later his father, because of having engaged in a revolutionary uprising, was banished with others from the country. Among the others were Carl Schurz, well known, and David Enoth. The elder Ritter came to America, and his family went to a little town known as Helatte, situated in the Pyrenean Alps, in Italy. Enoth went to Brazil. His name should be kept in mind, for he appears again in an interesting light. The wife of the elder Ritter had been a friend of princess Olga, of Russia, and when the latter married Carl, son of King Wilhelm, of Germany, she was enabled to successfully intercede for her husband's recall. Her prayer was granted in 1854, and the little family again gathered on their large estate in Wurtemburg.

Young Ritter was eighteen when he visited Stuttgart. He met there, in an accidental way, Para Adeline Unoth, and immediately on the two young people finding their fathers had been comrades and friends fifteen years before, they became close friends and soon after lovers. The young lady introduced Ritter to her older sister, Carrie Voila Unoth, and also to John Wilkes Booth, who was at that time paying court to the sister. This was in 1863. The elder sister, though but twenty-four years of age, had appeared on the stage in Ford's Theatre, at Washington, and there became the fiancee of Booth. He was now in Europe obtaining, under an assumed name, men and munitions of war for the cause of the Confederacy. Ritter's sentiments favored the Confederate cause and Booth's pleadings turned them into convictions. The two men not only became warm friends in the few days before they parted, but Ritter had determined to come to America and exercise his military instinct and knowledge in the aid of the Southern States. He became engaged to the younger Miss Unoth.

The elder Miss Unoth had aspired to play in German dramas, and was at Stuttgart to familiarize herself more closely with the German language. The younger sister had come to Stuttgart to be with her and to study music. They returned to their home, Para, Brazil, a few months after the young men left them.

MEETS BOOTH IN GERMANY

The following September, Ritter ran away from home, obtained a passport from a man who had given up crossing, and he landed in Buffalo, N.Y., Oct. 14. He there met Booth. The two went direct to Washington, then to Louisville. From there they went to Lexington Ky., and Ritter joined Morgan's Confederate troops. Three months afterward, Ritter received a severe bullet wound in the shoulder at Cynthiana, Ky. He went to Cincinnati, and was cared for in a hospital at Covington.

Ritter had come into a patrimony of $12,000 at his mother's death and had plenty of money. His father, however, was for the maintenance of the American Union, and though the young man endeavored to make him believe that he was in the Northern States engaged in the milling industry, the sad truth of the affair had lately dawned upon the old gentleman, and he was going to disinherit him. To regain the father's graces, Ritter returned to Germany. By this time, too, he had changed his mind regarding the virtue of the Confederate cause, and would have liked to confess and rid himself of responsibility for his past career. The father partially condoned him and he then came back to America. He landed in Washington, March 9, 1865, thirty-five days before Lincoln was assassinated. Booth was then playing in Baltimore, but in a few days he came on to Washington, and the two friends and prospective brother in laws [sic] were almost inseparable.

KNIGHTS OF THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

The Knights of the Golden Circle had their headquarters in the third story of the old Pennsylvania hotel, in Washington. It was a half block above Ford's theater. Booth was a leading member, and the two young men were in these rooms most of the time. Booth was the only one Ritter knew, and he cared for Booth more than for anyone he had known. Booth led him into this infamous crowd, and Booth introduced him to his first and almost only acquaintances-men in that order.

After associating with the men freely, Ritter was taken into the order on the night of April 10, four days prior to the assassination. A Knights of the Golden Circle charm was attached to his chain by Edwin Booth, the great actor, and the brother of John Wilkes Booth.

A digression might profitably be made here. About two weeks ago, Ritter had stepped into the South Side restaurant. He heard what appeared to be a familiar voice as he was going out, and turning asked a man near him who the gentleman was. The man only knew that he was a professor in the Anderson Normal University. Ritter followed the speaker out and to the corner, when a policeman responded, 'That is Louis Weichmann.' Ritter overtook Weichmann and addressed him. 'I believe you have the best of me,' said Weichmann. There upon Ritter told his name and showed Weichmann this charm. 'Rittenspurr you mean,' said Weichmann. 'No,' said Ritter, 'It was Rittenspurr, but when I was naturalized, I cut the name in two. It is now Ritter.' They talked but a moment and separated. But they knew one another.

WANTED TO KIDNAP LINCOLN

Ritter recognized there was an 'inner circle' in his lodge, and that this circle contemplated kidnapping the President. Dave Herrole [sic], afterwards hung for complicity in the assassination, first told him definitely regarding the plan and wanted him to join. 'No' said Ritter, 'my father knew "Old Abe" and liked him. I have met him and I like him. I will engage in nothing to do him harm.' The plan was to kidnap the President, take him to an old chateau near Washington and then out on the sea. They would hold him until certain legislation could be forced from Congress. Ritter, however, would not serve as a catspaw to draw chestnuts out of the fire.

BOOTH MAKING READY

At six o'clock on the evening of the assassination, Booth found Ritter at the bar in the Pennsylvania hotel. The two drank together and then Booth invited him to go to the Dago's, a block and a half below Ford's theater. On the way Booth said, 'Ritter, we might want to leave tonight to see our friends in Brazil. Would you be ready?' Ritter was unsuspecting and shifted the subject. Booth was silent for a few moments. Then he said: 'Have you any money about you? I might need to know a great deal before morning.' Ritter supposed he contemplated engaging in a poker game. He said he supposed he could help him. Booth later wanted to borrow where he could find him at 10 o'clock. Ritter said he would be at the lodge rooms.

Edward Brink, the actor, came along and Booth joined him to go to the theater. Ritter went to the lodge rooms and engaged in a game of 'six and six.'

AFTER THE ASSASSINATION

Shortly after 10 o'clock that night, Ritter heard a great noise in the street below. Then there was a tolling of bells and then a perfect bedlam. He went to the window. Out of the din, he heard the cries, 'Lincoln is murdered.' He turned and was assuring the crowd within of the terrible news, when a key turned in the door, the door pushed open, and John Wilkes Booth, in great excitement appeared. Throwing up his hands he exclaimed: 'Men, I have murdered Lincoln, but I have broken my leg doing it.' He then talked about the great blow that he had thrust that humanity might be saved, and turned to Ritter. 'David,' he said, 'will you stay with me?'

In the Knights of the Golden Circle members were paired off. One of each pair was Johnathan, the other David, and with daggers at their hearts they had taken oaths, one to serve the other, even unto death. The awful seriousness of this oath now appeared before Ritter and staggered him. But after reflection, remembering his honor as a man, and his family name he said, 'I will.' Booth was limping out with a cedar limb which he had picked up in the alley, as a cane.

Then Ritter as directed went to Kolb & Fox's stable and got three saddle horses. He took them to the rear of the Dago's restaurant, where he met Booth and Robert E. Stinton, another actor. Plasterers had thrown several lime colored suits aside, and the three men changed their broadcloth for them and donned the white caps. They left about 2 o'clock, intending to go to the home of Dr. Mudd, a well-known rebel sympathizer living out of Washington several miles. Booth was the only one who knew the way, and the pain in his leg was so excruciating that he did not notice at a cross roads and they went several miles in the wrong direction. They met two men and asked them how they could best get to Dr. Mudd's. They did not know, but said that a negro coming behind them could guide them to the home of Thomas Jones, overseer for Dr. Mudd.

When accosted, the negro would not go. He told them, however, of the sad murder of Lincoln the night before. They offered him $5 to go, but he returned that. Then Stinton pointed a pistol at him, and under this threat the negro conducted them. They arrived at Jones' at six o'clock. Stinton returned to Washington that day and for a week Booth and Ritter remained in hiding on Jones' premises. Ritter devoted his time to caring for Booth's leg. A government agent or two had brought [unreadable word] to the house to get Jones, but could never find him. However, it was getting too warm for Booth, and they decided to leave.

BOOTH'S PRIVATE PAPERS

Booth early found that he had left a stack of private papers in his clothes at the Dago's, and planned to get them. He directed Stinton to have Edward Fox, an actor, who by the way, closely resembled Booth, to put on Booth's clothes, Dave Herrole [sic] to put on Ritter's, and the two to meet and exchange, at Garrett's barn on the Potomac, on the morning of the 23rd.

At 2 o'clock that morning, Booth was put on a donkey. Jones walked by his side and Ritter carried a torch a half mile ahead. At the sight of any danger, he was to dip the torch. They went to the ferry, four miles away. There they turned the donkey loose, crossed the ferry, and hoped to get horses or a wagon for the rest of the way. In this they failed, and trudged along as best they could.

The ground was soft, and notwithstanding their help to Booth, the mud made walking heavy and occasioned an almost unbearable pain and soreness in his leg. After going four miles from the ferry, they had to stop. They went into what was known as Josephine's hut, where Ritter again bandaged the leg. They could go no farther, let come what might.

FOX WAS KILLED

A few hours later, a man whom Ritter did not know came to the hut. He slapped Booth on the shoulder and said, 'Booth you are a dead man. They killed you an hour and a half ago.' When he quieted he explained. Herrole [sic] and Fox had ridden from Washington to a cottage near the barn. They dismounted and were going to have their horses fed there. Fox was kicked in dismounting and his leg crippled. He had to be put on the horse and rode to the barn. Herrole [sic] walked beside him. Fox dismounted and hobbled into the barn with Herrole. [sic] No others came and government detectives charged on the barn. Fox swore he would fight for his life, and was killed. Herrole [sic] threw up his hands, surrendered and was later hung. Fox had on Booth's clothes, had Booth's papers, resembled Booth even to a scar on the neck, and in a hurried investigation was pronounced Booth. The captors were to share a reward of $75,000 and witnesses were not left unpaid who swore the corpse was that of Booth.

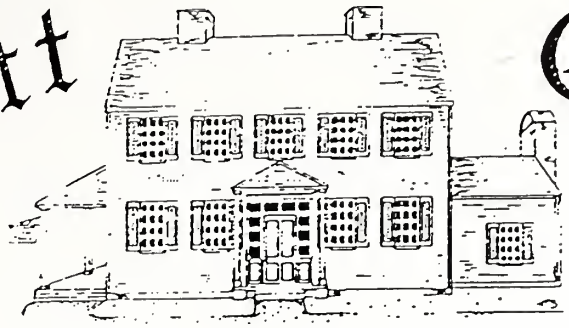
GO TO SOUTH AMERICA

On May 4, Booth and Ritter got on a boat and went up the Potomac to Philadelphia. They arrived there May 6, and the same day took a boat for South America. The boat took fire and they were landed at Trinidad. They went overland on donkeys to the Amazon, went by boat and rail to Para, Brazil. They were met at the station by David Unoth, or Unos, as he was then called. Two days later, Ritter married the younger sister. Booth's leg gave him renewed trouble by festering, and he did not marry the elder sister until fall. Eleven months later Ritter's wife was killed in a runaway, but an infant daughter lived, and is now married in Washington. Ritter then returned to America. He has lived in a number of places, including Buffalo, N.Y., Aurora, Ind. Pine Bluff, Ark., and Emnence, Ky. He is a widower, four wives having died.

