

Booth's Diary

WILLIAM HANCHETT

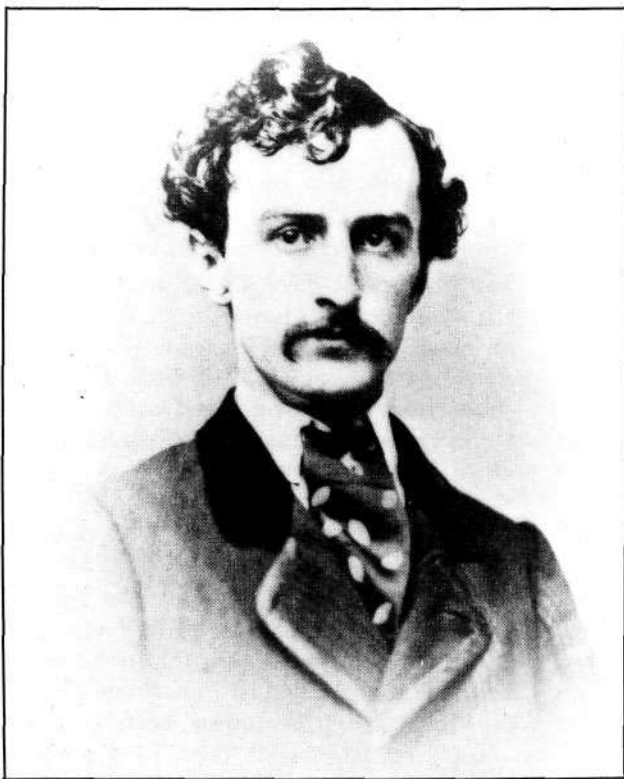
AN HOUR OR TWO before sunrise on April 26, 1865, John Wilkes Booth, mortally wounded, was dragged from a flaming tobacco shed on a farm near Bowling Green, Virginia, and carried to the porch of the farmhouse, where he was propped up against a doubled-over mattress. He had in his possession a knife, a pipe, a pocket compass, a pair of pistols in holsters on a belt, a carbine with cartridges, bills of exchange on a Montreal bank, about \$100 in United States greenbacks, and a small pocket diary—all of which were taken to Washington and examined by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who later turned them over to Judge Advocate General Joseph

Holt.¹ Several newspapers reported the diary, but in the drama and excitement of Lincoln's assassination, references to it were overlooked or forgotten; no questions were raised when it was not submitted with the rest of Booth's belongings as exhibits in the conspiracy trial of May and June.

Except for a few officials in the War Department, no one seemed aware of the diary's existence until February, 1867, when the United States House of Representatives began an investigation to determine if President Andrew Johnson had committed any impeachable offenses. At that time, Lafayette C. Baker, a former Army officer once high in the undercover operations of the War Department and organizer of the party that captured Booth, referred to the diary in testimony before the Judiciary

William Hanchett is a native of Evanston, Illinois, and since 1956 has been on the faculty of San Diego State University. He is the author of "An Illinois Physician and the Civil War, 1864-1865: Letters of Dr. Joshua Nichols Speed," which appeared in the Summer, 1966, issue of the Journal. He is currently at work on a manuscript titled "Lincoln's Assassination: Theories and Perspectives."

¹E.g., *New York Times*, April 28, 1865, p. 1, col. 2; *New York World*, April 28, 1865, p. 1, col. 5; *Chicago Tribune*, April 29, 1865, p. 1, col. 2.



"I knew no private wrong," John Wilkes Booth wrote in his diary concerning the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, "I struck for my country and that alone."

Committee. Baker also mentioned the diary in his memoirs, *History of the United States Secret Service*, published about the same time.²

The text of the diary, which consisted of two passages written by Booth during his attempt to escape, was released to the press in May, 1867. It is presented here exactly as he wrote it.³ In the interests of readability, the use of *[sic]* after errors of spelling, punctuation, and syntax is omitted.

April 13th 14 Friday the Ides

Until to day nothing was ever *thought* of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But our cause being almost lost, something decisive & great must be done. But its failure was owing to others, who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, was stopped, but pushed on. A Col- was at his side. I shouted *Sic semper before* I fired. In jumping broke my leg. I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night, with the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump. I can never

repent it, though we hated to kill: Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment. The country is not what it *was*. This forced union is not what *I* have loved. I care not what becomes of me. I have no desire to out-live my country. This night (before the deed), I wrote a long article and left it for one of the Editors of the National Intelligencer, in which I fully set forth our reasons for our proceedings. He or the Govmt

Here, in mid-sentence, Booth stopped writing. His statement about a "long article" referred to a letter he had written the afternoon of the assassination and left with a

² (Philadelphia: L. C. Baker, 1867).

³ As a direct result of the alleged discovery of the pages missing from Booth's diary (discussed later in this article), the Federal Bureau of Investigation made a comprehensive study of the volume in 1977. For details of that examination, see the February-March and March-April, 1977, issues of *Lincoln Log* (Seaford, N.Y.). The transcript printed above is based on the enlarged photographs made by the F.B.I. Where

friend and fellow actor, John Matthews, for delivery to the Washington newspaper *National Intelligencer* the following morning. After the assassination, Matthews opened, read, and, as he later admitted, burned the letter for fear of being incriminated in the assassination.⁴ On the night of his flight from Washington, Booth rode less than thirty miles, although it must have seemed like sixty. Because his was a simple fracture, not a compound one, the bone could not have been tearing his flesh, although it must have seemed as if it were. The man in the box at Ford's Theatre with Lincoln, Henry Reed Rathbone, was a major, not a colonel.

The next entry in Booth's diary is a hand-drawn calendar, necessary because the dates already printed there were for 1864, not 1865. Booth numbered the calendar through June 18, checking off each day as it passed.

