

The Cover-up of George Atzerodt's Confession

by Don Thomas

George Atzerodt's last confession is a treasure map of clues for anyone wishing to uncover the conspiracy that ended the life of President Abraham Lincoln. However, Atzerodt's last recorded words will also expose the true intentions of those who wish to keep the Lincoln conspiracy a never to be solved mystery.

It is mistakenly assumed that Atzerodt's last confession was lost, but that is not true. George Atzerodt's confession was not lost. It was stolen and destroyed by the very same men who stole the last words that John Wilkes Booth wrote in his diary confession. Those same men also executed Atzerodt, as well as Booth, and did so to keep their involvement in the plot to kill President Lincoln and his Secretary of State William Seward covered up. The Lincoln assassination was a secret military coup to swiftly and violently unseat the President in order to prevent his post-Civil War policy from being enacted.

George Atzerodt was executed, and his last interrogation was stolen and destroyed so that his statement to Military Marshal James McPhail would never be known. One hundred twelve years later, Atzerodt's last words made their way back through time when a copy of his statement was discovered in 1977.

Below is the recovered copy made from Atzerodt's original confession. Most reading Atzerodt's statement for the first time find that the transcript reads somewhat jumbled and confusing. The main reason his confession is so hard to understand is because Atzerodt spoke with a very thick German accent, and the questions Marshal McPhail asked him are not included.

Military Marshal of Baltimore, James McPhail was not only an investigator looking for Booth's Baltimore accomplices, but also a major player in the conspiracy cover-up. McPhail lied during the conspiracy trial when he testified that Atzerodt's confession was given with no questions asked. Most anyone reading his last words can realize that his voluntary deposition was to prove his innocence, and that the transcript is direct answers to specific questions. The information George Atzerodt gave was clearly an answer to a question that Marshal McPhail would have asked George, based on what the military Marshal of Baltimore already knew about the conspiracy before the interrogation began. After many years of study and research into the conspiracy (using Atzerodt's confession as a map), I was able to uncover the people and events mentioned by Atzerodt during his last opportunity to speak.

I have included with Atzerodt's testimony the logical questions Marshal McPhail likely asked, based on the written evidence Marshal McPhail left behind. The presumed questions are in italics. Highlighted in yellow are explanations, based on research, added to clarify what George was talking about, as well as to reveal what Marshal McPhail already knew. Based on the McPhail evidence, the interrogation began with a question about Secretary Seward's assassin Lewis Powell:

Q: *Who is Wood?*

James Wood sometimes called Mosby boarded with Mrs. Murray an Irish woman on the corner of 9 & F St. in a three story house, front on the upper end of the P.O. and South End of Patent Office - with basement entrance on the left side going up 9th St. from Avenue.

He was a little over six feet, black hair, smooth round face, gray coat black pants, & spring coat mixed with white & gray. Saw him last time on Friday evening [April 14] about 5 o'ck with Booth. He sent for letters to the post office with James Hall. He was brought from New York. Surratt told me so. He said he had been a prisoner in Balt, [Baltimore] near the depot. He was arrested for whipping a negro woman. [This man was Lewis Thornton Powell, alias James Wood and L. Paine. He attacked Secretary Seward. Note: McPhail's questions forced Atzerodt to later change his story and admit that he saw Wood and Booth again that same evening at 7:30 pm].



Lewis Powell

Q: *Did Wood ever use the alias Paine?*

Mosby was Wood's nick name - did not know him by any other name than mentioned. [Lewis Powell alias, James Wood never used the alias, L. Paine while he was in Washington. L. Paine (Payne) was Lewis Powell's Baltimore alias].

Q: *Who is Powell?*

Gust. Powell now arrested in Old Capitol was one of the party. He went also by name of Gustavus Spencer, Surratt and Spencer came from Richmond, together just after it had fallen [Not correct, Spencer Howell had already been arrested before Richmond fell. Augustus Spencer Howell is the man Atzerodt was talking about, and McPhail knew Howell was already in jail].

