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ALLAN PINKERTON'S *Unpublished Story* of the first attempt on the life of ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Illustrations *by* Jay Hambidge

The History *of the* Letter *by* Jesse W. Weik

SHORTLY *after the close of the war William H. Herndon, Mr. Lincoln's law partner in Springfield, while visiting in Chicago, happened to meet Mr. Pinkerton at the home of a mutual friend. Knowing that he had laid bare the plot to destroy Lincoln at Baltimore on the way to his inauguration, Herndon pressed the detective for the story. Pinkerton related it in detail, and later, in compliance with Herndon's request, promised to put it in writing. This, however, as appears from numerous letters to Herndon, he deferred from time to time till the summer of 1866, when, to use his own language, he "sat down and put the whole story in record form, so that there might be no question as to the material facts."*

In his letter transmitting the MS., Pinkerton asked Mr. Herndon, and Leonard Swett, the only other person to whom it was to be shown, to treat as confidential all matter therein that related to the affairs of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad; and that the name of the broker who occupied a room adjoining his own in Baltimore be withheld, on the ground that its publication at that time in connection with the exposure of the plot might tend to the man's injury in business circles. A further reservation was that all statements regarding Ward H. Lamon were also to be treated as confidential. As the necessity for withholding names or facts has passed, there is therefore no reason why the whole story should not now be given to the world. The MS., which covers thirty pages of legal-cap paper, has never been out of Mr. Herndon's possession or mine since it reached the former by express August 23, 1866.

Introduction *by* Ida M. Tarbell

INTRODUCTION: In the long succession of sinister events which crowded the months between the election and the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, there was none which more effectually startled the North than his secret journey from Harrisburg to Washington on the night of February 22, 1861. It gave substance to rumors of violence which had been rife for weeks. The cautious deplored it as a sign of panic which they believed unjustified. The radicals hailed it as proof of their own suspicions. Almost nothing, of course, was known by the public of the reasons that had led to the spectacular performance.

Gradually, since the war, bits of information have come out from the actors in the story until it has

been possible to piece it together with fair accuracy. We know now what an accumulation of warnings came from different and unrelated persons from the time Dorothy Dix gave to Mr. Felton what was probably the first and most conclusive proof of what was hatching. The part of Allan Pinkerton has been told in an incomplete fashion, but nothing at once so authoritative, so informal and convincing, has been published as the following letter of Mr. Pinkerton, written only a few years after the event, with the perfect freedom of one who simply wants to get down whatever he remembers, not for publication, but for the information of a friend.

This letter is altogether the most important document on the episode yet published, and probably the most important in existence. Its history is told in the introductory note by Jesse W. Weik of Greencastle, Indiana, from whom it was secured. Mr. Weik was William H. Herndon's collaborator in his Life of Lincoln, and to him Mr. Herndon left his large collection of materials for that Life.—IDA M. TARBELL.



Allan Pinkerton's Unpublished Letter

PINKERTON'S NATIONAL POLICE AGENCY
ALLAN PINKERTON, Principal
G. H. BANGS, General Superintendent

PHILADELPHIA,
August 23, 1866.

WM. H. HERNDON, ESQ.,
Springfield, Ill.

DEAR SIR: Early in January, 1861, I received from Mr. S. M. Felton, at that time president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad, an application requesting me to ascertain through my detective force if there was any attempt on the part of the Secessionists of Maryland to seize the large steamer of the company used in ferrying their trains across the Susquehanna River at Havre de Grace, as also to burn the bridges of the company between Havre de Grace and Baltimore. If I recollect right, I commenced detective operations for this purpose in January, 1861. You will probably find this under the heading of Reports of A. P., at the time set when, accompanied by several of my operatives (detectives), I left Chicago for Baltimore. Upon arriving at Baltimore, I distributed my operatives around the city for the purpose of acquiring the confidence of the Secessionists. One of these detectives, named Timothy Webster, accompanied by a lady, was stationed by me at Perrymansville, a station about nine miles south of Havre de Grace on the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, where a rebel company of cavalry was being organized. Webster, as well as the lady who accompanied him, succeeded admirably in cultivating the acquaintance of the Secessionists in that region. Webster's reports were more or less interesting, showing the manner in which the first military organization of Maryland Secessionists was formed, and the promises repeatedly made by Governor Hicks of arms being furnished to them, and, if my memory serves me right, of arms actually furnished; their drilling at Belair, etc. Webster was afterwards executed by order of Jefferson Davis at Richmond, Virginia, in the spring of 1862, as a Union spy, and was the first who paid the penalty of his life for that fascinating but hazardous service.

