"This is to Certify—"

An Article by

LLOYD LEWIS

(Reading time: 20 minutes 6 seconds.)

"THEE has heard about Mrs. Surratt, the woman they hanged for helping to kill Abraham Lincoln?"

My uncle looked down at me as we stood at the top of the long courthouse steps. I was busy admiring the grand flare the sundown was making in his great red beard, and thinking what a nice man he was to let me visit him all day in the courtroom where he was bailiff.

I nodded, however, to satisfy his question. Every boy in our neighborhood knew about that woman who was hanged.

"Look—coming down the street!" my uncle went on, his voice lowered. "There comes the man who hanged her."

Hurrying along the sidewalk below was a man with a white face, a proud mustache, and a sad eye.

"That's Louis Weichmann. They say he carries a derringer in his breast and never turns his back on a door because, some day, somewhere, John Wilkes Booth is coming to kill him. They say he never sits between a lamp and a window."

I was all rapture and curiosity now, staring at the strange man.

"What's he doing here in Anderson, Uncle Albert?" I asked, for any seven-year-old boy knew the Booth and Lincoln tragedy had happened long ago and far away.

"He lives with his brother and sisters down the street yonder and



Louis J. Weichmann, when he testified against the conspirators.

runs a little business college here in town; has run it for about ten years, I guess," my uncle went on, as he started down the steps, drawing me after him. "I don't believe that about Booth, although lots of people swear it's true; and that may not be so about the derringer. Booth's dead, but Lou Weichmann is afraid of something. Thee come along, now, home!"

"Home" lay eight miles down through the farmlands in a Quaker community. There the Weichmann legend slumbered along with the man as a hero. People there said that he had been a boarder and roomer at the lodging house in Washington where the Lincoln conspirators hatched their plot, and that he had come bravely and nobly forward at the trial, testifying that Mrs. Surratt, the woman who kept the house, had aided John Wilkes Booth in his scheme and in his escape.

She had hung with three male conspirators back in 1865. Weichmann had come to Anderson, Indiana, in 1889 to live with his brother, the Catholic priest, and had never spoken of the trial. But in other communities about Anderson, the legend was different. To the east, where "copperheads" and "Knights of the Golden Circle" had reigned during the Civil War, the Weichmann legend took the orthodox Southern trend.

The man, these communities said, was living in dread of the vengeance John Wilkes Booth was sooner or later to visit upon him. Booth, it was believed here, got away from his pursuers and lived, under an assumed name, in Texas, Oklahoma, or London, as the case might be, into the 1900s at least.

This myth had it that an innocent Confederate, going home from Appomattox, had changed coats with Booth during the assassin's flight through Virginia, and had been surprised with Booth's ally, Davy Herold, in the barn where the pursuing Federals killed him and palmed him off for the true assassin to save the government's face.

Weichmann, this tale ran, had been one of the conspirators in the meetings at the Surratt house, and had turned state's evidence.

Weichmann did act like a man with some secret dread; no denying that. He didn't mix, in a town where everyone mixed. He talked to few people. His pupils—there were never many in the little business college he conducted—respected his honesty, his gentility, and his amazing ability to speak eight languages as well as to teach shorthand; yet they said they never really knew him.

His shy reserve warded off the questions which the curious were dying to ask him, and the hearty, witty personality of his brother, Father Weichmann—"that fine man," as even the Ku Kluxers of Anderson still remember him—was a bulwark of protection.

If it had not been for the rise of the Lincoln myth across the Republic in these late '80s and '90s, the mystery of Weichmann might have disappeared in his lifetime.

People in the '90s were just beginning to write and talk of Lincoln as if he had been one of the dying gods of antiquity. The North was exactly far enough away to begin idealizing him, exalting him to superhuman heights.


War Department, Washington, April 20, 1865.

$100,000 REWARD!

THE MURDERER

Of our late beloved President, ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

IS STILL AT LARGE.

$50,000 REWARD!

will be paid by this Department for his apprehension, in addition to any reward offered by Municipal Authorities or State Executives.

$25,000 REWARD!

will be paid for the apprehension of JOHN H. SURRATT, one of Booth's accomplices.