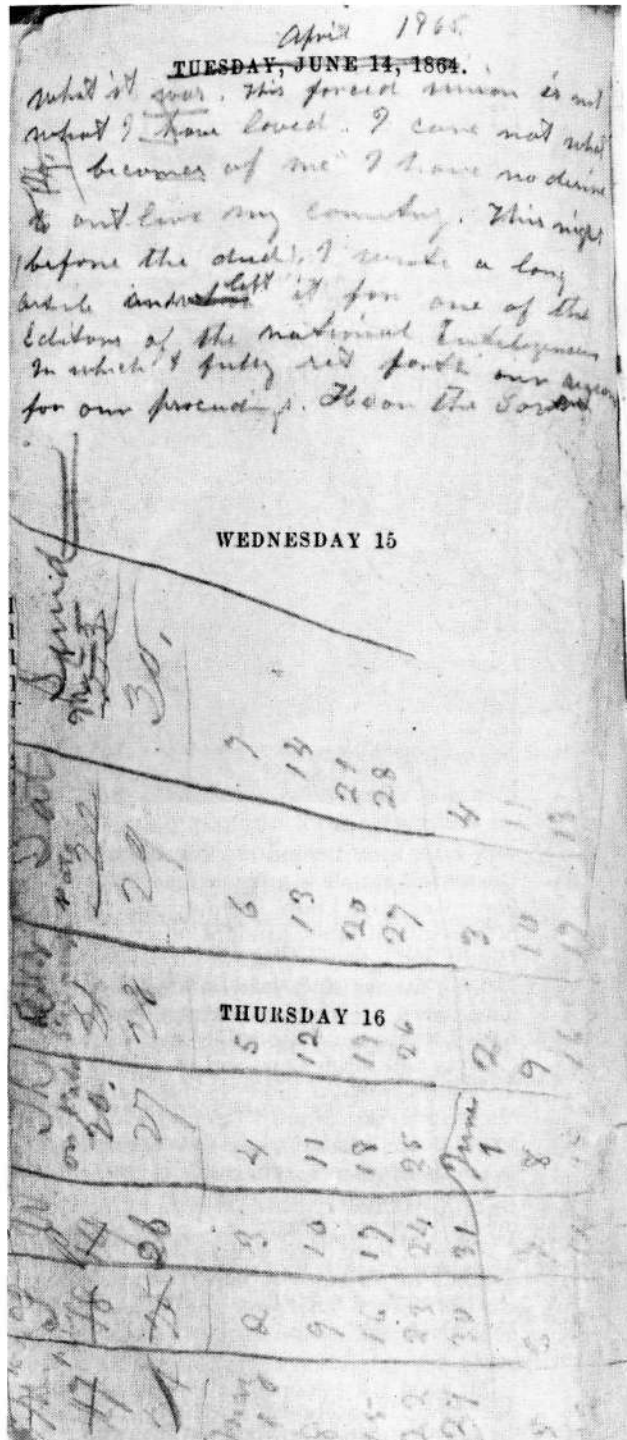
His text resumes:

Friday 21—

After being hunted like a dog through swamps, woods, and last night being chased by gun boats till I was forced to return wet cold and starving, with every man's hand against me, I am here in despair. And why; For doing what Brutus was honored for, what made Tell a Hero. And yet I for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew am looked upon as a common cutthroat. My action was purer than either of theirs. One, hoped to be great himself. The other had not only his country but his own wrongs to avenge. I hoped for no gain. I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone. A country groaned beneath this tyranny and prayed for this end. Yet now behold the cold hand they extend to me. God cannot pardon me if I have done wrong. Yet I cannot see any wrong except in serving a degenerate people. The little, the

Booth's pencilled script is no longer legible, I have deferred to the reproduction of the diary published in George S. Bryan, *The Great American Myth* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1940), pp. 302-03.

⁴*Impeachment of the President*, House Report 7 (Serial Set 1314), 40 Cong., 1 Sess. (1867), pp. 783-88 (hereafter cited as *Impeachment Investigation*); see also pp. 532-35.



A page from Booth's diary, slightly enlarged, showing a portion of his April 13-14 entry and his hand-drawn calendar



Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, two of many witnesses who denied that pages from Booth's diary had been removed after his death

very little I left behind to clear my name, the Govmt will not allow to be printed. So ends all. For my country I have given up all that makes life sweet and Holy, brought misery upon my family, and am sure there is no pardon in the Heaven for me since man condemns me so. I have only *heard* of what has been done (except what I did myself) and it fills me with horror. God try and forgive me, and bless my mother. To night I will once more try the river with the intent to cross, though I have a greater desire and almost a mind to return to Washington and in a measure clear my name which I feel I can do. I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before my God but not to man.

I think I have done well, though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me. When if the world knew my heart, *that one* blow would have made me great, though I did desire no greatness.

To night I try to escape these blood hounds once more. Oh who can read his fate. God's will be done.

I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. Oh may he, may he spare me that and let me die bravely.

I bless the entire world. Have never hated or wronged anyone. This last was not a wrong, unless God deems it so. And its with him, to damn or bless me. And for this brave boy with me who often prays (yes before and since) with a true and sincere heart, was it crime in him, if so why can he pray the same I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but "I must fight the course" 'Tis all thats left me.

If the Judiciary Committee was surprised to learn of the diary in 1867, it was perhaps even more surprised to hear Baker testify that the volume was not in the same condition that it had been when he had first delivered it to Stanton. "I think there was a great deal more of the original diary than appears here now," Baker stated, referring to the fact that pages had been cut out, leaving jagged stubs in the middle of the book. Baker remembered that one page, no longer present, had contained a sketch of a house. He said that he and Colonel Everton

J. Conger, who had taken the diary from Booth, had discussed the house and wondered if they would be able to determine "whether it was where Mrs. Surratt lived, or some other house he [Booth] was in the habit of frequenting." His recollection of the book was indistinct, Baker admitted, because he had had possession of it for just a short time. "I can only say," he concluded, "that, in my opinion, there have been leaves torn out of that book since I saw it."⁵

