December
21
1937

Mr J W Connolly
Traffic Department
Ford Motor Company
Alexandria Virginia

Dear Mr Connolly:

Your letter of December 13 about the John Wilkes Booth matter certainly is appreciated. We should like to have copies of any pictures of Booth and the other conspirators you may be able to obtain from the United States Signal Corps. We should also like to have pictures of the various conspiracy trial exhibits you listed, such as the Derringer pistol, etc.

In "Harpers Magazine" a number of years ago there was reproduced a picture of the Booth diary which was quite clear and readable. The photograph must have been taken at that time by the government. If so, the negative may still be on file in the Signal Corps and we could get prints of it.

In "This One Mad Act," by Izola Forrester, page 356, she tells of being taken by Mr Pitts to the basement of the War Department to view the exhibits and then says:

"I knelt by the old chest and felt carefully along its inner edges. Something sharp caught my fingers, a little five pointed star, oddly-shaped, not flat, but with wedge-like points on the upper side, made of either nickel or thin silver. I laid it on my palm. There was a crude sort of pin on its back so that it could be worn as an emblem. I had seen one like it a few days before, in a wall case at the Confederate Museum in Richmond, the old home of Jefferson Davis, which had been used as the White House of the Confederate Government during the Civil War. Near it had been a small carte-de-visite photograph of John Wilkes Booth, and there is a painting of Mary Surratt in the same room. The card beside the star reads, "Found on the battlefield of Seven Pines." I knew that it was the emblem of the order to which my grandfather had belonged, the Knights of the Golden Circle. Here in the old chest, with the rest of the "props" used in the great tragedy, it carried significance. If this star had been found on the body of the man who died at the Garrett farm, it presented a reason why he had been willing to shield the escape of Booth until the latter had time to get away, while the soldiers dallied around the warehouse. Supposing that they had each taken the same oath of brotherhood -

"I laid it back in the chest with a thrill of anticipation. It

seemed a definite clue that tied in with other things I knew, the old group photograph I had found in my grandmother's Bible, and her constant accusation, that he had been the "tool of other men."

"While Mr Pitts was closing the chest up and locking it, I knelt down to look in the old safe once more. Far back in it, completely hidden from anyone standing before it, was an old paper-covered bundle, very dusty, tied up with heavy string. The outer paper broke under the touch, it was so old, as I pulled it out. Mr Pitts glanced at it, remarking that it must have something to do with the Trial, or it would not have been there. Here, when the outer paper was opened up, was something entirely new and different from the collection of exhibits that had been produced by the prosecution at the Trial. I had seen the secret cipher cylinder and the key to it, that had been seized along with other articles belonging to Jefferson Davis and to his Secretary of State, Judah P Benjamin. The secret ciphers in Booth's trunk had been used as evidence that he had been on "special duty" with John H Surratt between Richmond and Canada. But the key did not fit the cipher which appeared on the fly-leaf of a little Book of Common Prayer, that lay on top of the contents of the bundle. There was also a large seal, and several emblems, larger silver stars than the little one in the chest, but exactly like it in shape.

"I caught a glimpse of the name on one of the neatly folded, official papers, George E Bickley. Then the package was lifted from my hands, and carefully retied and replaced in the old safe."

About 20 years ago there was a man in the Judge Advocate General's office named John P Simonton who claimed that a small medal, which he thought was some sort of Catholic insignia, had been taken from Booth's clothing and which, for a number of years, was among the Booth exhibits. Simonton claimed that this had disappeared a number of years ago.

We should certainly be delighted if you can secure photostats of the various official documentary evidence, such as affidavits of relatives, doctors, etc., who had known Booth and who certified to the fact that the corpse was that of Booth. There were a number of affidavits and signed statements taken just prior and during the conspiracy trial which are not included in Pittman's report.

I should like to have the various names written on the backs of the photographs that were in Booth's possession. With those names as a key, I think I may be able to identify some of them from theater records at Harvard University.

We should very much like to have copies of the pictures you list, which are the property of Mr Garrett, if he would care to let us have such copies.

I knew Mr Oldroyd quite well. As he got older, he became very much worried over the final disposition of his collection and we offered to buy it, providing the government did not see fit to take it over. As I remember, the price he asked was $50,000 and not $100,000. While we should have liked to have had it, we felt that the collection really belonged in Washington where it had been for so many years. I agree with Messrs Pitts and Garrett in their opinion of Eisenschiml's book.

I am trying to learn when the motion picture, "The Man in the Barn," will be shown in Detroit. I suppose it will be about as far from the historical truth as "The Prisoner of Shark Island," which dealt with the life of Dr Mudd.

We have Pittman's report of Oldroyd's book on the assassination. We should like to obtain copies of the Peterson Brothers report and will be glad to buy a copy if you can find it. Otherwise, we should like to borrow one and will photostat it. There used to be a bookstore at Pennsylvania Avenue near the Capitol which had a lot of Civil War material. As I remember, it was run by a Mr Coleman.

Sincerely yours,

F L BLACK

FLB KM