$25,000 REWARD!

will be paid for the apprehension of DANIEL C. HARROLD, another of Booth's accomplices.

LIBERAL REWARDS will be paid for any information that shall conduce to the arrest of either of the above-named criminals, or their accomplices.

All persons harbouring or secreting the said persons, or either of them, or aiding or assisting their concealment or escape, will be treated as accomplices in the murder of the President and the attempted assassination of the Secretary of State, and shall be subject to trial before a Military Commission and the punishment of DEATH.

Let the stain of innocent blood be removed from the land by the arrest and punishment of the murderers.

All good citizens are exhorted to aid public justice on this occasion. Every man should consider his own conscience charged with this solemn duty, and rest neither night nor day until it be accomplished.

EDWIN M. STANTON, *Secretary of War.*

DESCRIPTION ... BOOTH ... JOHN H. SURRATT ... DANIEL C. HARROLD ...

GEO. F. NESBITT & CO., Printers and Stereotypers, cor. Pearl and Pine Streets, N. Y.

Brown Bros.

The entire country was thrown into a frenzy of excitement by Lincoln's assassination. Above is shown the War Department poster issued six days after the shooting.



John H. Surratt.



Mrs. Mary E. Surratt.

The mother was hanged; but the son, caught after two years, escaped penalty for his share in the conspiracy.

ONE of the most common forms taken by this mysticism was the very general belief that virtually everyone who had had anything to do with the assassination or the trial had met a tragic end. Weird Fate was working, they said.

Mrs. Lincoln had gone insane and had died pitifully in an Illinois asylum. Similar destiny had snuffed out the other two persons who had sat with the President in the theater box that evening—Major Rathbone and Miss Harris. These two had later married, only to be claimed by the fatal spell when the Major, going suddenly crazy, had killed his wife, then himself. Boston Corbett, the Union sergeant who had shot Booth down, had been consigned to a madhouse in Topeka, Kansas.

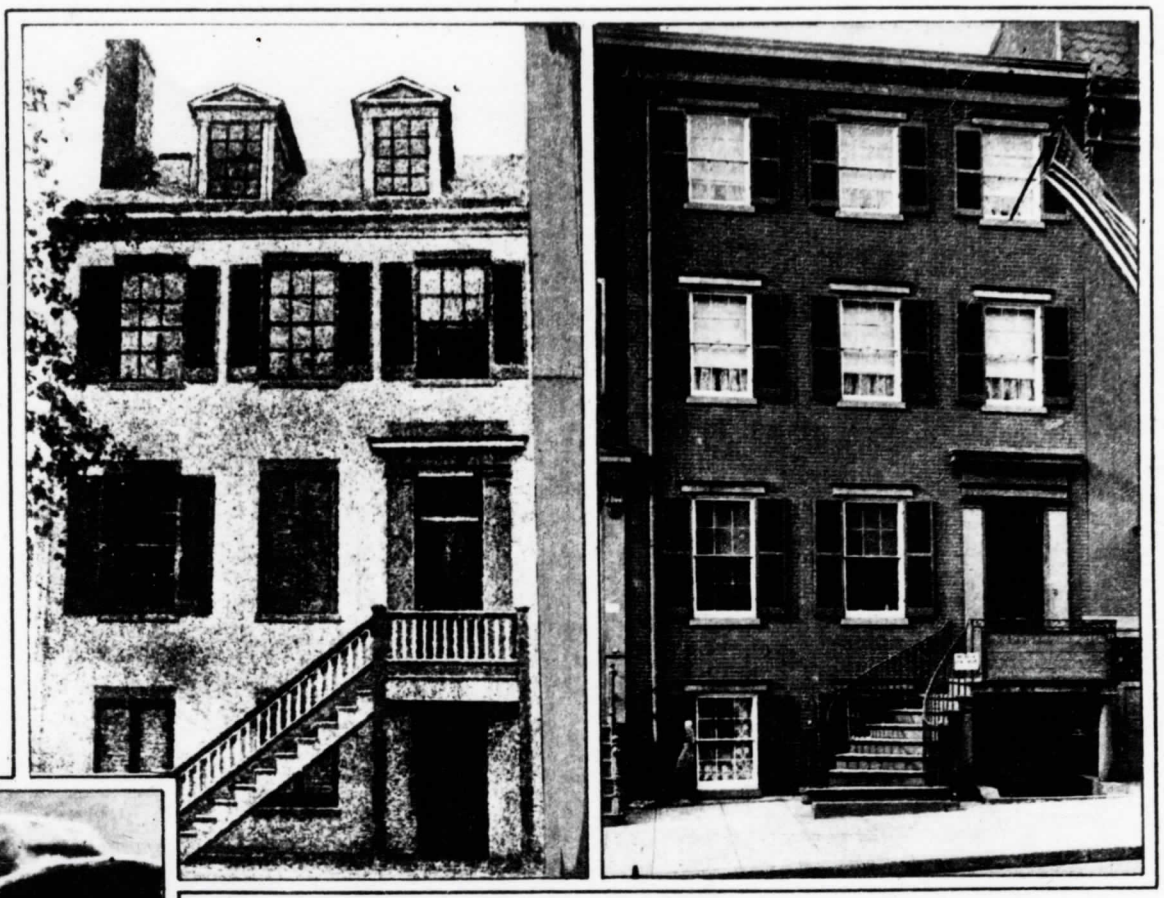
Two Northern officeholders, Preston King of New York and United States Senator James S. Lane of Kansas, who had stood shoulder to shoulder and kept Mrs. Surratt's daughter, Annie, from invading President Johnson's private office with her wailing appeals, had both died by their own hands.