I located my own headquarters at Baltimore, under the name of John H. Hutchinson, as a stock-broker, renting offices for that purpose. Here I formed the acquaintance of William F. Luckett, also a stock-broker, having offices on the same floor with my own. The reports of my operatives A. T. C., C. D., C. W., and M. S. clearly indicated to me the state of feeling in Maryland at that time, and how embittered and poisoned it was, showing that the Secessionists were prepared to do anything which they deemed necessary in order to break up the Union. The first intimation of a design to molest or do violence to the President-elect came to my notice somewhat accidentally, but one circumstance after another corroborating my first impression came gradually to light. It was not, however, until about the time Mr. Lincoln was due to leave Springfield to be inaugurated that the plot culminated in decisive information that he was to be assassinated upon his arrival and passage through Baltimore. At that time the Baltimore police were entirely in the hands of the Secession element, their chief being George P. Kane, a rabid rebel, who was subsequently a long time imprisoned at Fort McHenry, and, after being released therefrom made his escape into the lines of the Confederacy, and became a brigadier-general in the rebel army. He is a man with some fine feelings, but thoroughly Secession in his sympathies, and, to that extent, unscrupulous.

MR. LINCOLN'S published program was for him to leave Harrisburg via the North Central Railroad, going direct



"As it was too early for us to approach the P. W. & B. depot, Mr. Kenney had the driver take us around the city, apparently as if we were looking for someone"

to Baltimore, and landing at the Calvert Street station, at which point he and his suite were to take carriages to the Eutaw House, and thence to the Camden Street station, where he would take the Baltimore and Ohio train for Washington. The distance between these stations is a little over a mile. No provision whatever for his reception had been made by any public committee in Baltimore. The few Union men there were entirely overawed by the Secessionists, and dared not make any demonstration. It should be borne in mind that James Buchanan was still filling the Presidential chair, and the whole Nation was practically without protection; while rebels were arming in every direction. It was but a few weeks after Mr. Lincoln passed through Baltimore that the Sixth Massachusetts Volunteers were mobbed in that city, although they were an armed and organized troop.

IN ORDER to show how easy it was to assassinate Mr. Lincoln, attention should be called to the condition of the country, especially of Baltimore and Maryland, at that time. An indication of the feeling among these people may be obtained from the incident of the young man referred to in one of the reports of my operative, A. T. C., and who was to be one of the assassins, as frequently using the words of Brutus: "It is not that I love Cæsar less, but Rome more," when his conscience roused him to a contemplation of the awful crime he was about to commit. He seemed to regard that sentiment as the proper expression of a justification of his course.

Everything was in readiness about the time Mr. Lincoln was to start from Springfield. The plan was skilfully laid, and would have been effective had it not been discovered in time to prevent its execution. Chief of Police Kane had intimated that he had no special police to spare for the occasion and could not detail many of the regular force, but would send what he could of them. One of the leading spirits in the plot was a barber, whose name I do not recall, but it can be found in the report of my operatives at that time. His place of business was under Barnum's Hotel, the headquarters of the Secessionists from all parts of the country. There every night, as I mingled among them in the office and corridors of the hotel, I could hear the most damnable and outrageous

sentiments uttered. No man's life was safe in the hands of these men. The whole municipal power of Baltimore as well as all the courts were under their control. These bullies were always armed, and would not hesitate on the slightest provocation to shoot down a Union man.