Booth went to the stage in Brazil, adopting his wife's family name. In '88 his wife had died and Ritter attended his second wedding, in Hanover, Germany. Ritter heard indirectly from him five months ago. For a few years after his return to the United States, Ritter received from Booth und [sic] gave to a relative of the actor an annuity of $800.

This is the brief narrative of Ritter's most remarkable experiences, and they are told by him with an intelligence and accuracy that tend to force belief."

Surratt Courier



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Ellen Watson, Editor

Surratt House & Tavern - 868-1121
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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is time again for the Society to begin what, I am sure, will be another eventful year. But before we look to the future, we should look back to extend our thanks for a job well done by our past executive board. Louise Oertly, our past president, has worked especially hard and has been very effective during an extremely busy term. Not only were the normal activities handled smoothly, but the added task of opposing the proposed road expansions was an outstanding burden. Louise has sent letters to national, state, and local officials as well as many preservationists explaining our problems and soliciting their help. She has prepared and distributed comprehensive information reports outlining our situation and explaining the impact of the road expansion on the Surratt property. She has solicited assistance and received pledges of support from Senators Mikulski and Sarbanes, Governor Schaefer, County Executive Glendening, and many others.

We have a rough road ahead and will need all the help we can generate from our supporters. We need to keep up the pressure because I have a feeling this is going to be a long, hard fight (see page 2 for an up-date).

We are looking forward to an active year to come and welcome our new executive board: Ellen Watson, vice-president; Mary Kauffman, secretary; and Walter Kelly, treasurer.

TOM GIESE, President

!!! MARK YOUR CALENDAR !!!

Thru November - THE IMAGE OF WAR, a special exhibit of Civil War photographs from the private collections of Mark Katz and David Hack; during regular public tours at Surratt House.

Nov. 9 - SURRATT SOCIETY MEETS with a special post-Halloween program by S.L. Carson on the spirits of Washington. 7:30 pm at St. John's School, 8712 Old Branch Avenue, Clinton.

Nov. 14-15 - **THIRD ANNUAL MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE** at Surratt Tavern with free tours, special gift shop sales, and refreshments.

Dec. 12-14 - **VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS BY CANDLELIGHT**, our 17th annual holiday tours at Surratt House with displays of fresh greenery, exhibits of antique toys, 19th-century greeting cards and ornaments, Father Christmas, and homemade refreshments. The hours for these special Christmas tours are 5-9 pm on December 12 & 13 and 6-9 pm on December 14.

SPECIAL NOTICE: Attached to this newsletter is a special petition to the County Council of Prince George's Count[illegible] [illegible] will soon receive two proposals for the expansion of roads that will seriously impact our museum (see page 2). We must fight the proposal that will bring the road on our property. We are asking all members to sign this petition and to solicit others to do so. Return petitions to us by December 15, 1992.

PONTIUS PILATE POLITICS

At a work session on September 24, the Planning Board of Prince George's County professed their desire to preserve Surratt House and unanimously voted to remove from future plans the proposals that would have sent a major highway through museum property. They voted instead to widen existing Woodyard Road as it now runs. Their decision was applauded in the local press and by those interested in historic preservation.

In true political fashion, however, within two weeks, they pulled a clandestine maneuver that would have done the Confederate underground proud! On October 7, the Society found out that the same Planning Board intended to go back into session on October 8 and that the Surratt House would be discussed again. Your editor and our site manager went to that work session unannounced and watched as the Board "rescinded" their original stand. In what has become known as the "Pontius Pilate Syndrome," they announced that, while they were leaving the widening of the road on the books, THEY WERE ALSO LEAVING OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF RUNNING THE ROAD THROUGH OUR PROPERTY VIA A TUNNEL. They will send both plans on to the County Council in the near future. In essence, they are washing their hands of the situation and allowing the Council (and ultimately the State Highway Administration) to decide our fate.

Again, we ask your support. If you have not already written to the Council, please do so. We need to let them know that our site is of national significance and should not be sacrificed to developers. Please write directly to Richard Castaldi, Chairman, Prince George's County Council, County Administration Building, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772. We also advise that copies be sent specifically to our south county representatives, Sue V. Mills and Kirwan Wineland, as well as Frank Casula who has been known for his devotion to historic preservation. In fact, you might want to inform the others on the Council of your feelings also: Stephen Del Guidice, Joanne Bell, Hilda Pemberton, Ann MacKinnon, and James Fletcher, Jr.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Joanne Bean - Lexington Park, MD
Mr. & Mrs. Willliam F. Nast III - Douglassville, PA
Jane Beyer-Rodewald - Lakehills, TX
Dennis F. Carroll - Chevy Chase, MD
Joseph Surratt - Kent, OH
Benny J. Surratt - Biloxi, MS
Lenny Feinberg - Gladwyne, PA
Bonnie Langston - Kingston, NY
Harold Gross - Rego Park, NY
Milton Daniels - Baltimore, MD
James Bready - Baltimore, MD
Richard J. Anglin - Leesburg, IN
Mary Anne Razim-Fitzsimmons - Virginia Beach, VA
Lewis Hedges - Arlington, VA
Jewell Powell Fillmon - Tampa, FL
Joy Brookbank - Waldorf, MD
Rosanne Borello - Aquasco, MD
Shirley Grierson - Lothian, MD
Frank Sommers - Mechanicsville, MD
George L. Dowdy - Charlotte, NC
Candace Prebil - Cleveland, OH
Roger McMahan - Philadelphia, PA

AND SPECIAL WELCOMES to our newest Life Members, Virginia Bryll of Deerfield, Illinois, and Charles Raimond Rose of Takoma Park, Maryland. Mr. Rose has a unique story in that he portrayed Lewis Thornton Powell/Paine in high school and is dedicating his Life Membership as a memorial to the mysterious conspirator.

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OUR APOLOGIES for the lateness of our October newsletter. It went to the printer on time; however, we did not reckon with an obstinate machine! We are able to do monthly newsletters at no cost to the Society because of the generosity of the Support Services Office at Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. In September, that office purchased a new $143,000 Xerox machine -- which decided not to work! Its obstinance threw all printing off-schedule, hence our delays in getting the October issue to our members. When we are dependent upon FREE assistance, however, it is worth the wait. We would never be able to provide our members with a 6-8 page newsletter each month (for just $5 annual dues) if we had to pay outside printing costs.

A FINAL REMINDER -- This will be the last issue of "Surratt Courier" that you will receive if you have not renewed our membership for 1993. To avoid missing any issues, please send $5 to the Society at PO Box 427, Clinton, MD 20735 before November 30.

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BAKER REPRINT DUE SOON

General Lafayette C. Baker, Chief of The National Detective Police during the Civil War, was engaged by Secretary of War Stanton to head a "secret service." He was responsible for all kinds of investigations from bounty jumping, counterfeiting, spying, counter-intelligence, etc. At the time of the assassination of Lincoln, he was brought from New York to engage in the pursuit of Booth and the prosecution of the conspirators. In 1867, he wrote a book on his experiences.

That work, History of the United States Secret Service, is being reprinted in two volumes by Heritage Books, Inc. A useful index is being added. Of particular interest to Surratt Society members and historians generally is an 80-page introduction, with pictures, by Dr. Ray A. Neff. Dr. Neff is known for some specific views on the Lincoln assassination, and this introduction will reopen the controversy over the August 1961 article in "Civil War Times Illustrated," 'Did Stanton Plan Lincoln's Murder?' In the November 1981 issue of that magazine, Mr. William C. Davis, then editor, repudiated this 1961 article in a well-done editorial. It appears, however, that Pandora's box keeps flipping open! We are investigating offering this book through our gift shop; and, of course, a copy will be added to our research library.

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AS YOU READ this newsletter, we should be putting the finishing touches on our exterior restoration at Surratt House. It was a long process to alleviate old, lead-based paint that remained from the original restoration (which required following EPA guidelines), adding much-needed guttering, replacing some damaged wood, and following guidelines from a

(con't. right col.)

Paint -con't.--------
federal conservation grant as well as historic easement constraints through the Maryland Historic Trust. Professional museums, however, know that the final results are well-worth the wait.

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WORTH MENTIONING...

In the assumption that it is never too late to rectify an error of omission, we are highlighting a booklet published three years ago (1989) following the first Tudor Hall Conference. To mark the 150th birthday of John Wilkes Booth in May, 1988, Arthur Kincaid of England and George Stieler of Maryland organized a conference which brought together experts in the theater field as well as historians to discuss the great impact of the Booth clan in America.

A variety of dissertations on the 19th-century American stage as well as a history of John Ford's Theatre, discussions on playwright Deidre Barber's work in dramatizing the history surrounding John Wilkes Booth, and important evaluations of Booth as well as updates on research revolving around him and the assassination were presented. Following the conference, Mr. Kincaid expertly transcribed the talks and compiled them into a 73-page booklet entitled John Wilkes Booth, Actor.

The booklet (as did the conference) draws its strength from the years of research and experience represented through the participants. Organizers of the event sought and obtained well-qualified presenters, and this is obvious as one reads this transcript. The content is well-developed, concise, and pertinent. Assassination students remember our recently mentioning Booth's 1860 secession crisis draft currently in the holdings of the famed Players Club. At the conference, Jeannine Clarke Dodels presented a synopsis of this work; and its inclusion in the booklet is an added benefit.

Interested parties may contact the publisher directly: Arthur Kincaid, "Little Foxes," New Yatt Road, North Leigh, Oxon OX8 6TL, England (UK). The current price is $17.50 ppd.

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IN CASE I HAD ANY ILLUSIONS...

Dear Editor,

Just for the hell of it, on August 5, 1992 I sent photocopies of my three articles from the "Surratt Courier" to "Unsolved Mysteries" in Burbank, California with a cover letter saying that I was sending the copies "in the interest of correcting the record." I had no expectations that these would be read, digested or even commented upon. My full expectation was that they would be filed away in a drawer, discarded or possible sent to Nate Orlowek, but certainly not acted upon in any way.

