Wynkoop, Mrs. Franke

Lincoln's Assassination Is Told By Surviving Actress



Mrs. Frank Wynkoop as she is today (right) and as Miss Truman, the actress (left).

Mrs. Frank Wynkoop, a Southerner, Also Describes Plea to President for Clemency for Her Brother, a War Prisoner.

The approach of the 126th anniversary o the birth of Abraham Lincoln has brough forth two memory pictures of the President now given to the world in an interview by Mrs. Frank Wynkoop.

Mrs. Wynkoop, who is living in retiremen in Los Angeles, is more than 70 years o age. As a girl—as Miss Truman from Virginia—she accompanied her mother t the White House in 1864 to appeal t Lincoln for the life of her brother, who ha been arrested as a blockade runner. Th appeal was successful.

As a young actress a few months later a member of the cast at Ford's Theate where Lincoln was shot, she heard th pistol of John Wilkes Booth a momen after the assassin, glancing toward the stage from the President's box, had nodded to her in recognition.

Here is Mrs. Wynkoop's story:

"The first time I saw President Lincoln was on September 3, 1864. My mother and I had gone to Washington on August 20 to see him in behalf of my brother—only a boy—who had been put in prison in Norfolk, Va., for running the blockade.

"Before going to Washington we had appealed to General Wolfe, in command at Norfolk at that time, for a release or a pardon, but were told that the only person possessing authority to grant it was the President.

"We did not know how to raise funds to get to Washington even after General Wolfe had given us a pass, as our worldly goods at that time consisted of a barrel or two of Confederate money which would buy us practically nothing. We had lived in the South for many years, our plantation had been the scene of several battles and our slaves had been taken from us.

"By pawning all the jewelry in the family we got to Washington. On arriving at the capital we took a carriage to the White House. The day was very warm. Mother, nearly exhausted, had to be helped up the steps by a soldier who was standing guard and I was fearful lest she collapse before we could see the President.

Mother Faints At Door.

"I rang the doorbell and a sentry appeared and asked our business. I told him we had come seeking an interview with the President. He said Mr. Lincoln was out of the city. At that, mother gasped and fell in a faint at the sentry's feet. A soldier rushed to her assistance and lifting her from the floor placed her on a haircloth sofa in the hall near the door and handed me a palmleaf fan.

"The sentry, who was unable to leave the door, pulled a bell and a negro in uniform answered. He was asked to send his wife—an experienced nurse, who quickly revived her patient. Later a doctor appeared and finding we were strangers and from the South he took us to a private house, where we waited the return of the President.

"We returned to the White House on September 3 and found the same sentry at the door. In half an hour he took us to another guard, who stood at the door of the President's room. We were ushered in.

"When I saw President Lincoln for the first time, he was sitting at his desk. He turned as we entered and inquired pleasantly if he could be of any service to us. Mother could scarcely speak. Her sobs made her language incoherent.

spy, the President had granted a pardon and said it had been forwarded to General Wolfe.

"Mother's gratitude knew no bounds. The President said he appreciated her thanks and wished us a safe journey on our departure.

"Mother returned to Norfolk, but I remained to secure employment.

"Deciding that I would attempt a theatrical career I first applied to John T. Ford at his theater on Tenth Street and was very lucky, being engaged for the season, which began September 22, 1864.

"One visit of Mrs. Lincoln to our theater I recall very vividly. It was at the time we were playing 'Camille.' Mrs. Lincoln appeared with a large party of women and during the play all of the women including Mrs. Lincoln enjoyed a good cry.

"It was on the evening of Friday, April 14, 1865, when Laura Keene, Harry Hawk and John Dyatt were appearing in 'The American Cousin' that President Lincoln and Mrs. Lincoln appeared in the President's box. We were all notified of the fact and I managed to look into the box and saw that Mrs. Lincoln had on a new spring dress of a small pinhead check gray silk with a bonnet of the same material. Previous to this time she had appeared always in evening dress. We all remarked on the change.

"I later learned that General Grant had been invited to accompany the party, but was unable to attend. As it had been announced, the President and the commanding officer of the Union forces would appear, the house was crowded.

"Everything started smoothly and quietly and, after coming off the stage from a front scene, I tarried for a moment in the wings, and, looking to the President's box, noticed John Wilkes Booth standing in the corner near its entrance. At first I thought it peculiar that he should be standing there, but remembered that it was often the custom of actors and actresses to go to the President's box for introduction.

"Booth saw me gazing at him and

Case Is Investigated.

"The President spoke to her in a calm, low tone and told her to rest a bit before telling her mission. When finally she told him of her only son in prison at Norfolk as a blockade runner, the President listened intently. When she had finished, he told her he would look into the matter and have it investigated. He advised her to get some rest and cease her worry. We were told that a decision would be reached within a week or ten days and that she would be notified.

"As I now remember the man, he was possessed of the most kindly face I have ever looked upon. While he was tall and perhaps ungainly in appearance he did not give any impression of awkwardness and his voice was moderate and kindly. One thing I noticed at this time and on later occasions when I saw him was that his necktie was always askew. But for this detail his dress was always immaculate.

"Mother was so overcome with his kindness that she knelt at his feet and uttered a prayer of thanks. Mr. Lincoln helped her to her feet and assured her it would be all right. He shook hands with both of us.

"After eight days mother could wait no longer. Our funds were nearly exhausted, so we went again to the White House. This time we were compelled to wait an hour or more and again reclined on that haircloth sofa in the hallway.

"We found that the President remembered us. We were informed that my brother's case had been investigated and that another accusa- there was no proof that he was a