Q: *Who else was in the conspiracy with Booth?*

James Donaldson, a low chunky man about 23 or 24 years of age, small-potted, dark complexion (not very) deep plain black suit; only saw him one time & this was Wednesday [April 12] previous to the murder, [Not correct, both Atzerodt and Donaldson were at Booth's mid-March saloon meeting, which McPhail already knew] he [Donaldson] was having an interview with Booth and [Booth] told him to meet him on Friday eve [evening of April 14] & he [Donaldson] replied he would and left and went up Penn. Avenue towards the Treasury building. I was under the impression he came on with Booth. [All the military investigators knew James Donaldson, and that he worked for Secretary of State William Seward. James Donaldson has been edited from this entire history because he alone is definitive proof of a military conspiracy cover-up].



James Donaldson

Q: *I know that you were at a saloon meeting with Booth. Who else was there?*

Arnold, O'Laughlin, Surratt, Harold, Booth, and myself met once at a saloon or restaurant on the Aven. bet 13 & 14 St. [Not correct, Booth had many meetings to plot the kidnapping. In fact, Atzerodt first met Booth at Stanton's War Department during a kidnapping meeting, along with John Surratt and Louis Wiechmann].



Samuel Arnold

Michael O'Laughlin

Q: *How did you come to know Samuel Thomas?*

The Saml. Thomas registered on the morning of the 15th April at Penn Hotel, I met on my way to hotel, he was an entire Stranger to me. I left the Hotel alone on the morning of 15th of April. A Lieut. in room No. 51 will prove this. [Verified in court by Lieutenant W.R. Keim. Important note: Samuel Thomas was the shabby dressed dark-haired man seen holding the theater's back door shut until Booth had mounted his horse and rode away. Samuel Thomas then followed George Atzerodt to the Pennsylvania House after the assassination, and both men spent the night in the same room. The next morning military investigators followed the trail of Samuel Thomas who had boarded the Howard's Stable stagecoach on his escape from Washington to Rockville. Thomas carried with him a military pass, and when the stagecoach was stopped for the first checkpoint at Georgetown, four of the five passengers were not allowed to continue. Only Samuel Thomas was allowed passage with the stagecoach driver who carried the mail. Samuel Thomas was using the alias Atwood during his escape, and was overtaken just south of Frederick Maryland, arrested and brought back to Washington. Secretary Stanton ordered his release without a reason or a statement, and Thomas was never called as a trial witness. Atzerodt was wrongly accused of being the man using the alias Atwood, in order to cover-up Stanton's secret government accomplice Samuel Thomas].

Q: *How did the kidnapers plan to get the President across the river?*

Surratt bought a boat from Dick Smoot & James Brawner living about Port Tobacco, for which they paid \$300.00 and was to give one hundred Dolls. extra for taking care of it till wanted.

Q: *Why did Mary Surratt go to Surrattsville and how did she get there?*

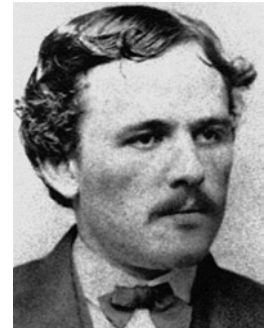
Booth told me that Mrs. Surratt went to Surrattsville to get out the guns (Two Carbines) which had been taken to that place by Herold. This was Friday. The carriage was hired at Howard's. [David Herold and Atzerodt transported the guns from the T.B. Post Office to Surrattsville Tavern. Atzerodt was protecting himself from guilt by accusing Herold and Mary Surratt of hiding the guns].



Mary Surratt

Q: *How did you know Mary Surratt's carriage was rented from Howard's Stable?*

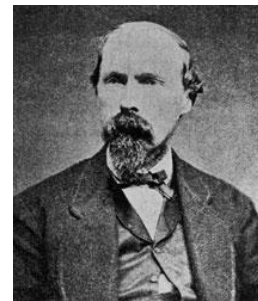
I same [saw] a man named Weightman who boarded at Surratt's at Post Office. he told me he had to go down the Country with Mrs. Surratt. This was on Friday, Also. [Note: Mary made two trips to Surrattsville, April 12 and April 14. On April 12, Mary sent Wiechmann to ask Booth if she could borrow his buggy. Booth had already sold his buggy, but gave Wiechmann \$10.00 to rent a carriage for Mary. On April 14, Mary paid for her carriage to Surrattsville and went there to finish her (business) reason for both trips. Louis Wiechmann was John Surratt's roommate, best friend and Stanton's prime prosecution witness. McPhail quickly changed the subject].