Three months later, before the same committee, Baker repeated his conviction that pages had been removed, but under questioning he modified his earlier statements about what had been inside the diary and admitted that he did not remember. He had, he said, "never examined that diary sufficient[ly] to recollect anything in it." Still, he observed, it was not necessary to have examined the book carefully to notice the stubs, if there had been any. Furthermore, he concluded, "I think Mr. Stanton would have asked me what had become of the missing leaves, if any had been missing." But Stanton had not asked, and that "is the reason I think the leaves were not gone."⁶

Of all the individuals who had seen the diary between the time it was taken from Booth and the time it was presented to the Judiciary Committee, Baker was the only one who believed that it had been tampered with. Conger, who appeared several weeks after Baker, testified that the diary was in the same condition that it had been when he had taken it from Booth. He remembered no conversation with Baker about the sketch of a house, although Baker had recently spoken to him about it. Conger said

that he had examined the diary very carefully and believed that there was "no change" in it. Another member of the capture party, Luther B. Baker, a cousin of Lafayette Baker's, testified that the pages had been missing in 1865. So also did Secretary Stanton himself, who had examined the book for thirty or forty minutes when he first received it. Thomas T. Eckert, an assistant secretary of war who carried the diary from Stanton to Judge Advocate General Holt, had also noticed the missing pages and testified that the book was in the same condition as it had been when he received it from Stanton. Holt, who had had physical possession ever since, declared, "It is now in precisely the condition that it was when it came into my hands."⁷ Thus, according to sworn testimony before a congressional committee, either Lafayette C. Baker was guilty of perjury (or a bad memory), or Conger, Luther B. Baker, Stanton, Eckert, and Holt were.

The weight of evidence, as well as of numbers, is against Baker. On May 20, when asked by a committee member how he had gotten hold of the extracts from the diary that were included in his *History*, Baker testified that he had heard Conger quote them in his office (in November, Baker changed that testimony, declaring that he had taken the extracts from newspaper reports—a clear impossibility because the text of the diary was not released to the press until May, 1867). Under further questioning, Baker admitted that he was not sure of what had been said about Booth's diary in his *History*, which, although published under his own name, had in fact been written from his materials by someone else. He admitted finally that he had not yet read the volume. Indeed he had not; for if he had, he would have known that the book contained no extracts at all from Booth's diary, but only a few passing references and the secondhand fiction that Booth had spent one night in the Maryland forest lying between the legs of his slain horse in order

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 32–33; Baker, p. 508.

⁶*Impeachment Investigation*, p. 458.

⁷Conger's testimony is *ibid.*, pp. 325, 332; Luther Baker's, p. 484; Stanton's, p. 281; Eckert's, p. 672; Holt's, p. 28.

to absorb the warmth that remained in the animal's dead body.⁸

Baker was not only a wavering witness, he was a vengeful one as well. One year before his testimony he had been forced to resign from the Army, possibly because of Stanton's refusal to support him in a quarrel with President Johnson, who had forbidden him access to the White House. In apparent retaliation, Baker sought before the Judiciary Committee to embarrass Stanton by holding him responsible for the removal of pages from Booth's diary. Baker also sought to destroy Johnson by exposing him as one of the arch-traitors of all history. Under oath, Baker claimed that he had seen, and could obtain, wartime correspondence between Johnson and Jefferson Davis and other Confederate leaders that revealed Johnson to have been a Confederate spy. Johnson's well-publicized Unionist sentiments, his radical denunciations of Rebel leaders, and his call for their severe punishment had all been part of his cover, and of course had helped him secure the nomination as Lincoln's vice-presidential candidate in 1864. The implication of Baker's testimony was astounding: if Johnson was not himself a member of the conspiracy against Lincoln, his Confederate friends had engineered the assassination in order to make him President of the United States.⁹

There was a surface plausibility to Baker's sensational testimony, for once Johnson entered the White House, he had indeed opposed the Reconstruction policies of the Republican party, exactly as he might have done had he been a Confederate spy maneuvered into the Presidency by an intricate southern conspiracy. Some Republican members of the Judiciary Committee were only too happy to listen to Baker's charges and would have been delighted to have him prove them. Among the congressmen was Benjamin F. Butler of Massachusetts, who referred in the House of Representatives to Booth's comment

about being tempted to return to Washington and clear his name. "How clear himself?" Butler asked. "By disclosing his accomplices? Who were they? . . . Who spoliated that book after it got into the possession of the Government, if it was not spoliated before?" Presuming that Baker had told the truth about the diary, Butler declared that the missing pages would explain how Booth would have cleared himself in Washington. "If we had only the advantage of all the testimony," he said, "we might have then been able . . . to find who it was that changed Booth's purpose from capture to assassination; who it was that could profit by assassination who could not profit from the capture and abduction of the President; who it was expected by Booth would succeed to Lincoln if the knife made a vacancy."¹⁰

In July, 1867, Butler moved that a special committee be created to explore those questions, particularly the role of "many persons holding high positions of power and authority, . . . who were acting through inferior persons as their tools and instruments."¹¹ The House granted Butler's request and made him chairman of the five-member committee. But Lafayette Baker was not able to produce his sensational letters or even any evidence that they had ever existed, and Butler's committee never reported.¹² In his autobiography, Butler admitted its failure. "I think I ought to say," he wrote, "that there was no reliable evidence at all to convince a prudent and responsible

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 452, 1192. The diary is mentioned in Baker's book on pp. 505, 538, 540.

⁹*Impeachment Investigation*, pp. 2-5, 29-32, 458-62.

¹⁰*Congressional Globe*, 40 Cong., 1 Sess. (March 26, 1867), p. 363.

¹¹*Ibid.* (July 8, 1867), pp. 515, 522.

¹²Stanton and Holt had previously investigated Baker's charge and were convinced that the letters never existed. *Impeachment Investigation*, pp. 29, 282. See also Hans Louis Trefousse, "Belated Revelations of the Assassination Committee," *Lincoln Herald*, Spring-Summer, 1956, pp. 13-16.

DECEMBER, 1864.