Yesterday's mail surprisingly contained a thick envelope with the "Unsolved Mysteries" return address. I told my wife about the bundle and we speculated on what could be in the envelope. It was certainly not an invitation to appear on a follow-up broadcast to clear up the matter and present new evidence. We doubted that it was correspondence from them to me commenting on the articles or offering any counter evidence.

Just what was in the package? Three things: First, an undated and unsigned, fourth- or fifth-generation photocopy of a form letter that said:

> "Dear Viewer,
> Thank you very much for writing to UNSOLVED MYSTERIES. Viewers' comments, suggestions, and ideas are always welcome. Feedback from our viewers, whether positive or negative, is important and we are glad to hear from you.
>
> We hope you will continue to watch the program and remember: "You can help solve a mystery!"
>
> (signed) UNSOLVED MYSTERIES Viewer Mail Dept."

Oh yes. What were the other two things in the envelope? Why, only my original cover letter to them and the photocopies of the articles! They appeared to be intact, unwrinkled ...and undoubtedly unread.

Steven G. Miller

SOME VICTORIAN TRIVIA

One of the most popular booths at our Craft Fair this fall belonged to a crafter who fashioned jewelry from antique buttons. The buttons were made in the 1800s and early-1900s, most from the period known as the Golden Age of Buttons. During this period, button makers competed with one another both at home and abroad to produce elaborate designs of fine quality of every imaginable subject and in every available material of worth, including brass, glass, shell (pearl), horn, semi-precious stones, marcasite, pewter, porcelain, silver, tapestry, ivoroid, china, cut steel, and others. Handiwork was an important part of the process, and the old standard of quality and excellence, combined with the exactness made possible by the use of machines, produced remarkable buttons. In the 1860s, young American women began collecting buttons to put together "charm strings" of at least 999 different buttons given to them by friends and family. According to tradition, a girl's beloved would come forth with one last button, complete the string, and claim her for his bride.

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MORE ON FINIS L. BATES

Dr. Richard Mudd of Saginaw, Michigan reports that Bates, author of the controversial Escape and Suicide of John Wilkes Booth, was born 8/22/1849 in Franklin County, Mississippi, the son of John Welch Bates and Miss Bobbin. According to a death notice, he died at Memphis, Tennessee on 11/29/1923, age 74. He had been struck by an automobile earlier in the month, and this probably caused his death. The cause in the death notice, however, is listed as cardeo-renal. He is buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

His personal papers and the book plates were sold by his widow to Dr. Clarence True Wilson, who once offered them to Dr. Richard Mudd. He declined, and they went instead to attorney E.H. Swain of Eden, Texas. Dr. Mudd quietly influenced him to sell these papers to Georgetown University where they are now available.

THE WITNESS AND AN UNCERTAIN SANCTUARY: NEW INFORMATION REGARDING LOUIS J. WEICHMANN AND THE SURRATTS OF ANDERSON, INDIANA

By Erich L. Ewald

The anxiety which afflicted Louis Weichmann during his fifteen year residence in Anderson, Indiana was frequently commented upon by his contemporaries and, for some of his more malicious neighbors, constituted sufficient proof that he had perjured himself during the conspiracy trials. It will be recalled that Monsignor Thomas Conroy wrote that "...in all the years of the school's life Wechman never stood with his back to a door...". This statement was generally confirmed by one of Weichmann's night school students, Joseph Abel, who remarked that his teacher would "...not go out only when necessary, and then only on well-lighted streets...".[1] This behavior has been attributed to various causes including Weichmann's natural cowardice, alleged but unsubstantiated threats upon his life by the Surratt family, and/or a guilty conscience arising from Mrs. Surratt's execution.[2] While some or all of this may be true, new information has surfaced which may go a long way in explaining Weichmann's furtive, almost paranoid behavior while living in Anderson. It is supremely ironic that the sanctuary Weichmann was seeking in Indiana was made uncertain by the fact that members of the Surratt family were living in Anderson during that same period of time. While it is true that the Surratts of Anderson were but distantly related to John Surratt, their mere presence had to have given pause to a man desperately seeking refuge from the controversy which always seemed to swirl around him.

According to family documents made available to this writer, the Anderson Surratts were direct descendants of Samuel "Sarratt" of Prince George's County, Maryland. This particular branch of the family moved to Davidson County, North Carolina in the late 1790's. One descendant, Spencer Locker Surratt, moved from North Carolina to Putnam County, Indiana prior to the Civil War and operated a grocery store there. Spencer Surratt eventually moved north to Anderson where one of the first city directories available, that of 1896, lists him as the proprietor of a grocery store on South Madison street with a residence on South Hendricks street, approximately twelve city blocks from Weichmann's residence and business school.[3] However, Spencer was the second Surratt in Anderson, having been preceded by his brother, Gorrell Surratt, who arrived in that midwestern town in 1888. Originally, Gorrell was a co-partner in an insurance company, but later practiced optometry in Anderson for many years.[4] This Surratt's personal background is quite interesting not only for the fact that he was a contemporary of Weichmann in the Anderson community, but also because his experiences shed new light on the frantic search for conspirators in the wake of Lincoln's assassination. According to the family history, Gorrell enlisted in the Twenty-Second North Carolina infantry at the outbreak of the Civil War and fought in the Seven Days campaign near Richmond in mid-1862. Surratt was badly wounded in one of those encounters and left for dead on the field of battle. Regaining consciousness the next morning, he "hailed a passing ambulance" which took him to an emergency hospital nearby and was transported from there to a more established hospital in Richmond. When he recovered, his one year enlistment had expired and Gorrell returned to North Carolina only to be conscripted in the government salt works. After only a few days of such duty, Surratt reenlisted--this time, apparently, in the Forty-Sixth North Carolina infantry--and served the Confederacy until his capture at the battle of Hatcher's Run in October, 1864. Surratt was sent to the Federal prison camp at Point Lookout, Maryland and was imprisoned there until his release in what must have been April, 1865. According to the family history:

> "Passage was furnished the released prisoners to their respective homes. Garl decided to go to Indiana, to his brother [Spencer], rather than return to North Carolina, and so took passage on a boat to Washington, D.C. There, as he stepped off the steamer, a Union officer took charge of him because an alleged accomplise of Boothe (in the recent assassination of Prsident Lincoln) bore the name of Surratt.
>
> Garl was placed in prison, and when questioned he told them to call General Brady who might be able to give them a few facts. [ff. Garl had seen the General in Washington!] Brady was accordingly sent

for, and on his arrival, when shown the prisoner, promptly informed the officers in charge that young Surratt could have had no part in the assassination as he had just finished an 8 month term at Point Lookout as a confederate prisoner, and was so confined at the time the president was shot. On this information he was released and proceeded to Brazil, Ind. where he intended to make his future home. At first he took up farming, and later was united in marriage to Mary Frances Jones. They reared three children. Farming did not make them happy, and so Garl studied optometry, and practiced for many years in Anderson, Indiana."[5]

Preliminary research has uncovered no evidence that the Weichmanns and Surratts had any dealings with each other in the Anderson community beyond a Surratt family tradition that the two families were aware of each other's presence.[6] As the Anderson of the late 1880's was still a very small town with an approximate population of 6,000 it would have been virtually impossible for the two families not to be aware of each other's existence. However, unless new information surfaces it would be pure conjecture to conclude that the Anderson Surratts harassed Weichmann or even cared about his existence in the community. Lloyd Lewis' 1926 interview with the Weichmann sisters is silent on whether or not the alleged threats made upon Weichmann during his Philadelphia career were continued in Anderson. Lewis did comment upon a whispering campaign against Weichmann, and inferred that his truthfulness was constantly in question; however, there is absolutely no indication that the Anderson Surratts were involved in such character assassination.[7]

This leads to a secondary concern; exactly what kind of reputation did Weichmann have in the Anderson community? This writer believes that the tradition fostered by Monsignor Conroy that Weichmann was ostracized by a large number of Catholics in Anderson is in need of revision. In what documents that have been examined thus far, it appears that Weichmann's exile from involvement with St. Mary's Church was self-imposed. Monsignor Conroy, who fashioned his comments largely upon the opinion of Father Denis Mulcahy, believed that Weichmann was anathema to his fellow Catholics and that Father Wiechmann's tenure as assistant pastor was rendered most unhappy due to Louis' reputation. In the absence of any surviving letters or diaries that would constitute a better guage of public opinion, two salient facts suggest otherwise: First, of the five students enrolled in Weichmann's business school that have been positively identified by this writer thus far, all five were parishoners of St. Mary's. This does not suggest a general hostility to the Weichmanns among a very tightly-knit Catholic community.[8] Second, fellow researcher Kurt Lortz has conducted an examination of the Fort Wayne (Indiana) diocese archives and has arrived at the conclusion that Father Wiechmann was probably removed from the parish because of his opposition to Bishop Dwenger's ambitious plan to build a new church in the city. According to Mr. Lortz, a lengthy petition signed by many prominent parishoners requesting Father Wiechmann's reinstatement is on file in those archives.[9]

Regardless of his reputation, the mere presence of Surratts in the Anderson community had to have caused some concern to Louis Weichmann and may shed new light on his obsession in justifying his conspiracy trial testimony. It may explain, also, his inability to publish his account of the conspiracy trials during his lifetime. At any event, Anderson could not have been the secure sanctuary he had been looking for when he left Philadelphia, and it is hoped that further research will bring to light more information on this curious twist of fate.

While the presence of the Surratts may have influenced Weichmann's behavior in Anderson, their presence should not be exaggerated in explaining all of that behavior. Entering into the realm of speculation, at least two tantalizing questions arise: First, if Weichmann lived cheek by jowl with Surratts in a small midwestern town where contact would have been virtually unavoidable, why did he stay in that community? Second, and more importantly, was John Surratt aware that he had distant relatives living in Anderson and, if so, did he enlist their aid in stirring up trouble for his old enemy? Indefatigable researchers of the caliber of John Brennan, Joseph George, or James Hall could, perhaps, supply that answer.

