

MICHIGAN MILLERS

MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE CO.

Lansing, Michigan

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Dear Miss Malone:

I have your letter of June 19 asking some questions in regard to the burial of John Wilkes Booth. I have collected all the information that I can and am giving it to you herewith.

John Wilkes Booth was killed at the Garrett farm by Boston Corbett. He was a crank on religious matters, and when Father was negotiating with Booth at the front door of the Garrett barn Corbett put his carbine through a knothole in the rear of the barn and fired. He hit Booth in the back of his neck - the same place that Booth shot Lincoln. Father heard the shot, and while standing at the front door saw Booth pitch forward and jumped in to catch him in case he was only wounded. He found, however, that Booth's spinal cord was severed. Some of the soldiers helped him carry Booth to the back porch of the Garrett house, where he died in Father's arms after he had said "Tell my mother that I did what I thought was for the best."

The captain of the company that was under Father's command said that the man who shot Booth would go back to Washington in irons, and when Corbett was brought before the captain he asked him why he had shot him. Corbett said "The Lord told me to," and the captain said "If you hit him through that knothole, the Lord must have directed you." Booth died on the porch after he had drunk some water from Father's pocket cup.

My father took Booth to Washington, which was only a few miles, in a lumber wagon driven by an old darkey. When fixing some repair under the wagon some of Booth's blood dropped on the darkey's hand, which scared him, and the darkey said "That is a murderer's blood and it won't ever come off. The body was identified by quite a number of people in Washington, and then Secretary of State Seward told General Baker to bury it where it would not be dug up until "Gabriel sounded his last horn." Father and, I think, Colonel Conger took the body in a boat from Old Capitol Prison and rode down the Potomac River until it became dark at night. Then they rode back to Old Capitol Prison, which, as you know, was in the city of Washington and belonged to the Government, and took up a big slab in a cell

and dug a grave underneath it and put Booth's body therein. Some four or five years later the actor, Edwin Booth, who was a brother of John Wilkes Booth, requested permission from the Government to take the body up and bury it in the Booth burial lot in (I think, Virginia) which was done.

Baltimore - B.M., in pencil

One of the stories that you hear is that of the Enid, Oklahoma, "legend" which is to the effect that Booth was not killed and went to Oklahoma and lived out his life there. That is pure fiction, as Booth died in Father's arms and Father knew him. Besides that, he was identified by quite a number of people in Washington. This "legend" was exposed in Scribner's Magazine, which said that the records in Washington were correct and none other should be accepted. Leslie's Magazine, which at the time of the Civil War occupied a place similar to that of the Saturday Evening Post, had a picture on the front page which showed Father and Colonel Conger shoving Booth's body (duly wrapped up) over the gunwell of the boat into the Potomac River. This was purely imaginary, although Father kept the magazine and I think he exhibited it in some of his lectures.

Booth shot Lincoln when Lincoln was sitting in a box in Ford's Theatre in Washington. He shot him through the back of his neck. He then leaped over the front of the box onto the stage, saying a Latin phrase which I think is "sic semper tyrannis," which is supposed to mean "so perish all tyrants." As he leaped from the front of the box his spur caught in the United States flag and he broke his leg. He went through the front of the stage to the back and out the back door and leaped on his horse. He went across the Potomac into Virginia, where he finally came to the Garrett farm, and the Garrets told him he could sleep in the barn, which he did. That is where my father caught him.

Booth knew that he had broken his leg when he leaped on the stage, and went to Dr. Mudd to have his leg set. If I remember rightly, Dr. Mudd was thus considered part of the conspiracy and was sent to an island off the Florida coast, called the "Dry Tortogus," where he was held prisoner for several years and was finally released. The Mudd who was in the United States Service, to whom you refer, is probably a grandson.

As you will remember, a Mrs. Surratt, who was unquestionably one of the plotters for the killing of all the cabinet officials, was hanged, as was also a man named Paine. What became of the others I don't know, but I do know that only Lincoln was killed in the conspiracy although all of the others were intended to be.

It has been almost forty years since my father died and what I am telling you is from memory, but I am quite sure it is correct. My father had a thousand dollar job in the State Capitol for many years, but occasionally a Democratic victory in the State would put him out of his place. It was in one of these two-year periods that he delivered his lecture a good many times in the States of Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. Part of that time I acted as his agent in dealing with the people who wanted him to give the lecture. I think that the lecture in the Plymouth Congregational Church, which you remember, had the largest audience he ever had, as the church was filled. I think he earned about \$600 a year while he was lecturing.

This is about all I can remember, although I have his lecture, written in his own handwriting, somewhere among my papers. I hope this will give you all the information which you wanted.

I think that the "Enid legend" was started by a man who looked somewhat like Booth, and while he was never known to have said he was Booth, he permitted the "legend" to spread. At least that is my memory of it now.

I am glad that you wrote me, as I am the last of the Baker family that you knew; my two sisters having died some years ago and my brother seven years ago. I was the oldest of the children and am now 82 years old. I remember quite clearly hearing your name, and I presume you were the friend of one or both of my sisters, who were twins. But, as you know, the memory of a person of my age grows pretty dim and I am not sure whether you were married or not.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Arthur D. Baker

ADB:NC

Miss Bertha E. Malone
81 Waverly Avenue
Highland Park 3, Michigan

P. S. Booth was, as was his brother, an actor and probably felt he was acting somewhat when he shot Lincoln on account of his leaping onto the stage from the box and making the Latin quotation which he did.

From the original, lent for reproduction
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