Louis Wiechmann

Q: *Was Dr. Mudd involved in the kidnapping plot?*

I am certain Dr. Mudd knew all about it, as Booth sent (as he told me) liquors & provisions for the trip with the President to Richmond, about two weeks before the murder to Dr. Mudd's. [The only reason Booth stopped at Dr. Mudd's house during his escape was because he had a broken ankle that needed medical attention. Booth and Herold left Dr. Mudd's house the next day without any provisions provided by Dr. Mudd, except for a makeshift wood crutch].



Dr. Mudd

Q: *When did Booth change the kidnapping plot into a murder plot?*

Booth never said until the last night (Friday) [April 14] that he intended to kill the President.

Q: *How did you and David Herold learn that Booth was planning to kill the President?*

Herold came to the Kirkwood House, same evening [Friday] for me to go to see Booth. I went with Herold & saw Booth. He then said he was going to kill the President and Wood, the Secy. of State. I did not believe him. This occurred in the evening [April 14] about 7 1/2 o'clock. It was dark. I took a room at Kirkwood's. Both Herold & I went to the room left Herold's coat, knife, & pistol in room and never again returned to it. [Herold's coat, knife & pistol were recovered from the Hotel room by Detective John Lee after the assassination, proving that Herold had no coat or weapons on him during the attacks by Booth and Powell, alias James Wood. McPhail's question forced Atzerodt to confess that he last saw Wood at 7: 30 pm, and not 5 o'clock as he stated earlier].



David Herold

Q: *Why were you at the Kirkwood on April 12, and who else knew about the kidnapping plot?*

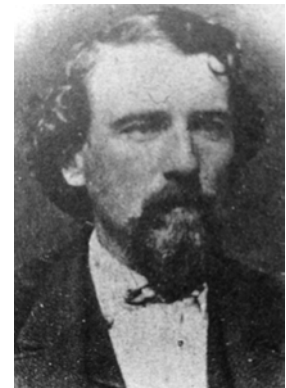
Booth said during the day [April 12] that the thing had failed [kidnapping plot] and proposed to go to Richmond & open the theatre. I am not certain but I think I stayed one night at Kirkwood's (Thursday) [April 13] we were to try and get papers [military passes] to Richmond from Mr. Johnson [Vice President Andrew Johnson]. Booth spoke of getting the papers. He would get them out of the Theatre. [Booth's mail was sent to Ford's Theater address, and by mid-day Friday the military passes, to allow travel to Richmond, had still not arrived in his mail. Booth then paid Johnson a visit at the Kirkwood but did not find him and only left a personal note].

Q: *Why did James Wood come back to Washington, and how many people knew of the kidnapping?*

Wood & Booth were apparently confidential with each other. Plenty of parties in Charles County knew of the kidnapping affair. One of the men named Charles Yates, knew all about it, he went to Richmond during the winter he was to row the Presdt & party over. [Atzerodt was talking about Charles Lee, alias Charles Letz a government employee in Booth's conspiracy. Charles Lee was the first accomplice arrested. McPhail knew that Charles Lee had already been captured and that his arrest was being kept a military secret].

Q: *Who else was involved in the kidnapping plot?*

Thos. Holbornn was to meet us on the road and help in the kidnapping. [McPhail also knew all about Thomas Harbin, and does not ask any more about Yates or Harbin, who was proven to have assisted Booth and Herold during their escape. Just as Atzerodt admitted].