NOTES

1. [sic] Msgr. Conroy to L. H. Warren of the Lincoln Museum Library, letter of October 17, 1943, p.2. Conroy based this statement upon testimony of Weichmann's unnamed personal secretary. Copy of the original is to be found in the Weichmann file, Anderson Public Library. Joseph Abel's observation is in "A History Of The Trial of Mrs. Surratt As Told To Me By A Lewis Weichman At The Time Of President Lincoln's Assassination," p.4. Original is to be found in the St. Mary's Catholic Church rectory archives, Anderson; a copy is on file with the Surratt Society. Abel's statement is seconded by Conroy who mentioned that when he did go out, Weichmann was generally accompanied by his brother-in-law, Charles O'Crowley.

2. See Lloyd Lewis, "Myths After Lincoln," Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1929, pp. 225-227 for the Weichmann sisters' allegations of these threats.

3. The first tax entry for Spencer Surratt is in the 1896 Tax Duplicate of the City of Anderson For the Year 1896, p. 344.

4. In the absence of earlier city directories, Gorrell Surratt's arrival in Anderson in 1888 is inferred from tax records. The 1889 Tax Duplicate of The City of Anderson For the Year 1889, p. 189, is the first such tax entry. Original tax records are on file in the Anderson Public Library. These records were kindly made available to this writer by the Director of the Indiana Room, Mr. Howard Eldon.

5. This document, hereafter referred to as "Family History" was compiled, apparently, by Donald and Martha Wiseman of Middletown, Indiana. The narrative was based on observations made by Spencer Surratt's son, Marvin Willard Surratt, who received the information first-hand from Gorrell. This document variously spells Gorrell as "Garl" and "Garrell;" the Madison County tax records spell it as "Gorrell," and this writer has adopted that spelling. Another note in order is that the "Family History" notes that Gorrell was imprisoned at "Point Lookout, Deleware" [sic]. This writer believes that it was Point Lookout, Maryland for the simple reason that the "General" Brady referred to was probably Major A. G. Brady, provost-marshal of the Maryland prison and whose photograph can be found in Frances Trevelyan Miller, ed., "The Photographic History of the Civil War," The Review of Reviews Co., New York, 1912; vol. 7, p. 63.

6. Based upon the reminiscences of Mr. David Surratt of Anderson, Indiana in a conversation with this writer in August, 1991.

7. In reference to the whispering campaign, see Lewis, "Myths After Lincoln," p. 227.

8. According to the reminiscences of Mary Louise Vogt--who remembers her childhood visits to the Weichmann sisters and whose father was baptized by Father Wiechmann--the family was highly regarded in the Anderson community. From a conversation with this writer on October 9, 1991. Father Mulcahy's testimony should be considered with caution as Msgr. Conroy, in the above-cited letter, remarked that Mulcahy, "...so far as I know, never spoke of Lou Wichman except with undisguised contempt." [sic], p. 4.

9. Mr. Lortz confirmed this in a conversation with this writer on November 6, 1991.

He talks about Boston Corbett's prison life and the bad blood between the soldiers of the Garrett's Farm Patrol and the Baker clan. Collins told Hoover of the execution of the conspirators, too.

William says, "...My Brother who visited you in Washington recently was present and saw the execution. Capt. Doherty I believe let him into the yard. He was only a boy at the time and was enlisted in the Regt. as he was too young but he staid with the Regt. for about 18 months and was a general favorite with all the Officers and particularly Capt. Doherty. Col. Switzer (Col. Nelson B. Sweitzer, commanding officer) of the 16th N.Y. Cav. was determined to have him educated and sent to West Point at the close of the war, but he wanted to come home with the rest of us and did so."

Is this story apocryphal? Perhaps, but John Collins's account has the ring of truth. Brother William Collins confirmed it to Capt. Doherty's nephew; and, last but not least, there is that boy in uniform in the courtyard of the Arsenal Prison.

March, 1993

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THE TALESPINNER AND THE WITNESS:
A LEGION OF QUESTIONS AND A PHALANX OF SPECULATIONS
CONCERNING CHRIS RITTER AND LOUIS J. WEICHMANN
by Erich L. Ewald

Who was Chris Ritter? Indeed, who was this eminently self-assured German who burst into Anderson, Indiana carrying a fabulous tale of John Wilkes Booth's miraculous escape to Brazil? The unnamed Anderson Herald reporter who broke the story on the front page of the January 31, 1897 edition was enthralled by "the romance of it." While members of the Surratt Society are not impervious to the charms of black-eyed South American beauties and tropical climes, Ritter's story commands our attention for far different reasons.

Abundant were - and are - the stories of Booth's "escape." Just recently we have been reminded of the persistency of such legends which somehow, and by unresolvedly mysterious channels, seem to attain a life of their own. At first blush, Ritter;s story appears to be but one more variation on a theme that only specialists in American folklore could adequately explain. It cannot be altogether surprising that such myths blossomed among the common people in the wake of Lincoln's assassination. Against the back-drop of the death throes of the Confederacy, with an entire half of the country going up in smoke and flame, with Confederate agents and suspected conspirators scurrying for parts unknown, such legends were bound to evolve. Even under the near-hysterical circumstances, though, the Government's bizarre handling of both the conspiracy trials and Booth's body was an abysmal performance that could only raise questions - many quite legitimate - among the American public. Reward money, strutting liars in responsible government positions, tales of secret rebel terrorist operations, purchased witnesses - all combined to add fuel to the fires of speculation.

The butcher's tale, without question, shares similarities with many such stories. Among the stock ingredients of these legends are a last minute switch, a fortuitous injury to the leg, misidentification on the part of the pursuers of the body on Mr. Garrett's porch, and an amazing escape to far-off lands.

But, Chris Ritter's story is much different in one significant respect. It had a purpose behind it that transcended the usual desire on the part of the talespinner to capitalize on the public's insatiable addiction to sensationalism. True, it is probable that monetary gain was one of Chris Ritter's motives. In several subsequent Anderson newspaper articles there are references to Ritter's preparation of a book detailing his adventures. (1) For all that , it was Ritter's deft tie-in to Louis J. Weichmann that revealed his true purpose. Woven carefully into the original story, almost as an aside, is Ritter's chance encounter with - and purported mutual recognition of - Weichmann in an Anderson restaurant. As we shall soon see, what was mere inference in the original story became an outright assertion that Mrs. Surratt's main accuser had been a strong Southern sympathizer. In this respect, and possibly not coincidentally, Ritter's allegations were harmonious with those of Henri Ste. Marie and John Surratt, Jr.. All three of these most unusual bedfellows, independently of each other, claimed

that Louis Weichmann was not the patriot he portrayed himself to be, but a closet Confederate.

Weichmann's own response to the story was characteristically swift - but uncharacteristically brief. In rapid-fire letters to both the Herald and the Anderson Bulletin, Weichmann stated that he did not know Ritter. As proof that Booth was the one killed at Garrett's barn, Weichmann contented himself with simply restating the time-worn identifications made by Dr. May as Booth's body lay lifeless on the gunboat Montauk.(2)

The Bulletin, sensing a golden opportunity of discrediting the rival Herald, launched an investigation of its own on the affair. In one of its interviews, Ritter's true purpose rose to the surface. "I see Weichman is trying to say what I say is not true," said the butcher to the Bulletin reporter. "Just wait till I show you. Weichman belonged to us. He told me he threw his [Knights of the Golden] Circle badge away because it gave him too much trouble." (3)

Chris Ritter was just one more mystery in the life of Louis J. Weichmann, a man whose life was filled to overflowing with mystery and intrigue. A key to understanding Chris Ritter and his motives, perhaps, is to examine how the butcher's arrival fit chronologically into Weichmann's exceedingly unhappy career in Anderson.

Abandoned and nearly forgotten by his old Government benefactors, Louis Weichmann arrived in Anderson in 1886. He was a man with a broken marriage, a reputation he wanted to conceal, dreams of a priesthood long since shattered and, if the remaining Madison County tax records are any indication, nearly penniless. Weichmann moved in with his brother and sisters while seeking out a way to support himself as well as contribute to the support of his aging parents. (4)

Eventually, Weichmann turned his decided intellectual talents to the creation and operation of one of the first business schools in central Indiana. Through this business, Weichmann gained and retained the respect of his neighbors, even though he held himself aloof from them to the day he died. Despite its good reputation in the business community, however, the school provided him only slender income. Even this small prosperity was interrupted in 1894 when he was forced to close his business during a six-month stretch for what can only be described as a nervous breakdown. (5)

Louis Weichmann lived for ten years in almost complete obscurity in a rapidly changing Indiana community. With the discovery of natural gas in Madison County in 1887, Anderson's population nearly doubled and the boom town attracted newcomers from all over the United States and Europe. (6) Even with the rapid influx of population, Weichmann's school did not become wildly successful. Still, his dark, past life remained unknown in the community and that, at least, had to have been some consolation to a man whose character had been vilified from one end of the country to another.

All this changed when the April, 1896 issue of Century magazine hit the stands. In this number, Victor Louis Mason's article, "Four Lincoln Conspiracies," immediately brought Weichmann's past to the attention of his Anderson neighbors. More importantly, embedded in Mason's article were the old, lingering questions of Weichmann's possible perjury. Mason succinctly summed up these questions by the damning statement, "He wove the thread of testimony which closed upon Mrs. Surratt, and in doing so escaped the gallows himself." (7)

The cloak of anonymity was thus raised from Louis Weichmann and it was at this point, probably, that he began exhibiting rather aberrant behavior. Weichmann became a near recluse and, according to independent witnesses, never stood with his back to a door or went out onto the city streets at night unless accompanied by members of his family. (8)

Mason's damaging assessment formed a most important event in Weichmann's Anderson career and from its circulation dates a pronounced deterioration in Louis' already fragile mental health. A bare eight months later, with the unhappy witness reeling from Mason's unwanted publicity, arrived Chris Ritter and his fresh accusations of Weichmann's involvement, if only peripherally, in Lincoln's assassination.