BALLOTS were prepared at a secret meeting in which those who drew a certain kind of card were to consider themselves bound to assassinate the president-elect. Each one believed that only one of these marked cards was drawn, although I have always believed that there were at least six or eight who thus bound themselves to strike the fatal blow, no one of the number knowing that any one, save himself, was so chosen. The time when this was to be done was just as Mr. Lincoln would be passing through the narrow vestibule of the depot at Calvert Street station to enter his carriage. A row or fight was to be started by some persons outside the building, to quell which the few policemen in the depot would rush out, thus leaving Mr. Lincoln entirely unprotected and at the mercy of a mob of Secessionists, who were then to surround him. A small steamer had been chartered, and was lying in one of the bays or streams running into the Chesapeake, to which the assassins were to flee, and it was immediately to put off for Virginia. Taken as a whole, it was a capital plan, and much better conceived than the one which finally succeeded, four years later, in destroying Mr. Lincoln's life.

HAVING tested my information and found it reliable, I decided to communicate the same to Mr. Felton, President of the P. W. & B. Railroad, who was and is now a thoroughly reliable Union man, and one who has proved himself true during the worst hours of our Nation's troubles. In reporting the matter to Mr. Felton, I said that while the information was his, or that of the railroad company, I could see no reason why it might not be imparted to Mr. Lincoln or his friends, so as to avoid the peril that threatened his passage through Baltimore according to the schedule then arranged and published in the newspapers throughout the country. A man named Wood was at that time acting as agent or manager for Mr. Lincoln and his suite until their arrival in Washington. At a subsequent time I asked Mr. Lincoln who this man was. He answered that he did not know him, but he had been sent by some friends to fill that position, and he had allowed him to do so—an evidence of the confiding and innocent nature of the man upon whose shoulders the Nation's destiny then rested.

Mr. Felton without any hesitation assented to my proposal, and directed me to proceed to New York, there overtake the Presidential party, and apprize Mr. Lincoln of what I had discovered. Accordingly, on the day of Mr. Lincoln's arrival in New York, fearing to leave Baltimore myself in case of anything vital occurring which might need my immediate attention, I sent one of my lady operatives, Mrs. Warne, who for many years had been in charge of my female detective force, and upon whose judgment and discretion I could rely, with a letter to my friend the Hon. Norman B. Judd, of Chicago, who was then accompanying Mr. Lincoln, and was with him in New York. Knowing the difficulty Mrs. Warne would have in securing an interview with Mr. Judd, I gave her a letter to my friend Mr.—now General—E. S. Sanford, of New York, vice-president of the Adams Express Company, and also president of the American Telegraph Company, requesting him to arrange for her an interview with Mr. Judd. This was accordingly done, and Mr. Judd, having read my letter and obtained from Mrs. Warne what additional information he could, came to the conclusion that he would not apprize Mr. Lincoln of the developments until after the arrival of the party in Philadelphia. I was then notified by telegraph from New York by Messrs. Sanford and Judd, and also by Mrs. Warne, to say nothing to anyone, and to meet Mr. Judd in Philadelphia on the arrival of the Presidential party. I did so, and through the agency of Mr. George H. Burns met Mr. Judd at the St. Louis Hotel on Chestnut Street, Mr. Felton, the president of the P. W. & B. Railroad, accompanying me. The streets were crowded with people, and there was more or less excitement. The loyal mass was waiting to congratulate and welcome their Chief Magistrate. I communicated to Mr. Judd the particulars of the plot, the only other person present being Mr. Felton. Mr. Judd was at once deeply impressed with the danger that seemed to surround Mr. Lincoln, but he said he very much feared he would be unable to induce that gentleman to change his route, which was what I urged, my idea, and that of Mr. Felton's also, being to have him leave Philadelphia that night by the midnight express for Washington, thus passing through Baltimore thirty-six hours before the time when he would be expected. Mr. Judd answered that Mr. Lincoln's confidence in the people was unbounded; that he did not fear any violent outbreak, and that he hoped, by his pacific policy and conciliatory measures, to bring the Secessionists back to their old allegiance. There was no doubt in Mr. Judd's mind of the correctness of his information, and his manner and expression convinced us that his deductions were reliable and accurate. After further discussion, he desired that I should accompany him to the Continental Hotel for an interview with Mr. Lincoln himself, to which I consented.



