Mrs. Ed. McLaughlin
3325 St. Johns Drive, Dallas Texas —

Acc. 1406

Wichita Falls, Texas,
January 12, 1922

Mr. Finis L. Bates,
Memphis, Tennessee.

My dear Mr. Bates:

In response to your querry as to where and when I first met John St Helen (or John Wilkes Booth), was on Squaw Creek, in Hood County, Texas, in the last days of March, 1870. He was staying with an old settler by the name of Ray, and was teaching school. This was about three miles from Charlie Barnard's (old trading houses, where he traded in early years with the Indians) mill and store on Paloxy, near its mouth, where it flows into the Brazos River. There was a family named McDonald who had some boys, and a young fellow from Smith County named Dallas Wise, staying there. The two families Ray and McDonald had a falling out about John St Helen, (or Booth) before I went to that section. I was just from Memphis, Tennessee, from my brother's place, John L. Strong, about two and one-half miles northwest of General Bradley's plantation, and about the same distance from the then John Lewis Malone Plantation, now known as Clarkton. Mr. Malone lived at the foot of Muscle Shoals in Colbert County, Alabama. I had gone to Squaw Creek to work for Jim McBridge, who then owned more cattle than any one in that section. I had heard a great deal of talk about Wise and the school teacher's row before I saw either of them. Dallas Wise had lived with Jim McBride the year before as a cow hand. A few days after my arrival at McBride's, McBride, J im Williams and myself rode down the creek to McDonald's one morning, as they all wanted me to see Wise. Every one considered him a fighter and bad man. While we were at McDonald's his boys, Wise McBride, Jim Williams and myself, sitting on the side of the road in front of McDonald's house, John M. Williams, an older brother of Jim's, rode up, and pretty soon Jim Ray and John St Helen (Booth) came riding along the road. I was told which one was St Helen, or the school teacher, as he was called, and how he and Wise came near having a shooting scrape a day or two before. I soon saw the crowd was trying to enlist me on the side of Dallas Wise and McDonald's. Before I had ever seen John St Helen I had placed my sympathies with St Helen, and had formed a decided dislike for Wise, who I dubbed "Governor Wise". At that time I was only 21 years of age. Jim McBride was one of the finest fellows I ever knew, and I told him this man St Helen had my sympathy as the McDonald crowd were trying

through Wise to make him leave the country, which they had threatened to do, and finally some shots were exchanged a day or two afterwards. A few days after this McBride and I met Ray and St Helen (or Booth) and I was introduced to them both. St Helen looked me straight in the eye and took my hand and said,"Young man, you will do(you will do) anywhere". Jim and Ray were talking. Jim McBride was a little hard of hearing. St Helen (or Booth) asked me where I was from, and finally what I thought of Wise. I simply said, "I think he is the outside of a bologna". He laughed and told me he wanted to see me some time and have a long talk about the states. There was a small still house at Barnard's Mill, (now know n as Glenrose, county seat of Summerville County, Texas). I met him there for the second time. There were eight or ten men wanting to drink beer from the fermenting mash. I did not drink anything and St Helen and I sat down under a mesquite tree and talked. The conversation drifted to the war between the states, and I said I was sure that John Wilkes Booth was never killed, and that for some time I had felt that some day I would meet him. He wanted to know why I thought he was never killed. I gave him my reasons. He simply said, I believe you are about right (or probably I don't know but that you are about right). I met him several times after that, but I want to say before I forget it at the first sight of the man he would impress you that he was a highly cultured gentleman in every respect. It stood out in every move and act and lineament of his countenance, yet his piercing black eyes showed very plainly he was no coward. At times he seemed to be in very deep thought, and as though he was thinking way back behind him, which would cause him to appear at times moody, and at other times he was quite jovial and apparently tried to make every one feel as he did. Coming out of those moody spells he would often quote a stanza of poetry, which was usually from Shakespeare. One day something caused me to repeat what Burns wrote while watching the louse crawl over the lady's bonnett in cnurch, and this was the beginning of his quoting quite a little from Shakespeare, first correcting me in my quotation. At this time we were riding from Barnard's Mill, or Glenrose, one evening and he seemed a little serious as I was telling him that I expected to have trouble with Dallas Wise sooner or later, as he had come to McBride's and I understood that he was going to work for McBride, and they all seemed pretty well stuck on him, and several times he had told me what to do. I told St Helen (or Booth) that I was many miles from home and friends or kin, but he should not impose upon me. We stopped and sat down upon the ground near the road. He put his hand upon my shoulder, and said "You are not without friends, or one, at least; for I want you to know and understand that I am your friend, and come