Thomas Harbin

Q: *Were your friends Bailey and Barnes part of the conspiracy?*

Bailey & Barnes knew nothing of the affair unless Booth told Bailey & he told Barnes. Booth had met Bailey on "C" St. with me. [Note: Marshal McPhail had a detective keeping surveillance on Atzerodt, Bailey, and Barnes as early as March. This is the reason for McPhail's question. McPhail's surveillance detective was Atzerodt's brother-in-law and the same detective who was taking the transcript of Atzerodt's confession].

Q: *Did you meet with Booth in Baltimore, on or about March 31?*

I did not meet Booth or any other of the [kidnapping] party in Baltimore on or about the 31 of March. [The surveillance report by McPhail's detective was about blockade running on the Bay on March 31. McPhail was trying to find out if Booth had a plan to cross the Bay to Kent Island].

Q: *What else can you tell me about the kidnappers?*

Boyle also killed Capt. Watkins near Annapolis last month, was one of the party, in the conspiracy. [McPhail already knew all about the "desperado" John Boyle].

Q: *What was your role in the plot to kill the President?*

I repeat I never knew anything about the murder. I was intended to give assistance to the kidnapping. They come to Port Tobacco (Surratt & Booth) several times and brought me to Washington.

Q: *What did you do with the weapons Booth gave you?*

The pistol given me I sold or received a loan on it Saturday mornng after the murder from John Caldwick at Matthews & Wells, Store, High St. Georgetown. [Verified in court]. The knife I threw away just above Mrs. Canby's boarding house the night of the murder about 11 o'clock when I took my horse to stable. [Verified in court]. I had the horse out to help to take the President. I did not believe he was going to be killed, although Booth had said so. After I heard of the murder I run about the city like a crazy man. [Verified in court].

Q: *When was the last time you saw Arnold, O'Laughlen and Wood?*

I have not seen Arnold for some time, but saw O'Laughlen on Thursday evening, on the Avenue at Saloon near U.S. Hotel. He told me he was going to see Booth.

Wood did not go on the street in day time for fear of arrest. [The military police had arrested and released Lewis Powell, alias Wood twice, and told him to stay north of Philadelphia, but Powell returned to Washington]. When he [Wood] first came to Washington he boarded at Surratt's. This was in Feby. He (Wood) went with Booth last of February to N. York. Booth we understood paid the way. [Actually, Powell went to New York in mid-March after the military police released him for a second time, and not the last of February].

Q: *Did Booth have accomplices in Canada?*

I know nothing about Canada. Wood told me he had horses in Virginia. Saml. Arnold and Mike O'Laughlin ought to know where the horses and pistols were bought. [Booth bought his horses in Maryland and his weapons in New York. He then smuggled the New York weapons to Washington in a black wardrobe box he originally used to carry his theatrical swords. The box was recovered by military detectives in the home of John Matthews, but kept a military secret].



John Matthews

Q: *Tell me all you know about Booth's weapons and horses.*

Sam and Mike have a buggy and horse kept at stable in rear of Theatre. Booth had several horses at same place. [Before April 12, Booth had already sold his horses and buggy]. I think the horses property was in Surratt's name. I sold one of the horses & paid part of the money to Booth and part to Herold, who said he would see Booth about it. The saddle and bridle belonging to Booth is at Penn House, where I left it. [Booth, Atzerodt and Herold each rode rented horses on the night of the assassination. The horse Powell was accused of riding after his attack on Mr. Seward's home was the buggy horse Booth sold to Samuel Arnold on January 30th. That same

one-eyed horse had again been sold by Atzerodt to a man in Montgomery County before the assassination. It was verified in court that Booth did not own Powell's alleged get-away horse].

Q: *How did Wood learn so much about Mr. Seward's home?*

I overheard Booth when in conversation with Wood say, That he visited a chambermaid at Seward's House & that she was pretty. He said he had a great mind to give her his diamond pin. [McPhail changed the subject every time Atzerodt implicated government accomplices].

Q: *What was Herold's role in the plot to kill the President?*

Herold talked about powders & medicines on Friday night at Mrs. Condy's. Wood, Herold, Booth, and myself were present. This was a meeting place because Wood could not go out for fear of arrest. [On March 14, the military police told Powell, alias Wood, alias L. Paine to remain north of Philadelphia. Powell could only remain in Washington by staying out of sight].