The True Story of the Man Whose Word Hanged a Woman for Lincoln's Death

Edwin M. Stanton, the Secretary of War, who had seized the reins of government that night when the President lay dying, was said to have died by his own razor. No matter that his physicians and plenty of witnesses testified that his death was natural; the tale was out and had been fitted into the crazy mosaic that the mythmakers were building.

For twenty years after the execution of the conspirators, the Rev. Father Walters, who had escorted Mrs. Surratt to the gallows, had been publishing in newspaper after newspaper the mad story that all nine of the Union officers on the commission which had tried and condemned the prisoners had died miserably, most of them driven to suicide by remorse.

It did not stop this fiction to have seven of the officers in 1892 declare that they were alive and happy, and that the two who were missing had perished comfortably of old age.



The Surratt home in Washington (left), where Booth conspirators plotted Lincoln's assassination. (Right) House opposite Ford's Theater, where the President was carried that fateful night in April, 1865. He died next day in the room from which the flag is displayed.



George Atzerodt.



David E. Herold.



Lewis Powell (Payne).

The three men, accomplices of John Wilkes Booth, who paid for their crime on the gallows.

Louis Weichmann died in a manner natural enough to disappoint anyone who reveled in superstition, but upon his deathbed he made a statement that should delight anyone who enjoys seeing mysteries solved. For, dying, he had written and signed a statement that solves the case of Mrs. Surratt, a case that has puzzled the scholars and historians who laugh at the mystery of Booth's escape as obvious folk invention.

WEICHMANN died one June night in 1902, old and broken far beyond his sixty years. He knew that his soul was drifting out the window where the night air, fresh with young corn smells, drifted in. Two sisters were with him, and they brought him the paper he called for, and they witnessed his signature upon it.

Ever since the United States Army hanged Mrs. Surratt with the three most important male conspirators then alive, on July 9, 1865, the mystery as to her real guilt has been abroad. The evidence against her was circumstantial. That she might have known of a previous plot to kidnap Lincoln was generally admitted, but that she was a party to the death plan was wildly denied by her counsel and has been denied by her champions ever since.

Tremendous pressure was brought upon President Johnson to pardon her, to commute her sentence to imprisonment. The widow of Stephen A. Douglas pleaded at the White House door. Even the soldiers who did the hanging delayed springing the trap as long as they dared in hope some message would come.

After she was dead, the North, which had been so clamorous for vengeance, sobered. A reaction began. Charges were made that Stanton had railroaded the woman to the gallows because she was a Catholic; that President Johnson had hurried her to death so that he might hide his own complicity in the plot.

