Boston paper

JUNE 22, 1901

399. The accounts of John Wilkes Booth's early appearances in this city have awakened a great deal of interest among our correspondents, some of whom have written of performances which they claim to have seen. One correspondent writes of a performance in this city in the spring of 1862, in which Booth, John E. Owens, E. L. Davenport and Charlotte Cushman appeared, the play being "Oliver Twist." We think that this must be a mistake, as Booth's engagement in the spring of 1862 was played at the Museum, and no such performance took place there. It is possible that the actor may have played in "Oliver Twist" on some special occasion, and if he did we should like to have the date and the cast. K. sends the following play bill and the accompanying extract from Mrs. Winslow:

BOSTON MUSEUM.

ACTING MANAGER.....R. M. FIELD

SECOND WEEK OF THE
☞ BRILLIANTLY INAUGURATED
ENGAGEMENT OF
J. WILKES BOOTH,
WHO WILL APPEAR
This Monday Evening, May 22, 1864,
IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF
OTHELLO
WITH THE FOLLOWING POWERFUL CAST:

OTHELLO	J. WILKES BOOTH
Iago	Mr. L. R. Shewell
Cassio	Mr. J. Wilson
Duke of Venice	Mr. J. Wheelock
Roderigo	Mr. J. A. Smith
Brabantio	Mr. F. Hardenburgh
Ludovico	Mr. G. F. Ketchum
Gratiano	Mr. T. M. Hunter
Montano	Mr. Walter Benn
Julio	Mr. J. E. Adams
Marco	Mr. J. Delano
Senators, Gentlemen, etc.	
Desdemona	Miss Kate Reignolds
Emelia	Miss Emily Mestayer

DANCE.....ARIEL
MISS ROSE AND THERESE WOOD

To conclude with the Laughable Farce entitled "John Wopps,"

In which Wm. Warren appears as Wopps, a policeman.

Catharine Mary Reignolds-Winslow, the Kate Reignolds of the cast, writes thus of John Wilkes Booth in her "Yesterdays with Actors":

"Another madman—and I do not say it from sentimental charity, but from the distinct memory of that sensation which the near approach to those unhinged minds communicates [she had been speaking of Frank Whitman, who had gone insane while playing with her on the Museum stage]—was John Wilkes Booth, a star or a comet of the Museum season. It is my earnest belief that if there was ever an irresponsible person, it was this sad-faced, handsome, passionate boy. As an actor he had more of the native fire and fury of his great father than any of his family, but he was as undisciplined on the stage as off. When he fought, it was no stage fight. If his antagonist did not strain his nerve and skill he would either be forced over the stage into the orchestra, as happened, I believe, once or twice, or cut and hurt, as almost always happened. He told me that he generally slept smothered in steak or oysters to cure his own bruises after 'Richard the Third,' because he necessarily got as good as he gave—in fact more, for, though an excellent swordsman, in his blind passion he constantly cut himself. How he threw me about! Once he even knocked me down, picking me up again with a regret as quick as his dramatic impulse had been vehement. In 'Othello,' when, with fiery remorse, he rushed to the bed of Desdemona after the murder, I used to gather myself together and hold my breath, lest the bang his cimeter gave when he threw himself at me should force me back to life with a shriek.

"The sharp dagger seemed so dangerous an implement in the hands of such a desperado that I lent him my own—a spring dagger with a blunt edge, which is forced back into its handle if it is actually struck against an object. In the last scene of 'Romeo and Juliet,' one night, I vividly recall how the buttons in his cuff caught in my hair, and in trying to tear them out he trod on my dress and rent it so as to make it utterly useless afterward; and in this last struggle literally shook me out of my shoes! The curtain fell on Romeo with a sprained thumb, a good deal of hair on his sleeve, Juliet in rags and two white satin shoes lying in the corner of the stage!