to me when you need me. I don't want you to get into any trouble. Always avoid it in an honorable way, for it is easier to get into trouble than to get out of it, but don't let any one run over you". During the conversation, I looked him in the face and told him I believed that he was Booth. He reddened a little and asked me why my suspicions lead me to think so. I told him and he then asked me about gentiment in the states, and in my travels as to Booth, and was believed to be still alive, etc. I told him what my observation had been. He told me not to divulge what we had talked about, that I had fathomed what thousands of shrewd men had failed to do, and I was but a boy. He said when we had an opportunity hehad a good deal to tell me. That fall I went West,having failed to get Wise to resent anything I would say to him. St Helen was at Billy Snyder's store one evening when I was trying to get Wise to resent what I had said and certain acts of mine, but Wise skipped out. W. W. (Billy) Snyder established a store in the Barnard Rock store near the mill, and was well and intimately acquainted with John St Helen (or Booth). For the last four years Bill Snyder and I have frequently talked of St Helen and his movements around Glenrose,Lampasseas County at Grandberry, and his trip to Coleman County. I think Billy Snyder sold out to St Helen when he left Glenrose. Billy Snyder, after closing his business at Glenrose whnh to Grandberry and went into the saloon business, and I think that John St Helen later left Glenrose and went to Grandberry and started a small business there. At one time there he got sick and came very near dying, and was expected to die for a long time. The last time I saw John St Helen was in Trickam Chisum's Store in Coleman County on Muke Water Creek. He had gone there he said to try to get a school. He said he came from down in Lampasseas County. I was told he came there afoot through that Indian country with nothing but a pocket knife. I saw him pass where I was staying with Jim Dofflemyre, and I asked Jim Dofflemyre who he was, for I thought I knew him though he had a beard all over his face. He said his name was Professor Ravenwood and that he came there to get a school. He was staying with Enoch Fivesh, a cattleman. He became quite intimate during the time with Emery Peters, the man who managed Chisum's business. He phrenologized Peter's head and got the confidence of each other in thi s way, and convinced Peter who he was. He wrote Peters a chart for his head. He wrote a very good hand, a short and right round hand. The walk he made was about 65 miles through the Indian country. I had seen him several times at a distance, but not to speak to him on his way to the store. I saw him one day just before noon in Chisum's store and was looking pretty straight at him, not knowing whether to recognize him or not, for I knew him as John St Helen, and he called himself there Professor Ravenwood.

He knitted his brow a little, and I merely said "Good Morning". That afternoon we left the ranch for a round-up and Jim Doffle-myer rode up to me and said "Henry, lets go by the store. Fiveash tells me that man Ravenwood is Wilkes Booth. They are helping him to get back to Lampassas County, an old man came and told him some fellows whom he had had trouble with had abused his wife. Enoch has given him his good horse; Bud Willett has given him his new saddle and Winchester and two hundred dollars in gold; Peters two hundred and Addison Gordon a hundred, making five hundred in gold. If it is Booth, or you are satisfied it is him, I don't mind giving him three or five hundred. Enoch wanted me to give a hundred. When we arrived at the store, the people in the store had filled a pa ir or new saddle bags with clothes. He took them off the counter as we reached the door and put them across the saddle on a nice little gray horse given him by Enoch Fiveash, and as he stepped back into the door and started into the store, he put his hand on top of my head, pushigg my hat back a little and said in a voice so every one could hear him, "Young man, you will do, you will do, in any country". This is the second time he made the same remark to me. I will say here that St Helen, Ravenwood or Booth was rather eccentric at times and seemed to try hard to overcome it. In his conversations with the rude and uneducated with whom he came in contact, he seemed to try to make it easy in correcting them in a way that they would not notice. This would be when he was in a jovial mood. He seemed not to want to offend any one in any ordinary conversation and often would quit talking to avoid doing so. The old man who came there for him rode an old bay mule and was hurrying him to get away. He shook hands with all the men, who had congregated there, about a dozen, and took my hand and said: "Old boy, I wish I had time to talk to you, for you are all right any where; I hope to see you some time", and then he left. At that time he had about an inch growth of beard on his face, and which was more than I had ever seen him wear. I have forgotten to say that Jim Prestidge was in the crowd that went with us to McDonald's the first day I saw JohnSt Helen. There was a peculiarity in St Helen (or Booth's) eyes, which caused him to appear sometimes as looking you side ways, or that one eye seemed to be deficient in some way when looking straight at you. Something in our conversationone day caused me to remark, where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise. He remarked, "Then what do you want to know for? My boy, do you know youhave a remarkable memory? You have mentioned things and occurrences

I had almost forgotten, and some things I had entirely forgotten". He was a man of wonderful personality. I was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, when I saw the account of his suicide at Enid, Okla. I was in a newspaper office and the editor handed me a paper and told me that John Wilkes Booth had committed suicide at Enid, Okla., and asked me what I thought of it. I told him if they could connect him with John St Helen, who at one time was at Glenrose, Texas, that it was Booth. On my return to my home at Sherman, Texas, Bud Bowles, correspondent for the Dallas Newsand associated press man, met me and asked me what I thought about the man who had suicided, for I had frequently talked to him about my having met John St Helen, and believed him to be Booth. I had also told him about meeting him as Professor Ravenwood at Trickam, and what occurred there, and about his writing a chart for Emery Peter's head. I told Bowles where he could find Peters, at Denton, Denton County, Texas. The Dallas News sent a man to Denton and located Peters and he verified all that I had said.

I have written this hurriedly. If there is anything else you would like to ask me about, do so. Billy (W.W)Snyder a year ago was in Cleburne, Texas. I called to see him at that time and Billy likes to play his old time pieces on his fiddle as much as he did when you knew him at Grandberry. I am also sending you my photograph just taken.

Your friend,

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF WICHITA.

On this the 20th day of January, A.D.1923, personally appeared Henry W. Strong, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the above and foregoing letter of five pages, and upon being duly sworn upon oath stated that the facts stated therein were true to the best of his knowledge and belief.

Given under my hand and seal of office the year and day above written.

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Notary Public in and for Wichita County, Texas.