William M. Stewart, Senator from Nevada, a stanch Union man, voiced the anti-Johnson charges openly in his Reminiscences:

> Any candid person who will review the evidence will be forced to the conclusion that Mrs. Surratt was an innocent woman. The fact that some of the conspirators occasionally visited her lodging house gave her an opportunity of knowing something of their movements and their associations, although she was undoubtedly ignorant of the conspiracy. . . . The people at large will never be satisfied with the killing of Mrs. Surratt.

Senator Stewart, along with other leaders of the dominant wing of the Republican Party, dangled the ghost of Mrs. Surratt before Johnson at his impeachment proceedings, and responsibility for the woman's death was bandied about through one political campaign after another well into the '80s.

And all the arguments, all the bitter word feuds, came to rest on the name of Louis J. Weichmann. The boy Weichmann had told things on the witness stand that fixed the noose about the woman's neck. If he had told the truth, she was as guilty as any of the men who died with her. If he had lied, she was innocent.

It was about this case that Louis J. Weichmann wanted to testify again when he lay dying in 1902. He was before a new Court this time, and deathbed statements are better than sworn testimony, for no man will dare to send his soul climbing to God weighted with a lie.

He testified again and died. His sisters folded up the paper and put it away. Their brother had wanted silence for himself; let silence keep his last words too.

Time, however, eases hurts, and the other day, sitting in the room where he had died, out in the west end of Anderson, grown now to be a clanging city of factories, these two aged women told me their brother's story.

Mrs. C. O. Crowley, the older sister, was talking, while the younger, Miss Tillie Weichmann, ran through the yellow trial records that her brother had pathetically thumbed over and over in the lonely years.

"LOU was just a boy when it happened," Mrs. Crowley said, "twenty-three years old, and young for his age, too; just a simple, good-hearted, thoughtless boy. Father had a tailor shop in Philadelphia, and when Lou was through high school, father sent him down to St. Charles, near Baltimore, to study for the priesthood. But the war stopped that, and he took a job teaching school in Washington.

"He had a wonderful education, could read and write eight languages, and knew shorthand, but he wrote home that he could make more money—eighty dollars a month—clerking in the War Department and was going to take that.

"One day an old school friend from St. Charles, a boy named John Surratt, met him and asked him to come live at his mother's boarding house there in town. Lou had visited John several times at Surrattsville, where John's widowed mother had been trying to keep a tavern. The boarding-house business was better in Washington when the war came, and they moved into town. Lou went to live with them.

"His letters home said Mrs. Surratt was the nicest kind of woman, a great churchgoer. She gave him room and board for thirty-five dollars a month and treated him like a son."

For the most detailed account of Weichmann's life at the Surratt home, one must go to the brown and dusty court records of the conspiracy trial. Therein the boy becomes very real, sitting hour after hour on the witness stand, talking readily and well—"too well," defense counsel insinuated again and again.

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["THIS IS TO CERTIFY——"
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He was too glib, Mrs. Surratt's lawyers said; too anxious to hang his former friends. Government lawyers answered that he was plainly just a nervous, patriotic boy.

All the lodgers had fun in the Surratt parlor, the boy told the court. Annie, the daughter, played the piano and the girl roomers sang. John, the son, for all his vague talk of oil and cotton speculations, and all his unexplained absences, was still Weichmann's closest friend. And John brought home interesting friends.

For instance, John Wilkes Booth, the most thundering of matinée idols in that day. Booth spent most of his time with John Surratt and his mother. Many an errand did young Weichmann run between Mrs. Surratt and Booth, he said, carrying messages down to the National Hotel, where the actor lived.

Another friend of John Surratt's was the Rev. Wood, a towering brute of a man. Still another was George Atzerodt, a squat, illiterate gnome, who made carriages in Port Tobacco, Maryland.

Now and then John and his friends hurt young Weichmann's feelings by edging away from him to talk, or by shutting doors between them. Once he had gone into John's room, to find several of them toying with knives and pistols. Once he had found a false mustache on a bureau and had thought it funny when the Rev. Wood claimed it.