New York.				Day of M th	Day of Week	San Francisco.			
Sun Rises	Sun Sets	Moon Sets	High Tide			Sun Rises	Sun Sets	Moon Sets	
h m	h m	h m	h m			h m	h m	h m	
7 54	34	7 9	9 44	1	Th.	6 58	4 41	7 22	
7 64	33	8 15	10 32	2	Fri.	6 59	4 40	8 28	
7 74	33	9 24	11 22	3	Sat.	7 04	4 40	9 35	
7 84	33	10 33	4	S.	7 10	4 40	10 42	
7 94	33	11 42	0 37	5	Mo.	7 24	4 40	11 49	
7 104	33	morn	1 33	6	Tu.	7 34	4 40	morn	
7 114	33	0 50	2 33	7	W.	7 44	4 40	0 57	
7 124	33	1 58	3 35	8	Th.	7 54	4 40	2 3	
7 134	33	3 6	4 38	9	Fri.	7 54	4 40	3 9	
7 144	33	4 14	5 38	10	Sat.	7 64	4 40	4 15	
7 154	33	5 19	6 35	11	S.	7 74	4 41	5 20	
7 154	33	6 21	7 28	12	Mo.	7 84	4 41	6 21	
7 164	33	rises.	8 17	13	Tu.	7 84	4 41	rises.	
7 174	34	6 16	9 1	14	W.	7 94	4 41	6 31	
7 184	34	7 16	9 45	15	Th.	7 94	4 42	7 29	
7 184	34	8 16	10 28	16	Fri.	7 104	4 43	8 27	
7 194	35	9 14	11 10	17	Sat.	7 104	4 43	9 24	
7 204	35	10 11	11 50	18	S.	7 114	4 43	10 20	
7 204	35	11 7	0 11	19	Mo.	7 114	4 44	11 15	
7 214	36	morn	0 54	20	Tu.	7 124	4 44	morn	
7 214	36	0 3	1 40	21	W.	7 124	4 45	0 9	
7 214	37	1 0	2 29	22	Th.	7 134	4 45	1 4	
7 224	38	1 58	3 22	23	Fri.	7 134	4 46	2 1	
7 224	38	2 57	4 17	24	Sat.	7 144	4 47	2 59	
7 234	39	3 56	5 13	25	S.	7 144	4 47	3 57	
7 234	39	4 56	6 8	26	Mo.	7 154	4 48	4 56	
7 234	40	5 54	7 2	27	Tu.	7 154	4 48	5 54	
7 244	41	sets.	7 53	28	W.	7 154	4 49	sets.	
7 244	42	6 0	8 41	29	Th.	7 164	4 49	6 13	
7 244	42	7 9	9 28	30	Fri.	7 164	4 51	7 21	
7 244	43	8 20	10 17	31	Sat.	7 164	4 51	8 30	

San Francisco Tides.

For explanatory remarks, see Note on Twelfth page.

Day of Mo th	High Tide.		Day of Mo th	High Tide.		Day of Mo th	High Tide.	
	Morning.	Evening.		Morning.	Evening.		Morning.	Evening.
1	2 14*	0 26†	12	0 26*	10 01*	23	6 51†	7 20*
2	2 33*	1 19†	13	1 0*	10 41†	24	7 30†	8 28*
3	3 37*	2 17†	14	1 36*	11 53†	25	8 27†	9 43*
4	4 23*	3 34†	15	2 24*	0 22†	26	9 40†	10 41*
5	5 29*	4 58†	16	3 04*	1 10†	27	9 15†	11 42*
6	6 1*	0 25†	17	3 25*	2 02†	28	9 48†	
7	6 50†	7 40†	18	3 55*	3 8†	29	0 27*	10 20†
8	7 45†	9 4*	19	4 32*	4 13†	30	1 19*	11 22†
9	8 18†	10 18*	20	5 0*	5 3*	31	1 50*	0 16†
10	8 50†	11 22*	21	6 17†	6 9*		2 28*	1 14†
11	0 32†							

SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1864.

Li Po

SUNDAY 12
April 12 Friday the 12th
 Until the day nothing was
 even thought of according to
 our country's ways. For in
 we had wanted to capture. But our
 cause was almost lost, something
^{urgent} must be done. What else
 was owing to others. Who did not
 strike for their country with
 heart. I struck boldly and not
 the papers say. I walked with a firm
 step through a thousand of them
 was stopped. But pushed on. A color
 was at his side. I shouted see before
 before I fired. In jumping back
 I found all his friends. He was
 my right. But he was at my
 the flash at my gun.
 I can never repeat it. I was
 hearted to fail. Our country
 all her trouble to him. And
 God simply made me the victor
 of his punishment. The country

The above photograph of the diary shows the first of two entries written in April, 1865. Also visible are the controversial stubs of missing pages.

man that there was any ground for the suspicions entertained against Johnson."¹³ Thus in the end it was Baker, not Johnson, who was exposed. As two exasperated members of the Judiciary Committee exclaimed of him as a witness, "It is doubtful whether he has in any one thing told the truth, even by accident."¹⁴

Not for seventy years did anyone again succumb to the temptation of exploiting the missing pages from Booth's diary by hinting that Baker might have been telling the truth about them after all. In 1937 Otto Eisenschiml published *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?*, in which he suggested by inference that the mastermind behind the assassination conspiracy might have been none other than Secretary of War Stanton.¹⁵ Though Eisenschiml advanced his idea as a hypothesis only and admitted that there was no evidence to support it, he so skillfully (and deviously) built a circumstantial case against Stanton that "the Eisenschiml thesis" has multitudes of true believers even today.

In reviewing the testimony before the Judiciary Committee, Eisenschiml tells of Baker's assertion that pages were removed from the diary, but he does not make it clear that Baker later retracted most of his testimony and ended up swearing that he remembered nothing at all about what was inside the diary. Baker's sole reason for believing the book had been intact was that Stanton had not asked him about any missing pages. Of that remark, Eisenschiml states: "This shot must have told, for the investigators quickly abandoned the subject. . . . All in all, Baker had decidedly the better of the argument."¹⁶

But to give Baker the better of this particular argument was apparently too much, even for Eisenschiml, for in his next paragraph he modifies his conclusion. "It is difficult to arrive at a verdict," he declares judiciously.

