New Version of Lincoln's Murder

A new version of the assassination of President Lincoln by Wilkes Booth in Ford's theater in Washington--new, at least, in the contradiction of some of the generally accepted details of that great American tragedy--has just appeared. Among the things accepted and vouched for by historians and incorporated in plays, movies and books that have been compiled with painstaking care for small, but dramatic details, which are pushed aside by this new version are the statements that Laura Keene was on the stage at the time of the shooting, and that Booth after the murder defiantly faced the audience and shouted "Sic semper tyrannis," before he hobbled off the stage.

And to give the new version verisimilitude, its author declares that he and he alone was the only actual eye-witness of the slaying of the Great Emancipator.

W. J. Ferguson, the veteran actor, now 77 years old, who was a call boy at Ford's theater when Lincoln was killed, gave his story of the killing recently in an address at the Green Room club, New York, at a reception tendered him by that organization of players. It was, he said, the first time he had ever publicly discussed the details of the event in the years that have followed. This, it was explained, was due to the innate retiring disposition of the aged actor and desire not to enter into any controversy with historians and others.

Some time ago, when David W. Griffith produced "The Birth of a Nation," he spent months searching records and historical data to make his production of the shooting in the theater correct in every minute detail. The result showed the second scene of the third act of "Our American Cousin" going on, with Miss Keene on the stage, when Booth slipped into the presidential box, fired, and then, shaking his fist at the audience, leaped onto the stage. He then--and, according to Mr. Griffith, all accounts coincided--turned to the auditorium and shouted out his rasping "Sic semper tyrranis!"

"I honestly think I was the only actual eye witness to the murder of President Lincoln," said Mr. Ferguson. "At the time I was a call boy at Ford's theater and frequently I was called upon to play small parts for visiting companies. On this evening one of the actors of the company failed to report at the theater and I was told I would have to do a small scene with Miss Keene. It was only a few lines and I was nervous and excited at the prospect of appearing on the stage with the great Laura Keene. It was not until just before the murder that I noticed that President Lincoln was in his private box.

"The scene had just begun, and I was standing in my place on the prompt side. There was no one else backstage, as the players were in the greenroom, where they remained until I called them for their cues. Miss Keene had come out to talk to me and explain a bit of 'business' we were to go through later. I was paying more attention to her than anything else when I noticed a sudden commotion in the presidential box.

"There was a sudden hush, then I saw Booth spring to the rail of the box, poise there a second and then leap onto the stage. He landed

on his left knee, rested a fraction of a second and then quickly stumbled toward the entrance where Miss Keene and I were standing. He lurched past us, brushing us to one side. The bowie knife he held pressed against my side as he passed and I could feel his hot breath on my cheek. I know I was terror stricken. As I recall it now my mental precesses apparently had stopped. In a dim way I knew that some one had been shot and that some one was President Lincoln. But I was powerless to move until Booth had passed me and had reached the side wall. I could see him stumble along this, holding himself up with one hand as he lurched along. When he reached the rear wall he turned and, still holding himself erect with one hand pressed against the wall, made for a small door which opened onto a dingy back street. I saw him kick the boy that was holding his horse and then he made off into the night.

"How long Booth was in the little back hall back of the box I do not know. He made his entrance from the 'front' of the house and not from the stage, as many have said. There was no way in which to reach the Presidential box from the stage. The only door to the little hallway was from the theater proper. Then in the hallway was another door which led directly to the box. Booth was in the hall long enough to work a stick into the plaster on the wall and use it as a wedge to keep the door shut. Also there was a gimlet hole in the door, which showed he had looked in on the Presidential party before opening the door and firing the fatal shot. Whether this had been made before or on that night I do not know.

"It was after Booth had made his way to the street and rode away into the night that I, as call boy, gave the signal that rang down the curtain on Ford's theater and upon one of the greatest of American tragedies."

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

The only true, reliable, complete and authentic story of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, then President of the United States, April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D. C. by Dr. W. A. Dumas, of Detroit, Mich., an eye witness of that night's tragedy.

This story is no dream nor made up fabrication, a story that has been told and published for oner half a century, more than a thousand times.

From the time that Booth stood before the President's box and entering therein, to the time of his exit from the stage, I saw every move he made and heard every word he uttered. I have written proof in my possession that this story was published twenty years ago. I have an article contradicting the story of W. J. Ferguson, that appeared in the "Detroit Free Press" February 8, 1920, as misleading and untrue.

I have also one rebutting as illogical and untrue, one that appeared in the "American Magazine" August number, 1920, written or caused to be written by W. J. Ferguson.

I am able to convince the intelligent readers that my story, without question, is the absolutely true and reliable one. Which will you believe, the eye witness who has repeated it from the time it occured without any deviation, or one who has waited 55 years and when he says he is the only person living who witnessed it, and all other versions are untrue?

The American people loved Abraham Lincoln and are entitled to the untarnished truth and I am able to give it to them under oath:

I saw Booth standing before the President's box,

I saw Booth enter the hall to the box,

I saw Booth had on a dark Prince Albert coat,

Booth did not carry a 3-ft. scantling,

Booth did not bore hole with gimlet in door that night,

I saw Booth enter President's box,

I saw Booth stab Major Rathbone,

Booth did not utter Motto of Virginia in box,

Booth did not place right hand on rail of box
as he vaulted,

Booth did not whirl in air,

I saw Booth place left hand on rail,

I heard Booth shout "Sic semper tyrannis" in
mid air,

I saw Booth land on stage,

Booth did not break his leg in leap,

Booth did not exit from the lst. wing,

Booth took a diagonal course and when in about
center of stage shouted, "Revenge for the South."

Major Rathbone did not lean over the box and shout,
"Stop him! Stop him!

Had Major Rathbone uttered those words to the
audience, Booth would have been riddled with
bullets, ere he had left the stage.

If you are desirous that your readers and the world should know the absolute truth, I will send you the three different articles written at different times, and if after inspection you may state what value you place upon a true story, if not return and oblige,

Respectfully,

Dr. W. A. Dumas,
1165 David Whitney Bldg.,
Detroit, Mich.

P. S. I have a "New York Herald" published April 15th, 1865, giving an account of the tragedy, etc., in my possession belonging to Dr. Bell. Everyone advises me to place this in your magazine.

(Signed) W. A. Dumas.