In the spring John, Wood, and Booth had come stamping into the house one night, whipping their boots and glowering. Coupled with newspaper reports that a plot to kidnap Lincoln had failed, this circumstance aroused Weichmann's suspicions, and he took the matter to Captain Gleason at the War Department. Gleason advised him to say nothing and to watch.

Against these occasional suspicions Weichmann balanced the kindliness of Mrs. Surratt and John, and the seeming absurdity of anything wrong with people he knew so well.

That was his story, and he clung to it through days of bitter cross-examination and abuse.

THEN came his testimony against Mrs. Surratt—the evidence that hanged her. Full of straightforward and convincing detail, it also contained a wealth of nonessentials. He filled it with praise of her character and he admitted reluctantly the things that damned her.

He told the court that during the whole time he had known her she had been "exemplary and ladylike in every particular." She had talked to Booth often, but he had thought nothing of that. Neither had he thought anything of the trips she had asked him to take with her out to Surrattsville.

On the fatal Good Friday, Mrs. Surratt had asked him to hire a horse and buggy and to drive her out to see a certain Mr. Nothey at Surrattsville. Mr. Nothey was not in. The woman then went into the tavern with some "things of Booth's," as she had described them casually to Louis. Weichmann waited in the buggy.

At the trial, John M. Lloyd, her tenant in the tavern, testified that she had left these same packages with him on this trip, with instructions to have them ready, as they would be called for that night. At midnight David Herold, fleeing with Booth, rode up and demanded "those things." They were Booth's field glasses and revolver.

As Mrs. Surratt and Weichmann drove home, they came out upon a hill. In the distance lay the capital, bathed in the jubilation fires still celebrating Lee's surrender.

"I'm afraid all this rejoicing will be turned into mourning and all this glory into sadness," Mrs. Surratt said.

"What do you mean?" asked Weichmann.

"After sunshine there is always a storm. The people are too proud and licentious and God will punish them."

At dinner, Mrs. Surratt showed the boy a letter from her son John in Montreal, saying that he was leaving on business.

The doorbell rang. Louis started for it, but the woman said "No," that she would answer it herself. Afterward Weichmann remembered that he had heard a man's heavy tread.

After dinner Mrs. Surratt grew more nervous and hurried Weichmann, Annie, her younger sister, Olivia Jenkins, and another roomer, Miss Fitzpatrick, off to bed.

A little after dawn the bell jangled, and Weichmann, the only man in the house, answered.

"Who's there?"

"Open up! We're detectives."

Mrs. Surratt peered over the banisters.

"Open the door," she said, "I expected the house to be searched."

When Louis threw back the door it seemed that 2,000 people were outside.

He gasped, "What does this mean, coming at this time of night to a widow lady's house?"

An officer thrust a cravat under his nose.

"It means that this is Abraham Lincoln's blood. John Wilkes Booth has assassinated him, and John Surratt has killed Secretary Seward. Haven't you heard of it?"

Weichmann held up his right hand, so his sisters say, and cried, "So help me God, I have not heard of it before this minute, but I see now what so many secret meetings around here do mean."

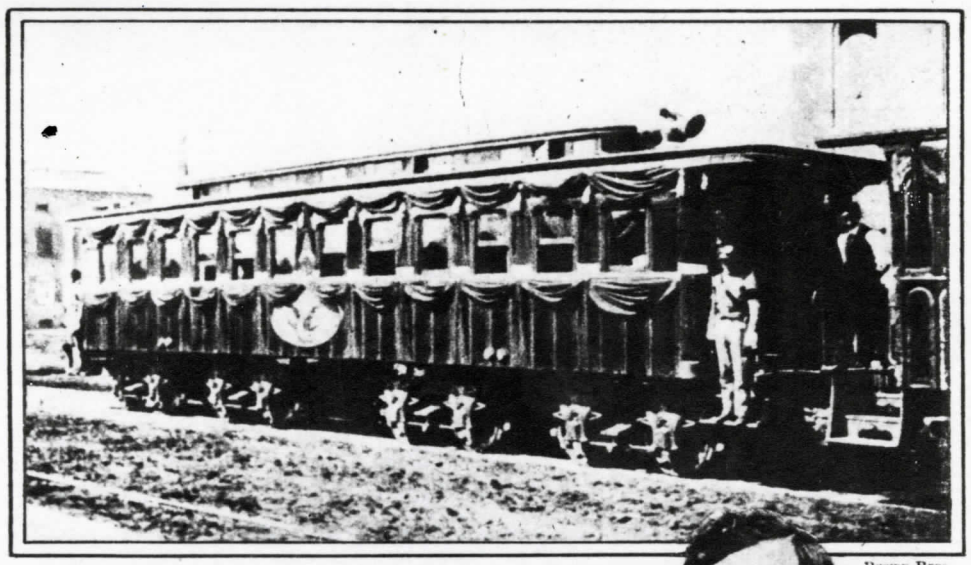
After the detectives searched the house they advised him to report at military headquarters in the forenoon. He pleaded earnestly with them for his friend John, citing the letter just received from Montreal to prove that it must have been some other who had attacked Seward.