On one hand there stands a disgruntled ex-secret service man whose love of veracity is not of

the highest rating. . . . Against him was pitted Edwin M. Stanton, who, as a young man in Cadiz, Ohio, during the presidential campaign of 1840, had once cited the Constitution and deliberately deleted one line, thereby distorting the entire meaning; as Secretary of War he was responsible for the actions of the bureau of military justice which had not hesitated to mutilate the official report of the conspiracy trial. It is impossible to glean the truth from the contradictory statements of two such men.

Because Stanton was alleged (in a reminiscence published in 1927) to have misrepresented the Constitution during an early and especially wild political campaign, and because the official report (actually an abridgement of the proceedings) of the conspiracy trial did not include the petition of clemency for Mary E. Surratt signed by five of the nine judges, Eisenschiml maintains that the Secretary's testimony before the Judiciary Committee, corroborated by four other men, is worth no more than that of Baker, who perjured himself both in his original testimony about the diary and in his testimony about President Johnson, and who was directly or indirectly responsible for the falsification of the diary in his *History of the United States Secret Service*.¹⁷

Eisenschiml was willing to call the controversy between Stanton and Baker a draw. Not so David Balsiger and Charles E. Sellier, Jr., who in 1977 startled students of the assassination and the public by announcing that the diary's missing pages—and Booth's letter to the *National Intelligencer* as well—had been found among papers owned by Stanton's descendants.

In their *The Lincoln Conspiracy*, released

¹³*Butler's Book* (Boston: A. M. Thayer, 1892), p. 930.

¹⁴*Impeachment Investigation*, p. 111. The committee's reports, from which this quotation is taken, precede the pages of testimony.

¹⁵The book was published by Little, Brown of Boston.

¹⁶Eisenschiml, p. 143.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 144.



Lafayette C. Baker, seated, confers with his aides Luther Baker, left, and Everton J. Conger. Lafayette Baker was the first chief of the Secret Service.

as a paperback by Schick Sunn Classic Books and produced as a motion picture by Sunn Classic Pictures,¹⁸ Balsiger and Sellier claim to have unravelled a conspiracy so shocking that they have called upon Congress to establish a joint Senate-House committee to reopen the case of Lincoln's assassination. "Until that congressional committee is formed," they instruct their readers, "you are the judge of the evidence."¹⁹

Unfortunately, they do not give their readers any evidence to judge; they simply state that it exists. Indeed, Balsiger and Sellier and their sponsor, Sunn Classic, have not seen the purported missing pages themselves, because negotiations to obtain them broke down over the owners' "desire for total anonymity, a disagreement on a dollar amount for using the papers, excessive contractual restrictions on their use, and numerous legal questions."²⁰ The best that Balsiger and Sellier were able to do was to acquire (for \$6,500)²¹ a transcript of the alleged paper, some three thousand words implicating seventy prominent businessmen and Union and Confederate political leaders, including, of course, Edwin M. Stanton. "Everything possible was done to authenticate the Booth diary transcripts," they declare, "including performing voice analyses on numerous interviews, using the psychological stress evaluator (PSE), used by many law enforcement agencies and the CIA." Based on the PSE results and their own critical evaluation of the page contents, "the authors believe the material to be authentic."²²

Critical readers judging the evidence for themselves would require additional substantiation, and Balsiger and Sellier give it to them. In the fortuitous discovery of still another document—the diary of an Indiana congressman, George W. Julian, who was in 1867 a member of Butler's assassination committee—they seek to prove that the missing pages were once in Stanton's pos-

session.

As described in *The Lincoln Conspiracy*, Julian was as anxious as other Radicals to remove Lincoln from the Presidency but was not a member of any of the four conspiracies the book claims existed against him. Summoned to the War Department on April 24, 1865, Julian found several Radicals greatly agitated over a little book being passed among them. "I asked what was happening," Julian wrote in his diary that night (as reported by Balsiger and Sellier), "and Stanton said, 'We have Booth's diary and he has recorded a lot in it.' . . . Stanton asked me if I wanted to read the diary and I told him that since I had not met the man [Booth] and was not mentioned in his diary, I was better off not reading it. . . . Stanton said, 'It concerns you, for we either stick together in this thing, or we will all go down the river together.' But I did not read it nor do I know what was in it."²³

If authentic, Julian's account would indeed prove that the missing pages from Booth's diary had once been in Stanton's office; it would also lend credibility to the transcript of the purported pages. But once again Balsiger and Sellier do not present a document for the judgment of their readers, but only the transcript of one.

In 1926 Julian's daughter, Grace Julian Clarke, lent her father's diary to the writer Claude G. Bowers, who used it as a source for his popular book on Reconstruction, *The Tragic Era* (1929). "I fear it will not be

¹⁸ (Los Angeles, 1977).

¹⁹ Balsiger and Sellier, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

²¹ Jack Anderson to the *Washington Post*, n.d. (ca. Aug., 1977), as reprinted in *Lincoln Log*, Aug., 1977, p. 3.

²² Balsiger and Sellier, p. 12.

²³ "Secret Documents Excerpts," promotional literature released by Sunn Classic Pictures (1977), pp. 9–10. The text of the alleged diary is reprinted in *Lincoln Log*, March–April, 1977, p. 5, and freely paraphrased in Balsiger and Sellier, pp. 219–21.