Jumping with careless abandon from the second train of thought back to the first, who was Chris Ritter? The trail is very cold after a year of research by this author has turned up embarrassingly few clues as to both his origins as well as his whereabouts after the affair. After leaving Anderson in the summer of 1897, Ritter was reported to have gone to Kokomo, then Muncie. Thereafter,

Ritter dropped from history as quickly as he had come into it. (9)

For a man who claimed to have hailed from such diverse places as Germany, Brazil, Pine Bluff, Arkansas and Eminence, Kentucky, it is exceedingly curious that Ritter listed his "nativity" as Alabama on the St. John's Hospital admissions record. (10) However, Ritter also claimed to have lived in the Ohio River town of Aurora, Indiana and it is here that we find him in the 1880 Dearborn County census. He was listed as a butcher living with his wife, Mary - a "grocer" - and a son, Joshua, age 9. Ritter's place of origin was listed as Wurtemberg, with his wife's as Bavaria. Joshua's place of birth was recorded by the census taker as Kentucky. From this it is a reasonable supposition that the son was born in or around Eminence in 1871. From the census, we can deduce with some certainty that Christopher Ritter was the butcher's true name, and not an alias, as he went by it for at least seventeen years. (11)

In the original story, the Herald reporter remarked of Ritter, "...he contributes direct testimony that would set at naught the records at Washington, or would stamp him as one of the most remarkable geniuses of the time, the art of constructing out of given circumstances plots that are freighted with most powerful significance." This was a most perceptive analysis by the reporter and one with which this author heartily concurs. In the original story, as well as another to be described below, it was Ritter's deep familiarity with assassination lore that gave his tale considerable currency in the Anderson community. Ritter was much too knowledgeable of the assassination and its major and minor characters to be a mere crackpot. His wealth of detail, ever escalating in scope and range, marked him as someone who knew his subject well - too well for someone not in full possession of his faculties. Regardless that much of Ritter's story was at odds with accepted fact, it was his brazen and careful insertion of detail into an implausible story that made it convincing to some residents of the midwestern town.

Ritter told his story with such authority, and in such detail, that the Bulletin was unable to convincingly unmask him as an imposter. In an interesting accompaniment to the original story, Ritter's own words come down to us in a follow-up letter to the Herald. Responding to an adverse letter to the editor, Ritter expanded his story by describing how he and Booth escaped Washington in the company of Edward Fox, meeting Herold coming the other way: "Booth told me to come on to Dr. Mudd's," Ritter wrote, "and he would pay me back my money after passing the bridge. I put my horse on a gallop, and as Booth could not stand the jolt of riding on account of his injured limb, I soon caught up with them. I had never been out on that pike more than five or six miles and knew no one out there. Booth had been to Dr. Mudd's before but somehow missed the turn off and said: 'Well, we might as well go on to surratt's and get some whiskey from Loyd.'" (12)

Ritter's expansion on the original tale is most interesting because it appears to be an attempt to shift complicity away from the Surratts and on to Dr. Mudd. Of interest, also, was Ritter's strange, paradoxical involvement into the story of both Robert Lincoln and Edwin Booth. Preceding the "Just wait till I show you..." quote cited above, were Ritter's remarks to the Bulletin:

> "Questioned as to whether he did not believe he was endangering himself by his story, Ritter said he was not. He added that people will say "Why has not Robert Lincoln stopped this?'
>
> 'The reason,' says Ritter, 'is because Robert T. Lincoln married a Miss Harlan, who is first cousin of Edwin Booth's illegitimate child, named Stinton. That's the family ghost and they don't want it brought out.'" (13)

And so, the story builds with increasing complexity. In the months that followed, the newspapers periodically reported that both Weichmann and Ritter were hard at work preparing their accounts of Lincoln's assassination. If Ritter was a crackpot, then he was certainly a thorough one. In early March, the Bulletin reported:

HIS PROOFS
C.C. RITTER RECEIVES THEM BY EXPRESS THIS MORNING

C.C. Ritter, this morning received by express a box containing what he claims as proofs of his story of the assassination of Lincoln and the escape of Booth.

The box contained a large number of old and worn papers, letters and documents. There was also about two dozen photographs of people connected with the assassination. There is several pictures of Booth and a picture of Edwin Booth, also pictures of the two sisters Ritter claims he and Booth married in South America. The box has been at Cincinnati in care of Ritter's sister.

Ritter says he will commence immediately to write a book telling the true story of the assassination of Lincoln and the escape of Booth. He has engaged William Rowland as stenographer to take the matter down as he dictates and prepare it for publication." (14)

And so it went until that day in August when the Bulletin, with some discernible relief, announced that "Chris Ritter...Story Teller" had left town. (15) The relief of the Bulletin could only have been exceeded by that of Louis Weichmann.

The butcher left behind him a strange story and a legion of questions, chief among them being: What was the purpose in telling this wild tale? Bravely, we do now enter the realm of speculation, that dark netherworld inhabited by Possibly, Perhaps and Maybe. The author has already indicated above, on the sketchiest evidence and deduction, that Ritter's role was to drawn Louis Weichmann further into the net of known conspirators and sympathizers of Lincoln's assassination. Chris Ritter, whoever he may have really been, was not just an ordinary crackpot on the make. He was carefully prepared for the intense scrutiny that his wild story engendered and it is not improbable that he was connected, in some way, with some of the players in the great drama of Lincoln's assassination. Nor is it impossible that he actually migrated to Brazil in the various colonization schemes following the Civil War. Based upon his descriptions in the original story, he certainly had knowledge of the Santarem/Belem (Para) area. Such knowledge was much less arcane in his century than ours and it is probably that he could have become familiar with the "Confederadoes" and their colonies through the various emigration tracts of the times. (16) Yet, his ability to graft all this eclectic knowledge and detail onto the known framework of the events of Lincoln's assassination marks him as a truly remarkable talespinner.

If the reader would but humor the author and accept the premise that Chris Ritter was hired, or solicited, to tell this story for the purpose of harassing Weichmann, then another, darker question arises: Who enlisted his services? The author, giving full rein to his imagination, has examined numerous possibilities ranging from political, to religious, to internal church politics. These possibilities have been cast aside, one by one, for various reasons.

Possibly, perhaps, maybe the answer can be found in one small fact not previously mentioned. In the Herald, Ritter was described as operating his butcher shop on Twenty Third street, only four short city blocks from Spencer Locker Surratt's grocery. (17) Is it possible that the Anderson Surratts were connected with Chris Ritter? Is it possible that in some way, by circuitous paths heretofore unexplored, the trail will lead to the door of Mr. John Surratt, Jr. of Baltimore, Maryland?

The reader was duly warned at the outset that this examination of the Ritter affair was filled with speculation. Having so speculated, the author confesses himself to be just about as confused at the end of his research as when he first began. But there is something here - something quite odd - in this incident that could, perhaps, cast light upon previously unknown and uncharted regions of Lincoln assassination studies.

NOTES

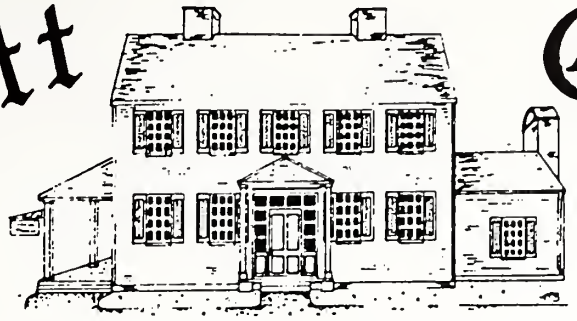
(1) e.g., Anderson Bulletin, March 9, 1897, p. 4; Anderson Herald, April 15, 1897, p. 1. For a full transcript of Ritter's original story see Erich Ewald, "The Butcher's Tale: The Primary Documentation of 'Chris Ritter's' Confrontation With Louis J. Weichmann", Surratt Courier, April, 1992.

(2) Anderson Bulletin, February 3, 1897, p. 5.
(3) Anderson Bulletin, February 2, 1897, p. 6.
(4) The surviving Madison County tax records are very incomplete, but Weichmann's assess valuation in some years was as low as $100 - a small figure for even that day and age. The records were graciously made available to the author by Mr. Howard Eldon and the staff of the Indiana Room, Anderson Public Library.

Weichmann's parents lived until their deaths in the St. Mary's Catholic Church parsonage. All the members of the Weichmann family were buried in the Catholic cemetery located near St. John's Hospital in Anderson.

(5) Weichmann was himself the source of this opinion. In a letter to the editor, he announced that he was reopening his business school. In doing so, he listed former students who had achieved business success after having studied under him. "I must however say in justice to the Indiana Business Institute that some of the parties named here have also attended that school and this at a time when, because of nervous prostration, my health gave way and I was for a period of six months during the present year compelled to close my own school." Anderson Bulletin, December 11, 1894. p. 5
(6) For a good synopsis of the Gas Boom and its impact on the city of Anderson, see David L. Flanagan, "A Century Ago - The Gas Boom," Madison County Monthly, Vol. 3, No. 1, September, 1992.
(7) V.L. Mason, "Four Lincoln Conspiracies," The Century Magazine, Vol. LI, no. 6, p. 895.
(8) Letter of Msgr. Thomas Conroy to L.H. Warren of the Lincoln Museum Library, dated October 17, 1943. Weichmann's nervous behavior was also commented upon by one of his night school students, Joe Abel. See Erich Ewald, "The Witness and the Young Boy: New Information Regarding the Testimony of Louis J. Weichmann," Surratt Courier, October, 1991. Of some interest, also, is that it was within a year and a half after the "Ritter Affair" that Weichmann had his strange conversation with Joe Abel. According to Abel, Weichmann admitted that he had been coerced to give damaging testimony against Mrs. Surratt and that she was innocent.
(9) Anderson Bulletin, August 4, 1897, p. 2.
(10) This information, taken directly from the admission log, was kindly made available to the author by Mr. James Stephens of the St. John's Health Care Corporation. Listed as a friend/relative to the patient is a "Mrs. Fran Duerger." The author has been unable to locate this person in the city directories of the period.
(11) 1880 Census for Dearborn County (Ind.) for the City of Aurora, Supervisor's District No. 2, Enumeration District No. 41, p. 56.
(12) Anderson Herald, February 28, 1897, p. 4.
(13) Anderson Bulletin, February 2, 1897, p. 6.
(14) Anderson Bulletin, March 9, 1897, p. 1. The Anderson Herald of April 15, 1897 reported both Ritter and Weichmann working on their versions of Lincoln's assassination. Of Ritter, the newspaper stated, "Every few days he receives by express some new photograph or record and is hard at work compiling the facts that he ways will bear out every statement he made in the Herald. Prof. Weichmann, in the meantime is working harder than ever preparing his history of the celebrated trials of the conspirators. He sends out and receives on an average of a dozen letters a day, mostly to and from departmental officials at Washington, and has received assurances from prominent historians that his book will be a valuable contribution to history."; p. 4.
(15) Anderson Bulletin, August 4, 1897, p.2.
(16) Typical of the emigration tracts in Rev. Ballard S. Dunn, Brazil, Home for the Southerners Bloomfield & Steel, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1866. The most complete study of the Confederate colony is Eugene C. Harter, The Lost Colony of the Confederacy, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, 1985. For a good synopsis that draws on Harter, see Robert L. and David N. Hoover, "Os Confederados," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. XXXI, No. 6, January/February 1993.
(17) Anderson Herald, April 15, 1897, p. 4. For background information in regards to distant members of the Surratt family see Erich Ewald, "The Witness and an Uncertain Sanctuary: New Information Regarding Louis J. Weichmann and the Surratts of Anderson, Indiana," Surratt Courier, November 1992.