As he shut the door he heard Annie Surratt cry, "Oh, ma, just think of that man Booth being here an hour before the murder!"

Those footfalls had been Booth's!

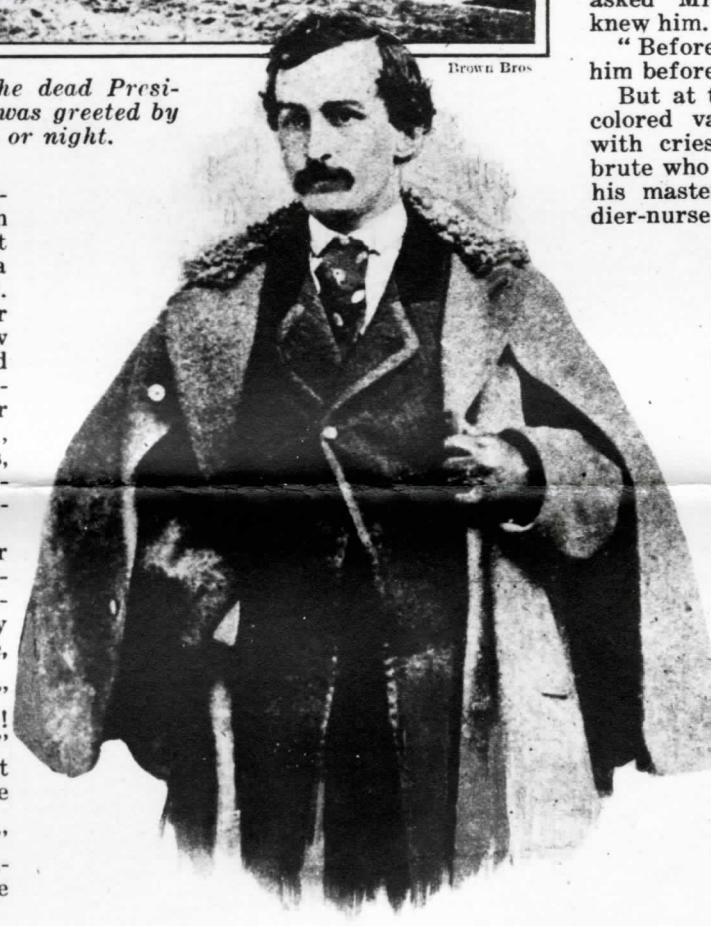
"Annie," Mrs. Surratt answered, "I am resigned; I think that John Wilkes Booth was only an instrument in the hands of the Almighty to punish this proud and licentious people."

Weichmann told Stanton's men all he knew, and for a week traveled with secret service agents about the country trailing John Surratt. They found traces, but nothing more.



Brown Bros

The funeral car which bore the dead President's body across the country was greeted by crowds at every stop, day or night.



John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's assassin, killed by pursuing Federal troops on April 26, twelve days after he fled from Ford's Theater.

MRS. SURRATT had been arrested on the Monday night following the assassination. While the bluecoats waited for her to dress, a knock came at the door. There stood a mud-covered giant, carrying a pick. He said that Mrs. Surratt had sent for him to dig a drain.