²⁴ Letter dated July 22, 1926, Manuscript Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, and reprinted



This sketch, titled "Death of J. Wilkes Booth," appeared in Lafayette Baker's 1867 History of the United States Secret Service.

up to your expectations," Mrs. Clarke had told Bowers. "And please remember that it was never meant for such critical examination and that my father meant to destroy it. I feel a little guilty in sending it forth, even for your friendly eye."²⁴ When Bowers returned the manuscript, Mrs. Clarke burned the parts relating to the Civil War and gave

the rest to the Indiana State Library. But Bowers, so the story goes, had made a transcript, and it is that transcript that Balsiger and Sellier used.²⁵

The alleged transcript was found not among the Bowers Papers at Indiana University but in the collections of Ray A. Neff, an associate professor of Health and Safety at Indiana State University, Terre Haute, who supplied many of the documentary sources for *The Lincoln Conspiracy*, and whose name has been associated since 1961 with discoveries relating to the assassination.²⁶ If the transcript is genuine, it means that Grace Clarke was completely blind to the importance of her father's diary, and that Bowers, whose prejudices against the Radicals were extreme, deliberately closed his eyes to material that would have incriminated many of them in Lincoln's

in *Lincoln Log*, Aug., 1977, pp. 3-4.

²⁵ Balsiger and Sellier, p. 314 (Ch. 18, notes 1-3, 11-17).

²⁶ Neff claimed to have discovered two ciphered messages written by Lafayette Baker in the margins of an old magazine. As decoded by Neff, they revealed a plot against Lincoln involving Stanton, Baker himself, and many others. See Robert H. Fowler, "Was Stanton Behind Lincoln's Murder?" *Civil War Times*, Aug., 1961, pp. 4-23; see, also, "Reaction to Baker Story: 'Kudos' to 'Rubbish,'" *ibid.*, Oct., 1961, pp. 2-5, and "Further Reaction to Baker Story," *ibid.*, Nov., 1961, pp. 2-4.

death—suppositions it is nearly impossible to entertain. By a happy circumstance, portions of Julian's diary had been copied in the *Indiana Magazine of History* in 1915. The entry for April 24 contains no reference to Booth's diary and describes no meeting with Stanton.²⁷ It is obvious, observes William C. Davis, editor of *Civil War Times Illustrated*, that "the fabricator of the more lurid version of the Julian diary didn't do his or her homework."²⁸

On the strength of their dubious transcripts alone, Balsiger and Sellier cannot expect readers to believe that the pages from Booth's diary now exist or that they were ever in Stanton's possession. Lacking new evidence of a convincing character, the only reasonable conclusions to be drawn about the diary come from an examination of facts long available. Little has been written about the diary because prior to Eisenschiml there was little interest in it. After Balsiger and Sellier, the interest may be considerable.

It should be remembered, first of all, that the little book (it measures six inches high by three and one-half inches across and is one inch thick) was published by James M. Crawford of St. Louis as a pocket diary for the year 1864, and was thus not the sort of volume that a true diarist would carry in 1865. Booth had a niece in St. Louis, Blanche De Bar (Booth), and played an engagement there January 12–16, 1864, when he probably obtained the book. If he ever used it as a diary, it could only have been before June 11, for the pages that follow that date are blank, except for those on which he wrote after the assassination and for a few others on which some now meaningless names, dates, and numbers are pencilled in, apparently at random. The pages from January 1 through June 10, a total of twenty-seven leaves, are the ones whose absence is made so conspicuous by the stubs. In addition, a total of sixteen sheets have been removed from different places in the last half of the volume.²⁹

When the year 1864 ended, Booth kept the diary; it was convenient for memoranda, and perhaps he could not bear to throw it away. It is handsome even today, when its brown leather binding is no longer supple and lustrous and its red leather lining has faded. It must have been a thing of beauty when Booth carried it, and of utility too. Inside the front cover and hinged to the back cover are leather pockets, with flaps, for miscellaneous papers (Booth carried the pictures of five women), and there are smaller pockets, too, marked for tickets and postage, and a leather loop for a pencil. Immediately following the title page is a series of printed tables, some of them obsolete in 1865 (like those showing the times of eclipses and high tides in New York and San Francisco for the whole of 1864) but perhaps still capable of diverting a bored traveller; some of the tables, like those showing distance in time and railroad miles from New York to various cities, were still current and valuable. And then there were all those blank pages. Regardless of the year, the beautiful little volume was still useful.