WHEN we reached the Continental Hotel a dense crowd of people had filled every available inch of space in Chestnut Street, struggling for admission to the hotel where Mr. Lincoln was holding a reception, and it was with the utmost difficulty that we were able to gain an entrance into the building. It was almost, if not quite, eleven o'clock in the evening before Mr. Lincoln was able to disengage himself from the crowd and join Mr. Judd and me in the former's room. Though plainly exhausted from the fatigue of travel and receptions, he greeted me in his usual kindly and gracious way. I unfolded as rapidly as I could the various bits of information I had gathered, all tending, as I contended, to prove the existence of the alleged plot. He asked numerous questions, especially as to the sources of my information, and appeared to be deeply interested in the developments. Finally he turned to Judd and, addressing us both, inquired what course we thought he ought to pursue. I urged upon him that as the Washington train would not leave Philadelphia for an hour he had ample time to take it, and thus would be enabled to pass through Baltimore before the conspirators would be looking for him. This he firmly and positively refused to do, saying he had an engagement for the next morning to raise the flag on Independence Hall, and that he had also promised the citizens of Pennsylvania to meet them at their capitol in Harrisburg; that he had positively engaged this to Governor Curtin, and was determined to carry out that program even if in so doing he knew he would

lose his own life. However, after the meeting in Harrisburg on the following day, he was willing, he said, to make any reasonable change in his program Mr. Judd and I thought best. He then assented to the following: After raising the flag on Independence Hall the next morning at six, he would breakfast at the hotel, leave by special train for Harrisburg at eight o'clock, meet the Governor and the Legislature, and, after his reception there, leave in the evening for Philadelphia by special train, in time to connect with the midnight Washington express, placing himself entirely in our hands. Throughout the entire interview he seemed to be perfectly cool and collected. Later, during the years of the war, I became unusually well acquainted with him. Whenever he visited the Army of the Potomac, I invariably met him; in fact, my tent was more of a place of resort for him than even that of General McClellan's, and I never saw him calmer and less disturbed than he was that night at the Continental Hotel. In fact, he did not appear to realize the grave danger which threatened him, insisting that if once he reached Washington there was no further risk; that Mr. Buchanan would soon vacate, and he felt that he could with perfect safety rely upon General Scott until that time for protection.

Undoubtedly this interview, culminating in his expressed determination to carry out the program both at Philadelphia and Harrisburg, even at the expense of his life, made a deep impression on Mr. Lincoln; for it will be remembered that the next morning, when he ran the Union flag up the staff over Independence Hall, in a burst of patriotic fervor, he exclaimed: "Now, my friends, can this country be saved upon this basis? [The promise of equal rights in the Declaration of Independence.] If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say, I would rather be assassinated on this spot than to surrender it."



"We passed rapidly through the depot"

FINDING Mr. Lincoln resolute, I told him I thought I could make the necessary arrangements for his safe passage from Harrisburg on the following evening through Philadelphia and Baltimore to Washington, being well acquainted with the officers of the roads over which it would be necessary for him to travel. After leaving him and promising to return to see Mr. Judd,—it was now about 1 A. M.,—I started out to find my friend Colonel Thomas A. Scott, vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, with a view to arranging with him for a special train to bring Mr. Lincoln from Harrisburg to Philadelphia. Learning that Colonel Scott was out of town, I then applied to Mr. G. C. Franciscus, superintendent of the Philadelphia division of the road. The city being all excitement, I had some difficulty in finding Mr. Franciscus, and, in fact, did not succeed till almost three o'clock. Knowing him to be a true and loyal man, I had no hesitation in telling him what I desired. He promptly answered that he would make the required arrangements for the special train for Mr. Lincoln, adding, however, that there were some difficulties in the way, because there were so many special trains due to leave Harrisburg for Philadelphia that same evening; but that he would arrange that Mr. Lincoln's should be the last to leave, and would side-track the others which had preceded his, so that none of them should reach Philadelphia till after he had left for Baltimore. This being satisfactorily adjusted, I then hunted up Mr. E. S. Sanford, president of the American Telegraph Company, and arranged with him to detail the proper parties, when Mr. Lincoln should have left Harrisburg in the evening, to cut the telegraph-wires leading out of that place in every direction, except the wires of the railroad company, which were necessary to the movement of the trains. It was further provided that none but trusty operators were to be at the wires, and that no despatch should be sent over the lines save such as related to the running of the trains.