Surratt Courier



A publication of the Surratt Society

Vol. XVIII - No. 9
September 1993
Ellen Watson, Editor

Surratt House & Tavern - 868-1121
PO Box 427 - 9110 Brandywine Road
Clinton, Maryland 20735

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is hard to believe that summer is nearly over and that the busy fall season is fast approaching. September marks the "official" beginning of the Surratt Society's eighteenth year. We were formally organized in September of 1975 through the efforts of Mrs. Orva Heissenbuttel and Mr. John M. Walton, Jr. Our original membership numbered about 25 and was composed completely of those who would be volunteers in the docent program when the museum officially opened for public tours in May of 1976. A number of those original guides are still serving on a regular basis today -- eighteen years later!

Our membership has changed dramatically, however. We now have 1000 members stretched around the globe. In addition to a strong force of volunteers, we have most of the top researchers in the Lincoln assassination field as well as Civil War students among our members. The bulk of our support comes from history-minded folk across the U.S. who appreciate the efforts we are making in preserving our little piece of American history.

September is membership renewal time. I hope that you will consider the great things that we have been able to accomplish at Surratt House and will continue your support through membership dues and donations. [illegible] forms were sent with the August mailing. If you have not already done so, please send in your 1993-94 dues at this time. Help us to build our museum program even stronger. TOM GIESE, President

! ! ! MARK YOUR CALENDARS ! ! !

SEPTEMBER IS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME. PLEASE SEE FORM ATTACHED TO THE AUGUST ISSUE.

Thru Sept. 12 - **A STITCH IN TIME**, a special exhibit of antique sewing items, during regular public tour hours at Surratt House.

Sept. 11 & 25 - **JOHN WILKES BOOTH ESCAPE ROUTE TOURS** (Filled)

Sept. 13 - **SURRATT SOCIETY MEETS**, 7:30 pm, St. John's School, 8912 Old Branch Avenue, Clinton. An evening enjoying those marvelous stereoviews of yesteryear with Mrs. Judy Proffitt of Richmond, Virginia. Audience participation is encouraged. Come learn history the fun way.

Sept. 18 - **SURRATT MARKET DAY** with a variety of handmade crafts and appropriate items for sale. 10 am to 5 pm on the grounds of our museum.

Sept. 23-Dec. 12 - **WASHINGTON OF YESTERYEAR**, a display of photos and memorabilia related to the history of our capital city, during regular public tours at Surratt House.

Oct. 23 & 30 - **JOHN WILKES BOOTH ESCAPE ROUTE TOURS** (Filled)

Nov. 13 & 14 - **FOURTH ANNUAL MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE** at Surratt House with free tours, special gift shop sales, and refreshments. Noon to 4 pm each day.

WE WILL BEGIN BOOKING SPRING 1994 BOOTH ESCAPE ROUTE TOURS IN JANUARY. WRITE OR CALL TO BE PLACED ON LIST.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Paul O'Flaherty - Evergreen Park, IL
Joseph E. Smith - Silver Spring, MD
Catherine Smith - Brandywine, MD
Sandy Lohr - Upper Marlboro, MD
Karen Surratt - White Plains, MD
Darrah Porter - Arlington, VA
Deborah Reed - Schuylkill Haven, PA
Sherri Gilbert - Mt. Kisco, NY
Jimmy Roggero - Torrance, CA
Bobby D. Ryan - Temple Hills, MD
Edward Feege - Upper Marlboro, MD
Mr & Mrs. Bill Mason - Anaheim, CA
Mr. & Mrs. George R. Laurence and Debra Laurence - Hyattsville, MD

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AMONG OUR MEMBERS

Bettie Trindal of Edinburg, Virginia advises us that she has received a contract from "Civil War" magazine for an article on Mary Surratt to be published in the January/February 1994 issue.

Deirdre Barber of Oxon, England gave a talk in Charleston, South Carolina recently on John Wilkes Booth's years in stock at the Richmond Theatre. Her talk was featured as part of a symposium on "Theatre in the Ante-Bellum South," presented by the Southeastern Theatre Conference.

* * * * * * * * * * *

WANT TO BUY A HOUSE?

The City of Petersburg, Virginia recently contacted us for assistance in finding a buyer for a property currently owned by the Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation. The Thomas Wallace House, located at 204 South Market Street in Petersburg, was the site of the last meeting between President Lincoln and General Grant before Appomattox. It was on the porch of the Wallace House that they discussed plans for a lenient policy towards the South after the anticipated surrender. The Wallace House served as headquarters for General Ulysses S. Grant following the fall of Petersburg in 1865.

The house is a fine example of pressed brick Italianate architecture constructed in 1855. Consisting of two full stories over a raised base-

(con't. right col.)

Wallace House -con't.-

ment, the exterior features include a bracketed cornice, fine detailed iron window hoods, balcony, and a distinctive, later period, circular porch. A two-story brick dependency of the same style is now connected with the main dwelling.

The 145x160 ft. corner lot has a cast-iron fence on the two street fronts. This property is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places and is located in the state and locally designated South Market Street Historic District. The property will be protected with preservation covenants.

The asking price is $74,500. For detailed information and elevation drawings, call the City of Petersburg, 804-733-2308; the Historic Preservation Foundation, 804-732-2096; or the Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation, 804-225-4257.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This notice was received before the recent tornado heavily damaged much of the historic area in Petersburg. We do not know if the Wallace House was one of the buildings affected.

* * * * * * * * * * *

INTERESTED IN RESTORATIONS?

The largest array of preservation products and services ever assembled will be exhibited December 6-8, 1993 at Boston's Hynes Convention Center. Nearly 200 companies have signed up to display their wares at this exhibition, including ones from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the former Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom. Running concurrent with the displays will be a conference on "Preservation and the Real World," with distinct programs aimed at trade professionals as well as owners of historic properties and collectors. Architects, archivisits, engineers, appraisers, contractors, curators, conservators, designers, museum managers, and historic site owners can all benefit.

For further information, please contact RAI/EGI Exhibitions, Inc. at 617-933-6663, Fax 617-933-8744.

* * * * * * * * * * *

"A STAGE IN HISTORY"
Ford's Theatre Symposium
September 13-15, 1993

As promised in our August issue, here are full details on the three-day symposium to be held at Ford's Theatre, 511 Tenth Street, Washington, DC, on September 13, 14, and 15, 1993. **ADVANCE REGISTRATION IS NECESSARY. CALL 202-426-6924.** Three basic topics will be covered over the three-day period: The Assassination, The Presidency of Mr. Lincoln, and The History of Ford's Theatre.

Each morning, members of the 54th Volunteer Massachusetts Infantry reenactment group (of "Glory" fame) will be present outside the theater.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: (All times are approximate)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

9:40 am -- "The Myths of the Lincoln Assassination"
Dr. William Hanchett
11 am -- "Who Was John Wilkes Booth and Why Did He Kill Mr. Lincoln?"
James O. Hall and Dr. Terry Alford
12 noon -- "Various Memories of the Assassination"
Michael W. Kauffman
1:00 pm -- LUNCH (on your own)
2 pm -- "The Case for Dr. Mudd"
John E. McHale
3 pm -- "The Case Against Dr. Mudd"
Richard Sloan

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

8:30 am -- TENTATIVE - Sen. Paul Simon speaking on "Mr. Lincoln and Civil Rights in 1865"
9:15 am -- "If Mr. Lincoln Had Lived"
Ralph Newman
10:15am -- "Mr. Lincoln's Mail"
Harold Holzer
11:30am -- "Mr. Lincoln and His Mythdom"
Frank Williams
12:30pm -- LUNCH (on your own)
1:30 pm -- "Black/White and Mr. Lincoln: British Cartoons of the American Civil War"
Dr. Gabor Boritt
2:30 pm -- "Mary Elizabeth Surratt...The Whole Story"
Laurie Verge and Joan Chaconas

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

9:15 am -- "Mary Lincoln"
Michael Burlingame
10:45am -- "Mr. Lincoln and the Performing Arts"
Clark Evans
12 noon -- LUNCH (on your own)
1:30 pm -- "John Thompson Ford and His Theatre"
Gayle Harris
2:30 pm -- "The U.S. Government, The National Park Service, and Ford's Theatre since 1865" A roundtable discussion led by NPS historian Gary Scott; William Pozen, former aide to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall; Frankie Hewitt, executive director of Ford's Theatre Society; Richard Cos, drama critic emeritus of The Washington Post newspapers.
4:15 pm -- Farewell Remarks
Arnold Goldstein
Superintendent of National Park Service Central

REMEMBER TO CALL FOR ADVANCED REGISTRATIONS

LOUIS J. WEICHMANN'S SECOND "DEATHBED CONFESSION"
AND OTHER TALES FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN
by Erich L. Ewald

The pre-eminent authority on Louis J. Weichmann is Dr. Joseph George, Jr. of Villanova University. Dr. George received many deserved plaudits from the historical community several years ago for his discovery that Weichmann had been married in Philadelphia to one Annie Johnson. Dr. George's research indicated that this union had dissolved in some sort of legal separation, or divorce, before the unhappy witness departed for a new life in Anderson, Indiana. This information added even more intrigue to the shadowy historical figure of Louis Weichmann and suggested that the most incriminating witness against Mrs. Surratt had hidden many such dark secrets from both his contemporaries and modern historians alike.

It is now certain, however, that Dr. George was rediscovering what at least one Indiana newspaperman knew on the day of Weichmann's death. The journalist, whose name is unknown to us, placed his revelation of Weichmann's unsuccessful marriage squarely on the front page of the June 6, 1902 Muncie Morning Star. Nor was this all, for there is much more of interest in the Star obituary. Included here are other pieces of information decidedly and pointedly not mentioned in the more familiar Anderson Morning Herald's account of Weichmann's death. The Muncie newspaper's obituary is important for the following reasons:

First, the Star printed an interesting variation of Weichmann's alleged "deathbed confession." It will be noted by a comparison of the two versions that the Star's account contains much the same general thrust as the one repeated to historian Lloyd Lewis by the Weichmann sisters in 1926. However, this version is of sufficient dissimilarity both in style and tone to add support to the theory - if any support is necessary - that the famous "This is to certify..." statement existed only in the imaginations of Weichmann's family and other apologists (1).