"The stage door was always blocked with silly women waiting to catch a glimpse, as he passed, of his superb face and figure. He was ever spoiled and petted and left to his unrestrained will. He succeeded in gaining position by flashes of genius, and the necessity of ordinary study had not been borne in upon him. No life could have been worse for such a character than that of an actor. It is doubtful if aught could have counteracted the effects of inheritance and the lack of early education; but, even if crime had been their outcome, it would, under other conditions, have hardly taken the vain form of his awful deed, with the mock heroism of its 'Sic semper tyrannis' and its tawdry tragedy."

ASSASSIN BOOTH'S WARDROBE

McKee Rankin Gives Another Version of Its Destruction; Says It Was Lost in the Burning of the Winter Garden Theatre and Not as Otis Skinner Relates in Article

John Wilkes Booth's wardrobe, the places to which it found its way and what eventually became of it, have long been interesting topics of dispute. Recently a magazine contained an article entitled "Edwin Booth's Shame," written by Otis Skinner, which doubtless was read by few persons with more eager interest than McKee Rankin, who now gives a new version which differs from that told by Mr. Skinner. Mr. Rankin thinks that the magazine article does great injustice to Edwin Booth and John McCullough, as well.

In discussing the article, Mr. Rankin recalled that he was playing in Boston in the spring of '65. It was at the old Howard Athenæum, and while here John Wilkes Booth passed through town on his way from Montreal to Washington. That was about three weeks before the assassination of President Lincoln. Happening to run across a well-known character of his time —"Bill" Pitcher (Mr. Rankin said he thought that he was still living)—it developed in the course of the conversation that arrangements had been made to ship Booth's wardrobe from Montreal to Havana by a revenue cutter. Booth said that everything was dead in Boston, speaking professionally, and that he was going South. That was the last time that Mr. Rankin saw Booth, and soon after came the news of the assassination. At the same time (it was Good Friday night) the craft on which the Booth wardrobe was shipped was wrecked in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. While much of the cargo of the vessel was lost, the Booth trunks were saved and in due course of time they were sold for salvage by the Admiralty Court of Canada.

It happened that Mr. Rankin's only brother, George Rankin, was in Quebec at the time and he sent word to McKee to know if there was anything in the lot that he wanted. Mr. Rankin said that he was not especially anxious to possess any of the articles; however the brother purchased the three trunks. As there was considerable interest manifested in their contents, the brother disposed of a few things such as books, swords, etc., but retained the wardrobe which he shipped to McKee in Washington.

"In September, 1865, I went to the Arch Street Theatre, Philadelphia," continued Mr. Rankin in his narrative. "I told Mrs. John Drew that I had the wardrobe. She advised the greatest secrecy about it, as it tended to unpopularity to be in possession of anything that suggested the author of the dreadful tragedy. During the season, however, I wrote a note, as delicately worded as possible, to Edwin Booth informing him of what I had, and suggesting that he could have the wardrobe for the same price that I paid for it. Mr. Booth never answered my letter.

"However, I got a communication later from John Sleeper Clark, Mr. Booth's brother-in-law, in which he stated that Mr. Booth wanted nothing to do with anyone who had been in any way associated with his brother.

"In 1866 I went to New York. Mr. Booth was presenting 'The Merchant of Venice' at the Winter Garden Theatre. Barton Hill was in the cast. Meeting the latter he said to me, 'You have John Wilkes Booth's wardrobe, have you not?'

"I asked him how he knew, and he replied: 'Never mind who told me; I know you have it. I would like to buy it.'

"After a short conversation I asked him to name a price and finally he gave me $75 for the wardrobe, which was later delivered at the stage door of the Winter Garden Theatre. Later I met Claude Burroughs. I told him of the conversation which I had had with Hill and how the latter had bought the wardrobe. He told me that Hill had purchased the articles for Mr. Booth, acting as his agent.

"And now the climax of the story. The Winter Garden Theatre was burned in 1866 and among the things destroyed was this same wardrobe of John Wilkes Booth."

Thus the destruction of the Booth wardrobe, according to Mr. Rankin, was effected seven years earlier than is told in Otis Skinner's recital, for the latter repeating the tale told by Garrie Davidson, says that Edwin Booth personally consigned the wardrobe to the furnace in the cavernous depths of Booth's Theatre.