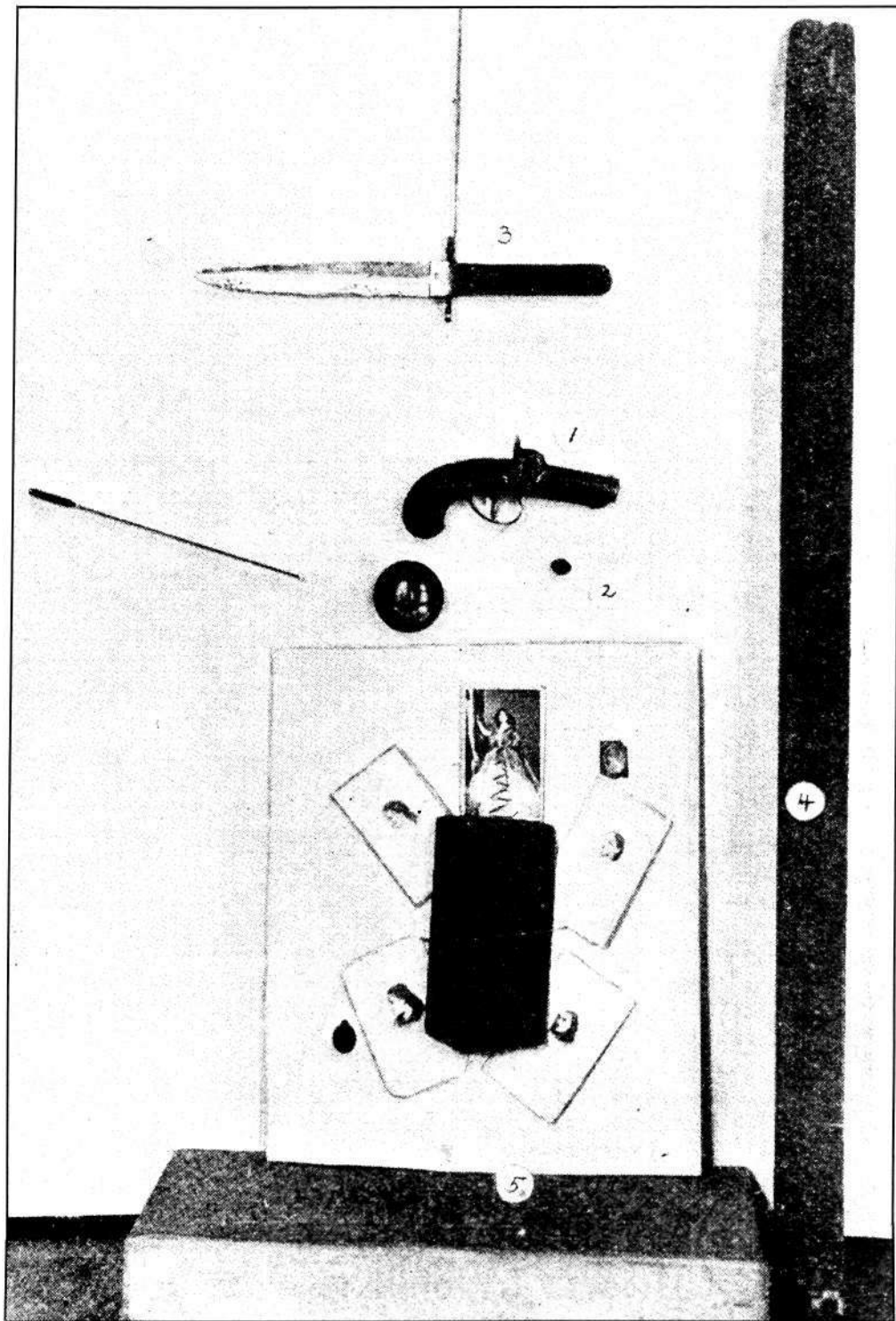
And Booth used it. In September, 1864, he showed it to a friend, Samuel B. Arnold, whom he tried to impress with the amount of money he was earning in the theater.³⁰ At the top of the first page after the stubs, just before the first passage about the assassination, Booth wrote the words "Ti Amo" (instead of "Te Amo"), and many of the stubs show marks and the beginnings or

²⁷"George W. Julian's Journal—The Assassination of Lincoln," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 11 (1915), 324–37.

²⁸Davis, "Caveat Emptor," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Aug., 1977, p. 36.

²⁹"Report of the FBI Laboratory, Federal Bureau of Investigation" (on Booth's diary), Oct. 3, 1977, pp. 2–3.

³⁰[Charles F. Heartman, comp.] *Defence of a Lincoln Conspirator: Statements and Autobiographical Notes by Samuel Bland Arnold* (Hattiesburg, Miss.: Book Farm, 1943), p. 19.



Booth relics formerly held by the War Department: (1) derringer used in the assassination; (2) fatal bullet; (3) dagger; (4) wooden bar used by Booth to prevent admittance into the Lincoln box at Ford's Theatre; (5) diary and items found in it.

endings of words, proving that they had once been written upon. One wonders how many of them were love notes in Latin. On April 23, 1865, only two and a half days before the fatal rendezvous at Richard Henry Garrett's farm, Booth and his faithful companion David E. Herold, fleeing southward as fast as a broken leg would permit, reached the country home of a prominent Virginia physician, Richard Stuart (not Stewart).³¹ Already in trouble with Union authorities for his support of the Confederacy, Stuart would not receive the fugitives (though he did not turn them in, either) but sent them to the cabin of one of his former slaves, William Lucas, where he provided dinner for them and where they spent the night.

Booth was so indignant at the treatment that the next morning he opened the diary and wrote an angry note to Stuart. The note was dated April 24, the very day that Bal-siger and Sellier claim Julian saw the diary in Stanton's office. "Forgive me, but I have some little pride," Booth began. "I hate to blame you for your want of hospitality; you know your own affairs. I was sick and tired, with a broken leg, in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog from my door in such a condition." However, the doctor had given food, for which Booth thanked him; since Booth had not been treated as a guest, he asked Stuart to accept \$5.00. Booth tore the note from the diary, leaving parts of words on the stubs, and then reconsidered. The gesture was too extravagant. He cut out another sheet and copied what he had written, except for the conclusion. "Be kind enough," he now asked Stuart, "to accept the enclosed two dollars and a half (though hard to spare) for what we have received." He folded the first note and put it in one of the pockets of the diary, where it still resided when the diary was shown to the Judiciary Committee.³²

About two weeks after Booth's death, Luther Baker, backtracking Booth's trail for information about his movements,

heard from Lucas of the second note, secured it from Stuart, and took it back to Washington. In his presence, Lafayette Baker or his representative and Eckert matched it against the stubs in the diary. It fit. "I am positive," Luther Baker testified, "the leaf came from the diary."³³

On April 25, at the Garrett farmhouse where he had taken refuge, Booth asked Richard Baynham Garrett, a boy of eleven years, to take down a large map that hung on the wall and place it on the floor. Leaning his crutches against the wall and using a chair for support, Booth then lowered himself to the map. "After carefully studying it for a long time," Garrett later recalled, "he took a pencil and notebook from his pocket and wrote something in it."³⁴ The next day Booth was dead and his diary was at the War Department.

Stanton told the Judiciary Committee that he assumed Booth removed leaves whenever he had a use for them or wished to destroy something written on them. Holt conceded that in cutting out pages Booth could have been shielding co-conspirators, but thought it more likely that the actor, recognizing the possibility of being captured, was preparing his diary for maximum public impact. Booth's dramatic and passionate vindication of his deed had been written for publication, Holt believed. "I think there can be no doubt about that, if you examine it carefully."³⁵

For a man with limitless opportunities to study the diary, Holt was surprisingly un-

³¹ David Miller DeWitt, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and Its Expiation* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), p. 80.

³² *Impeachment Investigation*, pp. 676-77.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 484-85.

³⁴ Richard Baynham Garrett, "A Chapter of Unwritten History," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 71 (1963), 393.