Second, with the directness typical of unrestrained turn-of-the-century journalism, the Star revealed Weichmann's Philadelphia marriage and bluntly stated that Weichmann and his wife separated because of "domestic troubled." This information was so accurate - as confirmed by Dr. George's research some eighty years later - that the reporter had to have received it from sources extremely close to Louis or the inner circle of the Weichmann family. What is of significance here is not that Weichmann had a broken marriage but that news of its existence was apparently suppressed by the Anderson newspaper.

Third, an item of the greatest interest is the Star's brief comments on prevailing local Catholic attitudes toward Louis Weichmann. In this respect, its observations are synoptic not only with the Anderson newspaper, but also with the few brief references to Weichmann contained in the old Madison County histories. It will be recalled that Monseigneur Thomas Conroy gave currency to the tradition, which was accepted at face value by early Weichmann researchers, that Louis was ostracized by the Catholic community in Anderson. This writer has previously examined what evidence still remains and maintains that the opinion advanced by Conroy was a totally incorrect gauge of public opinion. There appears to have been no general feeling of hostility directed toward Louis Weichmann or Father Fred Weichmann beyond the intense, specific hatred of Father Denis Mulcahy and a handful of other individuals to be examined at a later time in connection with the "Chris Ritter" confrontation. Msgr. Conroy's analysis of the Anderson community's opinions depended exclusively upon Father Mulcahy's "undisguised contempt" for the entire Weichmann family (2). If Louis Weichmann was exiled from his fellow Catholics during his declining years in Anderson, it was a continuation of sacramental abstinence that marked his post-assassination life in Washington and Philadelphia. A better explanation of Weichmann's separation from his fellow Catholics in Anderson is that his exile was self-imposed.

This is the obituary of Louis Weichmann as printed on page one of the June 6, 1902 Muncie Morning Star:

"PROF. LEWIS J. WEICHMANN IS DEAD
WOMAN HANGED ON HIS TESTIMONY

HE WAS A WITNESS AT THE
TRIAL OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH
AND THE OTHER ASSASSINS
OF LINCOLN IN WASHINGTON

BROODED OVER THE EVIDENCE
HE GAVE, FEELING THAT IT
MAY HAVE RESULTED IN MRS. SURRATT'S CONVICTION

(Star's Special Service)

Anderson, Ind., June 5 - Prof. Lewis J. Weichmann, 60, died at the home of his sister, Mrs. Charles O'Crawley, in this city at 8 o'clock tonight.

Prof. Weichmann had been seriously ill for several days and his death had been momentarily expected since early this morning. The deceased was a brother of Father Weichmann, of Gas City.

With the exception of John Surratt now in Baltimore, Professor Weichmann was the last witness in the trial of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln.

CAUSED HER CONVICTION

At the time of the assassination, Prof. Weichmann was boarding at the Surratt home in Washington. He had met John Surratt while attending a Catholic school near Baltimore.

The testimony of Professor Weichmann was believed at that time to be the most important against Mrs. Surratt, and although his evidence was true in detail, Professor Weichmann has always brooded over the matter, and frequently said that his testimony was the cause of the conviction and sentence to the gallows of Mrs. Surratt.

Professor Weichmann has also been possessed of the impression that because Mrs. Surratt was a Catholic, the Catholics of this city were unfriendly to him, but the Catholics say this is not the case.

Thursday morning, at 3 o'clock, when he was thought to be dying, a priest was called in and Prof. Weichmann's connection with the church was renewed.

HE WAS ONCE MARRIED

Until today, it was believed that Mr. Weichmann was a bachelor, but it has been learned that thirty years ago he was married to a woman in Philadelphia. Domestic troubles soon came and they separated.

Professor Weichmann, at the time he was taken ill, was writing a book, giving his acquaintance with the Surratt family, and it is believed that the book contains some surprising information regarding the assassination of President Lincoln.

Professor Weichmann's health broke before he could complete the book, and it is believed its contents will never be known. He never allowed his manuscript to be read by anyone, and it is not now known where the manuscript is concealed.

He had for several years conducted a business college in this city.

But ten minutes before his death came Mr. Weichmann called H.J. Creighton, a neighbor to his bedside. He was unable to talk and in a trembling hand he wrote the following:

'Now, as I am so soon to meet my Almighty God I wish to state that my testimony in that great trial was the truth and nothing but the truth.'

It was the last thing he did." [sic]

The reader is asked to forgive an analogy (overlaid with a slight tinge of melodrama), but it is as if a gray, impenetrable curtain has descended to veil

Louis Weichmann's life in Anderson from the historian. Why would a Muncie newspaper reveal detailed information of the existence of Weichmann's marriage, but an Anderson reporter would remain stonily silent on the matter? Perhaps, the Anderson newspaper deliberately and delicately omitted an item which might have caused some embarrassment to a respected city family. That is a plausible explanation. But, for one who has examined Weichmann's career in Anderson in the greatest possible detail, such a lack of disclosure on the part of the Herald seems to be another example of inexplicable journalistic restraint concerning one of this city's most important and controversial residents. The County and City histories can be searched in vain for all but a few, sparse references to Louis Weichmann. In none of them can be found even a hint of "Chris Ritter" and his wild allegations involving Weichmann, John Wilkes Booth, and other personages and matters of the greatest import. That was one of the most explosive news items ever carried in t his Indiana town and the subsequent historical silence concerning it was so effective and oppressive that until recently only a handful of residents had ever heard the story.

The curtain that separates us from a better understanding of Louis Weichmann's later years has a few holes. Through their admittedly limited perspective, we catch glimpses of a man desperately afraid of retaliation from thousands of unseen, yet omnipresent, mental enemies. Mrs. Surratt's most ardent champions could not have devised a circle of hell more destructive of Louis Weichmann's mental health that the one he constructed for himself during his residence in this Indiana town (3). Weichmann's anguish was greatly understated by the Muncie Star when it mentioned that the professor always "brooded" over his testimony given during the great trials of 1865 and 1867.

Be that as it may, not all of Weichmann's enemies were so ephemeral. A few of them, at least, were of the flesh and blood variety. It is this rogues' gallery that we shall examine in a later article concerning "Chris Ritter."

NOTES:

(1) For the full interview, see Lloyd Lewis, Myths After Lincoln, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1929. pp. 225-232. According to the Weichmann sisters, "When he was dying he asked us to get a pen and paper and told us to write: 'June 2, 1902; This is to certify that every word I gave in evidence at the assassination trial was absolutely true; and now I am about to die and with love I recommend myself to all truth-loving people.'" The most striking difference in the two purported "confessions," beyond the obvious disparity in wording, is the fact that the sisters claimed to have written it out for Weichmann while the Star stated that the dying man wrote it out himself. Both accounts agree that the respective "statements" were made only a few minutes before death. Anderson researcher Kurt Lortz has previously advanced the opinion - based upon medical evidence - that Weichmann could not have physically made this statement in any form in such a short period before death.

(2) Msgr. Conroy's letter to L.H. Warren of the Lincoln Museum Library, dated October 17, 1943, spoke repeatedly of Father Weichmann's "removal" from the Anderson parish because of Louis' reputation. More specifically, Conroy stated, "It seems that the community in general resented his [Louis'] presence because of his connection with the trial of Mrs. Surratt."

(3) This is one theme constantly running throughout Msgr. Conroy's statement. The writer of this article agrees with Conroy's assessment, but cannot improve upon the Monseigneur's most graphic descriptions; e.g., "The ghost of Mrs. Surratt was on the wing and Lou Wichman was pursued to the end by fear of retribution or vengeance. His fear of standing near an open door, his care not to go out in the dark unless Charley Crowley was with him or some member of the family accompanied him are sure signs that an evil conscience was drawing its barbed wire over the soul of Lou Wichman." [sic]

Mrs. Ruth Cook
The Lincoln Museum
1300 South Clinton Street
P.O. Box 1110
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

September 21, 1993

Dear Mrs. Cook,

As promised sometime last year, I am enclosing the rest of the Louis Weichmann series for your stand-up files. This will be the last for a while as other writing projects are calling me away from the subject. However, Traces magazine is considering a new article for possible publication next year. If they accept and publish it, I'll be sure to send you a copy.

Please accept my best regards and continued good wishes. I'm sure I'll be seeing you one of these days and hope that I can, once again, avail myself of your resources and kind help.

Sincerely,

Erich L. Ewald

1653 Kingsley Drive
Anderson, Indiana 46011

REVISITING THE CASE OF MARY SURRATT

By Richard Sloan


Mary Surratt

The case of Mary Surratt remains one of the most controversial elements in the story of President Lincoln's murder. The recent movie, *The Conspirator*, focused on three major elements: the moral conscience of her attorney, Frederick Aiken; the question of whether or not her constitutional rights were denied when she and other assassination conspirators were tried by a Military Commission; and third, what the movie's screenwriter, James Solomon, called the "extraordinary mother and son story."

He was referring to John Surratt, who hid out in Canada during his mother's trial for crimes *he* had committed. Even while in jail, Mary continued to deny any knowledge of Booth's designs or her son's role, in order to protect him, even though she faced execution. During a talk at the Greenwich Public Library, Solomon argued that had the government found John Surratt and brought him back during the1865 trial, they would not have released his mother. In fact, Solomon created a scene in the movie in which she tells lawyer Aiken: "My son did not conspire to kill your president. He conspired to *kidnap* him. My son is not a murderer."

However, Mrs. Surratt never really made such an admission. When I cited this as an example of historic license, Mr. Solomon replied: "You were never there. Nobody was there.... This is a perfect example of, 'you just don't know.' I think that the emotional truth...was that she had knowledge of what went on in that boarding house. I took the point of view that Mrs. Surratt had to know the existence of *something*. Many of the folks at the Surratt House Museum believe that she had knowledge of the kidnapping plot. But nobody really knows... ."

Some students of the case have nit-picked the film to death. They do not seem to appreciate that in telling a complex story such as this, a playwright cannot always write it just as it happened. (As you will soon learn below, I can certainly relate to the practice of taking historic license.)