PROMPTLY at six o'clock the next morning Mr. Lincoln made his speech in Independence Hall and raised the flag. An hour later I met Mr. Judd, and notified him of the arrangements I had made during the night. It was then agreed between us that Mr. Lincoln should, just before leaving Harrisburg, withdraw to his room at the hotel under pretense of indisposition, and then slip away without the knowledge of any of his party save Mr. Judd. Mr. Lincoln had insisted that none should be acquainted with his secret departure but Mrs. Lincoln. This he said could not be avoided,—as, otherwise, she would be very much excited over his absence. I had just learned that morning that General Scott and Senator Seward had also discovered a plot to assassinate Mr. Lincoln as he passed through Baltimore, and had employed certain New York police officers to ferret out the same; that the latter had found some evidence of such a plot, but not so clearly outlined as ours, and yet of sufficient weight to impress upon General Scott and Senator Seward the danger to Mr. Lincoln if he persisted in carrying out his published program. Accordingly, Mr. Seward delegated his son Frederick to notify Mr. Lincoln of the conspiracy, and to urge him to change his route; to which the President-elect replied, thanking Mr. Seward for the suggestion, and adding that he might do so, but not giving him any idea how or when he would arrive in Washington if he decided to change his program. According to the published schedule, Mr. Lincoln left Philadelphia in the morning of the 22d, reaching Harrisburg in due time.

DURING the day I arranged with Mr. Felton the program for the passage through Baltimore and on to Washington. This was that Captain Burns, Mr. Sanford's confidential agent, Mr. H. S. Thayer, and Andrew Winn should, at the proper time, cut the necessary telegraph-wires, the same not to be reunited till Mr. Lincoln had reached Washington; that in the evening, shortly before the departure of the regular train from Philadelphia to Washington, I was to send Mrs. Warne, accompanied by Mr. George Dunn of Newark, N. J., to engage two sections—the rear ones, if possible—of the through sleeping-car to Washington for a sick friend, while I myself, in company with H. H. Kenney, Esq., now general superintendent of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad, was to meet Mr. Lincoln with a carriage at the West Philadelphia depot of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and convey him from there to the depot of the former road, so that none of the employees of that road, with the exception of Messrs. Felton, William Stearns, the general superintendent, and Kenney, should know aught of the important traveler who was to pass over their line. Mr. Felton arranged for the detention of the train a short time by instructing the conductor that the train should not leave the depot until he received a package from him, Felton, addressed to "E. J. Allen" (the name under which I went in the National Capital) at Willard's Hotel, Washington, which package he should hand to the conductor of the Baltimore and Ohio train for delivery in Washington. Of course the package contained nothing but a lot of unimportant papers.

MR. LINCOLN received me very kindly, and appeared to be as cool and free from excitement as I ever saw him. He wore an overcoat thrown loosely about his shoulders, without inserting his arms in the sleeves, and a black Kossuth hat, which, he told me, some ardent supporter had presented to him during the campaign. He took a seat with Mr. Lamon and myself, Mr. Kenney, the superintendent of the P.W.&B. Railroad, sharing the seat with the driver overhead. As it was too early for us to approach the P. W. & B. depot, Mr. Kenney had the driver take us around the city until it was just about time to reach the depot five minutes after the train was due to leave. We left the carriage at a dark spot a short distance from the depot; and, Mr. Lamon keeping a little in the rear of Mr. Lincoln and myself, the latter leaning upon my arm, and stooping somewhat so as to diminish his height as much as possible, we passed rapidly through the depot, entered the sleeping-car, and within two minutes—Mr. Kenney, meanwhile, having delivered the package of valuable papers to the conductor, John Litzenburg—the train was in motion, and we were speeding along towards Baltimore. None of the party slept any. At Havre de Grace, on my return inside the car, after having been out to see if my signals were all right, Mr. Lincoln remarked: "They say we are at Havre de Grace, and are moving along well. I understand we are on time."