³⁵ *Impeachment Investigation*, pp. 281, 282-86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-87.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

³⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Cong., 1 Sess. (March 26, 1867), p. 364.

familiar with it in 1867. He said it "was evidently written after the events," declared that Booth had exulted over his crime, and observed: "The entries continue down to the 21st of April. They are not continued up to his capture. It does not appear even that he had crossed the river when they ceased." Any close reading of Booth's comments would make it clear that they were written after the assassination and that, although Booth justified his action, he did not exult over it. Holt referred to "the entries" as if they had been made day-by-day to April 21, when in fact Booth had written in the book on only two occasions: the first probably on April 17—antedated April 13–14—and the second dated "Friday 21." The text of the latter passage makes it obvious that Booth had not yet crossed the Potomac. Of the figures, letters, and lines Booth had drawn after the first entry, Holt said it was "probable" they were to indicate the days of the week and month.³⁶

If the diary was of so little interest that Holt had forgotten what it contained—even though he had had it in his possession for the past two years—and if it was true that Booth himself had cut out the missing pages for his own reasons, why was the book suppressed by the War Department? Why was it not presented at the conspiracy trial? It may have been, as Holt explained, that "There was nothing in the diary which I could conceive would be testimony against any human being, or for any one except Booth himself, and he being dead, I did not offer it to the Commission."³⁷ John A. Bingham, one of the special prosecutors at the trial, declared that the diary was not evidence of the kind that the government was obliged to introduce. "Why, sir," he exclaimed in the House of Representatives on March 26, 1867, "if one of several conspirators can thus make his declarations, made after the fact[,] evidence, either for himself or for his co-conspirators, how impotent is justice itself."³⁸



Title page of 1864 pocket diary used by John Wilkes Booth in April, 1865. The booklet was published by St. Louis stationer James M. Crawford.

MONDAY, JUNE 20, 1864.

TUESDAY 21

WEDNESDAY 22

THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 1864.

After being hunted like a dog
through swamps, woods, and
night being chased by gunboats
we were forced to make our way
and having with every man
a good deal of ammunition
why? For during the time we
were in the boat, Robert
there. And yet I have seen
down a gun. **FRIDAY 24**
they were there. Am looked
upon as a common coward
my action even more than
of them. One shot to the
himself. The other had not
him coming but his own
to bring. I hoped for nothing
I knew no female names
which for **THURSDAY 25** my
and that alone. But the
ground beneath the
and frozen for the
you behold the
then extend to me. I can
find me if I have
Get I cannot see
it in the

Above, the final pages of John Wilkes Booth's brief but impassioned account of his flight from Ford's Theatre after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The earlier pages of Booth's diary are reproduced on pages 41, 45, and 53 of this article.

SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 1864.

SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 1864.

The very little I left behind
to share my name. The
Govt will not allow to be
printed. So I will all. For
my country I have given
up all that makes life
sweet and glad. I have
nothing before me. I have
the same feeling as I have

MONDAY 27

MONDAY 27

TUESDAY 28

[illegible]

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 29, 1864.

I think I have done well.
Though I am a sinner, still
the curse of Cain is on me
When of the world know
my heart, that one flow would
find words too great, thought
I still claim no greatness
To night I try to escape
these blood bonds once

THURSDAY 30

more. ~~Who~~ ^{THURSDAY 30} who can read
his late. Book must be done

I have two great ones
 & also one in the back of my
 the May 1st 1861

I bless the entire world
 Have never ruled or changed
 anyone. This last time
 I have ruled the world

FRIDAY, JULY 1

FRIDAY, JULY 1
 20. And it with him, so
 down and past me. And
 for this brave boy with
 who often froze for before
 since with a fire and
 he was in line on
 of the war, the
 of blood. but I
 fight the course" in all

Following Booth's April 20 entry are several blank pages of calendar sheets, some torn, as well as printed sheets intended for personal use, including pages titled "Memoranda" and "Cash Account."

Perhaps the diary was suppressed because its opening lines spoke of a six months' kidnap conspiracy and also of the sudden need to do "something decisive & great" since the cause was almost lost. Whether or not the statement was evidence, it certainly would have weakened the government's contention that assassination had been the object of Booth's conspiracy from the beginning. Throughout the trial, Holt and the other prosecutors were determined that Booth's associates should be convicted and punished for their involvement in Lincoln's murder, and they were none too scrupulous about how they accomplished it.

But the most likely reason of all why the diary was suppressed was the same reason that Booth, not knowing of the cowardice of John Matthews, believed that his letter to the *National Intelligencer* had been suppressed. "The little, the very little I left behind to clear my name," Booth had written, "the Govmt will not allow to be printed." The government did not publicize the diary in 1865 because it would not allow Lincoln's assassin to clear his name, or try to, by describing the purity and selflessness of his motives. Stanton, who had had Booth's body secretly buried so that it could not become the object of glorification or veneration by rebels and rebel-sympathizers,

knew only too well that there were many people in the North, as well as in the South, who agreed that Lincoln was a tyrant and the author of the country's sufferings.³⁹ Stanton would not allow Booth to appeal to that group. Nor would he allow Booth to plead for understanding and God's forgiveness, or to reveal the torment of his dawning self-doubt; Stanton knew that there were many more people who would respond compassionately to such human suffering. He was resolved that Booth be denied any defense at all, that he be despised and execrated and, if not forgotten, then consigned to a place in history as miserable as his unknown gravesite.⁴⁰

Booth escaped the hangman, but Stanton sought to condemn him to silence and obloquy by concealing his diary. In doing so, the Secretary became vulnerable to the tragically ironic charge of being himself a party to the assassination.

³⁹ So he told the Judiciary Committee. *Impeachment Investigation*, p. 409.

⁴⁰ For the same reason, Stanton was "violently opposed" to the publication of the diary in 1867. Gideon Welles, *Diary of . . .*, ed. Howard K. Beale (New York: Norton, 1960), III, 95.