The Federal soldiers stood him under the hall light and asked Mrs. Surratt if she knew him.

"Before God, I never saw him before!"

But at the prison Seward's colored valet identified him, with cries of terror, as the brute who had cut his master, his master's son, and a soldier-nurse to pieces the Friday previous.

It was the "Rev. Wood," Lewis Powell, a more grotesque-looking preacher than ever, as he lay chained in the hold of a monitor out on the Potomac. With him were Mrs. Surratt, Atzerodt, Dr. Mudd, who had set Booth's broken leg as he fled, Edward Spangler, the stage hand who had held Booth's horse at the door while the killing went on, and two farm hands, Michael O'Loughlin and Samuel Arnold, who had loitered around Booth in Washington.

All the prisoners were in heavy chains and all but the woman had heavy canvas bags fastened over their heads to keep them from talking with each other. For weeks they sweltered there in the damp spring heat of Washington. On April 27 another was added to their list: David E. Herold, the silly boy who had followed Booth on his flight and who was brought back chattering with Booth's body.

John Surratt was not captured until two years later. When the President was assassinated he had fled to Canada, then to London, Paris, and finally to Rome. On this flight he had been traced by one Sainte-Marie, a Canadian detective, who eventually located him serving in the Papal Zouaves under an assumed name.

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Despite the absence of an extradition treaty, Cardinal Antonelli, the papal Prime Minister, readily consented to surrender Surratt; but while he was being marched, under guard, to the American authorities, he made a spectacular escape by leaping over a cliff, miraculously avoiding serious injury.

With the aid of a bandit gang, Surratt made his way to Naples and boarded a ship for Malta. From there he fled to Alexandria, Egypt. He arrived still wearing his Zouave uniform, and was readily apprehended by United States Consul General Hale, who returned him to Washington on board the U. S. S. Swatara.



Weichmann as a boy in St. Charles' Academy, where he first met John Surratt.

In 1867 Surratt faced a civil court, unlike his co-conspirators, who, in 1865, had been tried by a military commission. The government failed to convict and Surratt went free.

For six weeks after Lincoln's assassination the nation had been raging. Stanton had tuned grief into howling fury the night that he had taken charge of the government while soldiers were carrying Lincoln from the theater to a house across the street. The Rebellion, crushed in the field, was seeking to win the war with assassination, he said.

STANTON was a strange man, capable of vast executive energy, but susceptible to mental unbalance in the presence of death. Years before, when his brother had died, he had left the casket to run through the woods like a hunted thing. He had caused the body of his infant daughter to be exhumed after it had been buried a year, and had kept the ashes in a metal container in his own room until the death of his wife, when they were interred with her. When Mrs. Stanton lay dead, only the watchfulness of relatives defeated his repeated attempts to hide her wedding ring and other valuable jewelry in her casket.

Now, beside the dying Lincoln, he performed miracles of organization. But he was too close to a dead man. He lost his head.

He ordered Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the defunct Confederacy and Lincoln's old friend, as well as other secession leaders, arrested for complicity in the plot.

No one would listen to Thaddeus Stevens and the other radical Republicans who deplored the arrest of such honorable opponents as Lee and Stephens.

The one man who might have guided the country sanely in this lunatic hour, William Tecumseh Sherman, was under a temporary cloud. Sherman had dealt so gently with the surrendering Confederates that the North was accusing him of treachery.

Stanton ruled, and, what is most important to the story of Louis J. Weichmann and Mary E. Surratt, he ruled that the conspiracy had been a Catholic plot. Always an anti-Catholic, he had jumped to this conclusion when his detectives brought him the news that Mrs. Surratt, her son John, Dr. Mudd, and Michael O'Loughlin were members of that Church. It made no difference that Booth and Herold were Episcopalians, Powell a Baptist, and Atzerodt a Lutheran. Of the others, Arnold and Spangler were of Protestant families, but had no church affiliations.

Louis Weichmann, Stanton's chief witness, was also a Catholic.

There is no evidence that the military commission paid any heed to the religious issue. All were officers of character and bravery and had served with Phil Sheridan, "The Irish Brigade," and the thousands of Catholics who had worn Lincoln-blue uniforms.