Although Mr. Lincoln did not sleep, he was by no means restless. I could not then nor have I since been able to understand how any one, under like circumstances, could have manifested such complete mental composure and cheerful spirits as he exhibited during the entire journey. On arriving at the Baltimore and Ohio depot in Baltimore, we had a wait of about half an hour. Here I again left the car, but remained outside only long enough to satisfy myself that everything was all right. It was now about four o'clock. When I returned, everybody in the car seemed to be asleep but our party. Presently the train rolled out of the depot, and we were at last bound for Washington. All the night through Mr. Lincoln, being unable to sleep, had been telling us jokes and stories, of which he seemed to have an endless store, in a voice so low no one heard him but Lamon and me.

AS THE train neared the Capital City (it was then daylight, and we were making the necessary preparations for our orderly appearance on our arrival at the Washington depot), Mr. Lincoln yawned, and, turning toward Lamon and me, said with a smile, "Well, boys, thank God this prayer-meeting's over." Then he told a story to emphasize the fact that he was now at the end of his perilous journey and no longer needed our aid or companionship. A steamboat, on one occasion, ran into a sand-bar in the river with such force, and became so deeply embedded in the obstruction, it was found impossible, with the methods and appliances then in vogue, to move her. The only other remedy left was to wait—and no one could tell how long that would be—till the high waters should come and float her away. Meanwhile there happened to be a revival in progress at the church in a village on shore, opposite the point where the helpless vessel lay. Yielding to the entreaties of the church people, the captain one day consented that a prayer-meeting might be held in the cabin or large room of the boat. The meeting had not progressed very far until the vessel, yielding to the movements of the crowd and the additional weight at one end, began to lurch slightly, and presently slid off the offending sand-bar. In an instant she floated away into the deep water. At that particular moment an old brother, with eyes closed, was on his knees sending up a long and fervent petition to the Almighty. The captain's joy knew no bounds. Without waiting for the good brother to finish his prayer, the former mounted a chair, and cried out at the top of his voice, "Get off this boat, every d——d one of you; this prayer-meeting's ended."

AT THE depot, awaiting us as the train rolled in, were Mr. Washburn, of Illinois, and Senator Seward. We then proceeded at once to Willard's Hotel, where Mr. Lincoln registered his own name and that of Mr. Lamon and myself, and was assigned rooms, though not those he expected he would have, as he had arrived somewhat in advance of the appointed time. During the morning, after the news of his arrival had spread, there was more or less excited talk. Few men were willing to believe he had actually reached the city, and many were the vile and bitter imprecations I heard heaped upon his head while mingling with the crowds in the hotels and public places of that rebellious city. Its people, as a rule, appeared scarcely more favorable to the Union than in Baltimore. Mrs. Lincoln, accompanied by Mr. Judd and the rest of the party, followed in due time. Before they left Harrisburg, the news had been telegraphed all over the country of the safe arrival of the President-elect in Washington. In passing through Baltimore, they met with anything but a cordial reception. At Mr. Lincoln's suggestion, I returned to Baltimore that afternoon for the purpose of learning whether those who sought his life in that city might not amend their plot so as to attempt to destroy him on the day of his inauguration; and I accordingly remained there till after the latter event had taken place.

I have thus endeavored to give you a brief history of this matter as it comes to my recollection.

Yours truly,

ALLAN PINKERTON.



"All the night through Mr. Lincoln, being unable to sleep, had been telling us jokes and stories . . . but in a voice so low and subdued no one heard him but Lamon and me"