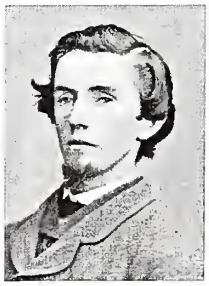
There is another, related "mother and son" story—which *The Conspirator* only touched upon—a story I find much more interesting, dramatic, but as yet unexplored by dramatists. So I wrote it myself, and call it *The Witness & the Collector*.

The "mother and son" scenario here is between Mrs. Surratt and Louis Weichmann, a 23-year-old former theological student (and friend of her son) who boarded in her Washington home. Mrs. Surratt's daughter, Anna, testified that her mother treated him like a son, a story corroborated by John T. Ford, the owner of Ford's Theatre, who heard it from Weichmann himself while they were being detained as witnesses during the trial. After Mrs. Surratt was found guilty and hanged, Weichmann was branded as a coward who had deserted Mrs. Surratt in her hour of need.

Years later he claimed no one had more respect and love for Mrs. Surratt than he, but when placed "in a position that tarnished my reputation, endangered my very life, and made me look like an accomplice, my sympathy ceased forever." Just as historians (and screenwriters) are *still* not altogether sure what Mrs. Surratt knew about the conspiracy, they remain equally uncertain of Weichmann's role. I find him to be a far more interesting character than Frederick Aiken. Weichmann was shown in the movie testifying that over a five-month period he observed the comings and goings of Booth, the Surratts, and three other men (who turned out to be conspirators), heard snatches of their traitorous conversations, and observed (albeit from a distance) frequent secret meetings and whispered conversations not only between Booth and John Surratt, but between Booth and Mrs. Surratt. He added that his suspicions were sufficiently aroused to warrant confiding what he observed to a fellow worker in the War Department. This is historically accurate—up to a point.

Throughout *The Conspirators'* trial scene (filmed on a set that was a perfect recreation of the courtroom), Mrs. Surratt turned her head from Weichmann's occasional glance, almost as though he was telling the truth. The audience is given to wonder if perhaps she really did know of the kidnap plot. I would have preferred seeing Mrs. Surratt give a steely look to the man she had considered a son, and have *him* avoid *her* eyes. Aiken's intense cross-examination of Weichmann prompted one of the judges to say, "The witness is not on trial!" Defendant Lewis Paine immediately rose and blurted out, "He oughtta be!" Aiken then expressed the opinion that Weichmann appeared to know more about the plot than he would admit. He was right, for there *is* more to Weichmann than meets the eye. Flashbacks could have been employed to show the audience just how friendly he had been with the conspirators. In fact; Weichmann provided many of the details in his memoirs, unpublished for more than a century, but made it all seem as though he had been "duped" ("framed" might have been more appropriate).

Students of the case are still asking nagging questions about the man some of them call "Lyin' Lou." Was John Surratt telling the truth in an 1880 lecture when he said Weichmann was not a conspirator, but knew all about the kidnapping scheme and was constantly importuning him and Booth to let him be part of it? Did he really take a co-worker into his confidence? Or did he realize too late that he had been caught in the web of conspiracy and approach a co-worker (Daniel Gleason) so that if something happened to Lincoln he would appear to have just been an innocent bystander? Why did he ask Gleason if the men might be plotting to kidnap or assassinate the President? Why was he a nervous wreck on the morning after the assassination? Why couldn't he hear Mrs. Surratt's message to her tenant, John Lloyd, to have "those shooting irons" ready for people who would be calling for them on the night of the assassination? As Aiken wondered in *The Conspirator*, how could he *not* have known the conspirators' true designs after having been so chummy with them for so many months? He attempted to answer many (but not all) of these questions in the weeks and years that lay ahead, but never to anyone's satisfaction. Frightened and shaken, he revealed to Ford that Secretary of War Stanton told him that "the blood of the murdered president was as much on his hands as on Booth's," and that if he was concerned about his own "safety," he would be wise to tell all he knew.


John Surratt

One of Ford's employees, costumer Louis Carland, later stated that Weichmann told him that if he had been left alone and allowed to give his statement to his interrogators as he had wanted to, Mrs. Surratt would have met a different fate. The general consensus of historians is that he was, indeed, threatened with prosecution as a conspirator unless he told prosecutors what they wanted to hear. Faced with that dilemma, he claimed the Surratts placed him in a position "endangered my very life, and made me look like an accomplice."

From the day Mrs. Surratt was hanged until the day he died, Weichmann was haunted by her friends and supporters.

These included the Catholic priests of Washington who had been among the lady's strongest allies. The press had a field day with him, and he was even rumored to have suffered a nervous breakdown. In a sworn statement shortly after the execution, Weichmann answered one of his early accusers, John Brophy, by denying he was a coward and insisting he had been Mr. Surratt's best character witness, which, oddly enough, is not far from the truth. As he reached what he called "the shady side of life," still tormented, he decided to write his memoirs and put his side of the affair before the world. However, they never saw the light of day during his lifetime, probably because he feared renewed attacks. In fact, there is no evidence that he ever submitted his manuscript to a publisher. It was forgotten until Weichmann's great niece offered it to Minnesota collector Floyd Risvold, who acquired it for an undisclosed sum and saw to its publication (by Alfred Knopf) in 1975. The memoir turned out to be nothing more than a self-serving vindication, full of cleverly twisted statements, inconsistencies, contradictions, tampering with dates, and perhaps even a few fabrications. (Risvold later told the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin that from his own research he was sure Mrs. Surratt knew about the kidnap plot.)

Shortly after publication of the Weichmann memoirs, I saw a reference in an auction catalogue that the great Lincoln collector Oliver Barrett once owned letters Weichmann had written to Osborn Oldroyd, another famous Lincoln collector. With the help of legendary Lincoln autograph dealer Ralph Newman, I found them in the University of Chicago Library. I located the other half of the correspondence as well. Floyd Risvold had acquired it along with Weichmann's manuscript. He generously made copies available for study, enabling me to put together both halves of the correspondence for the first time. They revealed two important things: first, that Oldroyd had asked Weichmann for a few pages about his experiences for his own forthcoming book, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, and second, that Weichmann had traveled from his home in Indiana to Washington in June of 1901 to visit Oldroyd in his museum, which was located, ironically, in the house where Lincoln died.

Reading these letters made me feel as though I was in the same room with the two, listening to them chat about Lincoln and his assassination! I imagined Oldroyd giving Weichmann a tour of his museum and going over his chapter with him. That is what inspired me to write *The Witness & the Collector*. In a manner of speaking, *they* wrote it for me. Besides drawing upon their correspondence and Weichmann's memoirs, I selected Weichmann's words from his 1865 and 1867 testimonies, his interrogations and statements to government investigators, and his reply to Brophy's charges. Oldroyd's dialogue was reconstructed from his 1901 book and the numerous interviews he granted to reporters in his museum.

The reason for Weichmann's Washington visit was never made clear in the correspondence, so I had to make an educated guess: it was to see the house and convince Oldroyd to include his submission in his book. (The letters really indicate that Oldroyd didn't need to be convinced; he had already decided to include Weichmann's submission, and in fact did so. He no doubt considered it a scoop.)

I had to take license here as well; otherwise there would be no reason for the play in the first place. My whole purpose was to give Oldroyd a reason to ply Weichmann with the questions that have long been asked, to argue with him and contemplate whether or not he was convinced of what Weichmann *claimed* he believed: that Mrs. Surratt was "as guilty as John Wilkes Booth!" In my play, Oldroyd represents all of the historians and students of the case. I wanted to present what I hoped would be a thoughtful discussion of the evidence, and at the same time paint a picture of Weichmann as I see him: intelligent, polite, nervous, clever, guilt-ridden, sensitive, and overly defensive. As my play progresses, Oldroyd asks many of the nagging questions that have been asked over the years, but is not satisfied with most of the answers. He conveys to the audience the sense that he is leaning towards a belief in Mrs. Surratt's innocence, despite all of Weichmann's statements and protestations. He becomes increasingly frustrated by Weichmann's inability to accept any of his host's arguments. (For example, Oldroyd asks him if Mrs. Surratt was "simply unaware of what her son was really up to and that she was just an unwitting pawn?") Weichmann responds, "Oh, come now. She was his mother; she knew him better than anyone!" Oldroyd counters with, "But wouldn't she have been the last person in the world to have suspected her own son of being implicated in such a mad scheme? Maybe she did think he was only a cotton speculator or a blockade runner. You say that you would have been the last person on earth to suspect him. And yet you were his best friend. You had gone to seminary together. You ate together at his mother's house. Why, you even slept in the same bed! How is it possible that even you couldn't see what he was up to?"


Louis Weichmann

Weichmann heatedly asserts, "Because he deliberately deceived me, just like his mother. I keep telling you that!" Oldroyd, just as excited, replies: "You miss my point! If you only had a vague suspicion.... even though you were his best friend, why can't you see that he could have also fooled his own mother?!" Through it all, Oldroyd tried to remain a good host, giving Weichmann a V.I.P. tour of his museum (including the room in which Lincoln died), and proudly showing him photos, letters, and artifacts that he thought he would find of interest. Eventually, Oldroyd has enough. He emphatically tells Weichmann, "You place me in a very difficult position if you expect me to include *your* story, and *your* convictions, in *my* book, and claim that I am its author. I'm not ready to do that. *When you get your book out, you'll be able to state it just as you see it, right?*" Weichmann comes up with number of little excuses for not being able to submit his work to a publisher for six to nine more months. "*Don't forget, this has been a work of years for me, and I find I must still go over it and correct a few inaccuracies and omissions of my stenographer, and my faulty spelling*" (italicized words from their correspondence.)

Weichmann finally realizes he has failed to win Oldroyd over and that his trip from Indiana was in vain. He makes one more long-winded plea, gives him letters from some of the judges of the Military Commission that attest to his truthfulness at the trial, and departs. Once he is gone, Oldroyd lets out a sigh of relief, picks up his life mask of Lincoln, and speaks to it. "Well, Mr. President, what do you think? Shall I believe Mr. Louis Weichmann? Will we ever really know the true story behind your murder? I wonder. I wonder."

(*Former Lincoln Group of New York President Richard Sloan presented his* The Witness & the Collector *in staged readings, with props, to the Surratt Society in 2005 and the Lincoln Group of N.Y. in 2011. Sloan portrayed Weichmann, and a fellow student of the case, John Howard, portrayed Oldroyd.*)

WEICHMANN, LOUIS J.
(trial witness)

DRAWER 14.

Personalities