The country was still at fever heat as the trial began June 1, six weeks after the assassination. Lincoln's funeral train had gone across the country, heightening national emotion.

For Powell and Herold little could be done. They were doomed. For Atzerodt, Arnold, and O'Loughlin, it was argued that they had conspired with Booth in mid-March to kidnap Lincoln, but that they had refused to join in the death plot. Atzerodt drew a death pronouncement; Arnold and O'Loughlin life imprisonment. Dr. Mudd also. Spangler was given six years.

The main fight came over the woman. Her defense would, in all likelihood, have triumphed but for Weichmann's testimony.



Brown Bros. photo

The death watch at the bedside of the wounded President during the night hours of April 14, 1865, and the early morning of April 15—from a painting by W. R. Leigh.

So long as the commission believed Weichmann, their duty was clear. They convicted Mrs. Surratt. Five of them, however, signed an appeal for mercy and attached it to the official verdict as it went up to President Johnson. The Executive sentenced her to die on July 9 with Powell, Herold, and Atzerodt.

Later, Johnson swore that he never saw this plea for mercy and that Judge Advocate Joseph Holt, who presented the verdict to him, had concealed it. Most thorough historians believe that Johnson saw the paper, denied it, and shifted the blame to Holt in order to gain political sympathy from the South.

With the woman hanged, a revulsion of feeling set in and Weichmann became the target. The rumor grew that he had confessed to Mrs. Surratt's friends that he had lied her life away to save his own, that Stanton's men had strung him up by the neck until he had promised to tell the lies they wanted told. Major A. C. Richards, who had charge of Weichmann, branded this as a lie; but, like the other mad rumors, it continued to run.

Whispers went over the country that Stanton had cut out several pages from the diary found on Wilkes Booth, because they proved Mrs. Surratt had known nothing of the conspiracy. General T. M. Harris answered that, since Booth was admitted to have written the diary after his crime, any defense he might have made therein for anyone was worthless.

TIME, now, to go back to the sisters of Weichmann, sitting in their home in Anderson, in the year 1927.

"Pa took us to church that Good Friday that Lincoln was killed," Mrs. Crowley is saying, "and we heard a sermon on the Passion of Christ. The next morning we read that Lincoln was dead. On Monday Pa saw that everybody in the Surratt home was arrested, so he caught the next train for Washington and found out that Lou wasn't in it except to help clear it up.

"After the trial Lou came home to Philadelphia and went to work as a reporter on the *Globe*. There was a lot of talk about Mrs. Surratt and Lou.

"Pretty soon they started worse than talk after Lou. He got letters attacking him.

"One evening, as he was walking home from work, a woman screamed to him to run. A man was following him on the other side of the street and began to run as soon as Lou did. The woman held the door open and pulled Lou in just as the man fired. The bullet struck the door.

"Lou had to testify all over again in 1867 when they caught John Surratt and brought him back for trial. That made it worse, for John started attacking Lou and kept stirring up trouble as long as Lou was in Philadelphia.

"When the Democrats got in power Lou lost the job he'd held in the customs house for seventeen years. So he came here to Anderson, where our brother, Father Weichmann, had a parish, and started a business college.



Weichmann, when he withdrew from the world to start his business college in Anderson, Indiana.

"Lou always believed that Mrs. Surratt was just fascinated by Booth, simply carried off her feet. From that first night when the detectives poked that cravat with Lincoln's blood on it right in his face, Lou was sure she was guilty.

"When he was dying he asked us to get a pen and paper and told us to write:

"'*June 2, 1902: This is to certify that every word I gave in evidence at the assassination trial was absolutely true; and now I am about to die and with love I recommend myself to all truth-loving people.*'

"Then he signed it 'Louis J. Weichmann,' and died.

"The doctor who filled out the death certificate put down as 'cause' just 'Extreme nervousness'—that was all."

Just who were the Lincoln conspirators; how did they live; how did they meet their gallows deaths? A true picture of these unfortunates, stripped of all romanticism, will appear in LIBERTY next week.