February
3rd
1927

Mr Bruce H Franks
Newport Roller Mills
Newport Ky

Dear Mr Franks:

Forgive me for not sooner answering your interesting letter received by my office early in January. I have been ill and also away from the office on business since that time.

First with reference to the photograph you spoke of: On April 27, 1865, the day following Booth's death, an order was issued by the Secretary of the Navy permitting Surgeon-General J K Barnes and his assistant, accompanied by Judge Advocate-General Holt, John A Bingham, Major Eckert, Assistant Secretary of War; William C Moore, Colonel L C Baker, chief of the Secret Service; Lieutenant L B Baker, Lieutenant-Colonel Everson J Conger, Charles Dawson, chief clerk, National Hotel; J L Smith, Mr Gardiner, the photographer, and an assistant, to go on board the Montauk to identify the body of John Wilkes Booth. Whether there was ever a copy of this photograph placed in the War Department files, I cannot say. However, the photograph was published in Harper's Magazine a couple weeks later. It would be of little assistance in the identification of the remains as there was too large a group and as far as the body of Booth was concerned it might as well have been that of a dead Indian.

As to Booth's sweetheart, it was whispered around Washington at the time that he was paying court to a daughter of Senator Hale. This was denied by the Hale family and other than gossip there was no substantiation. He had a mistress in Washington by the name of Ella Turner, who according to the newspapers attempted to commit suicide after the assassination. There is no chance that he ever knew Agnes Perry. She was an Australian who came to San Francisco about 1859. Her name was Agnes Land Rookes. February 11, 1861 she became the second wife of Harry Perry, an actor. Her husband died in San Francisco January 22, 1862. She still played there until October 1865 when she first came to New York, and became identified with Junius Brutus Booth, Jr. whom she married in 1867. She was his third wife. She came to New York several months after the assassination and there is no record of John Wilkes Booth having been in San Francisco during the period she was a resident there. It is hardly likely that she was everyhis sweetheart. John Wilkes had a great many affairs. According to newspapers current at the time of the assassination, a girl in Buffalo attempted to kill him in that city.

John Wilkes' mother's name was not Mary Agnes. It was Mary Ann. I do not know the day and month of Booth's birth. I have never had occasion to search the records for that as it did not come in question. Some of the newspapers at the time of the assassination said that he was 26, others said that he was 27. Both these ages would place his birth prior to 1840. Brown's History of the American Stage published in 1870 states that he was born in 1838 but does not give the month or day. His birthday in 1841 would make him only 24 at the time of the assassination.

You have aroused my interest in your man Newton - not that I am in the least convinced that he was John Wilkes Booth but because you are. It is quite intriguing to know there could be another whose identity so closely parallels Booth. As you doubtless know, there have been a great many cases of such mistaken identity and this is used as one of the arguments against capital punishment. I am wondering if you are well enough acquainted with Mrs Newton to ask her for details as to where her husband was born and something of his family history. It would be interesting to trace back and see if we can learn anything there. A great many families in the middle of the last century did not procure birth certificates or keep records that can be authenticated, especially if children were born in the country. However, we might find something which would settle the question for you as to this man's identity.

I am still hoping that an opportunity will present itself for me to come to Cincinnati or for you to come to Detroit. Unfortunately I become rather rusty on the Booth question. Although it interests me very much, I am concerned with a great many investigations dealing with a variety of subjects and it is next to impossible to keep the past ones in mind while dealing with new ones.

Sincerely yours,

THE DEARBORN PUBLISHING CO

F L Black

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