Q: *Who was the woman Booth had in the conspiracy?*

Kate Thompson or Kate Brown, as she was known by both names, put up at National [where Booth lived] & was well known at Penn House [where Booth paid for Atzerodt to stay]. She knew all about the affair. Surratt went to Richd with her last March and Gust. Howell made a trip with her to same place. This woman is about twenty yrs of age, good looking and well dressed. Black hair and eyes, round face from South Carolina & a widow. [Fay Brown was the good-looking woman put up at the National Hotel, who looked about twenty, well dressed, black hair and eyes, round face, and well known. Kate Warne, alias Kate Thompson was a widow from Baltimore who spied on Booth while working undercover for the Pinkerton Detective agency. Sarah Slater was a small blonde-haired Frenchwoman from South Carolina who went to Richmond with Surratt and Howell. Atzerodt was describing three different women thinking of them as being one single woman that he had never met, only heard about. Note: McPhail knew all three women Atzerodt was describing, but arrested only Sarah Slater. Slater disappeared forever while being held a War Department prisoner just like Charles Lee, Atzerodt's confession, Michael O'Laughlen's arrest statement, Booth's missing diary pages, and the photograph of Booth's dead body, which all disappeared while being held at the War Department].



Fanny Brown

Q: *When was the last time you saw John Surratt?*

I did not see Surratt for seven or eight days before the murder nor have I seen him since. Miss Thompson or Brown [Actually, this was the blonde-haired Frenchwoman Sarah Slater] had two

large light trunks, one much larger than the other. Young Weightman at Surratts' ought to know about this woman.

[Note: At this point Marshal McPhail's interrogation was getting the cover-up into real trouble. Atzerodt believed he was giving information that could demonstrate his willingness to cooperate with the investigation. However, his knowledge of James Donaldson, Seward's chambermaid, James Hall, Samuel Thomas, Charles Yates, Thomas Harbin, Kate Thompson or Brown, Louis Wiechmann and "Col." Lewis Mosby became his death sentence. McPhail, once again had to divert Atzerodt's attention to a different subject. Marshal McPhail changed the topic by telling Atzerodt that he knew about some enterprise on the Bay that he, Bailey and Barnes were planning, and that it involved a steamer].

[Atzerodt responded by saying]: This remark made by me in Baltimore on the 31 of March alluded to blockade running & privateering altogether & Booth said he had money to buy a steamer & wanted me to go in it. I was to be one of them. In this way I was going to make a pile of money. [Note: Atzerodt was becoming desperate to give Marshal McPhail a reason to believe he was not involved in the plot to kill the President. But, once again, George Atzerodt's knowledge about Booth's true assassination accomplices: The New York crowd and the friends of the President, got him in even deeper trouble].

[Atzerodt told Marshal McPhail that Booth told him about an assassination plot by a party from New York, which involved friends of the President]. Booth said he had met a party in N. York who would get the Pres. certain. They were going to mine the end of the pres. House, near the War Dept. They knew an entrance to accomplish it through. Spoke about getting friends of the Presdt. to get up an entertainment & they would mix it in, have a serenade & thus get at the Presdt. & party. These were understood to be projects. [The entertainers Atzerodt spoke of were the New York minstrels who had their own plot to kill the President, which was separate from Booth's plot to kidnap the President. The friends of the President would arrange to have the minstrel entertainers perform for the President at the White House. The plan Atzerodt overheard in a conversation was that President Lincoln would be lured into a room and a bomb planted under the floor would be detonated, killing Lincoln. It is not known if this plan was seriously considered, it was never attempted, but Atzerodt thought that by telling McPhail about the New York plot it would help prove his innocence of a plot to kill the President].

Booth said if he did not get him [kidnap Lincoln] quick the N. York crowd would [kill Lincoln]. Booth knew the New York party apparently by a [secret] sign. He [he?] saw Booth give some kind of sign to two parties on the Avenue who he [he?] said were from New York. [Atzerodt was not talking about himself when referring to "he". A name is missing from the recovered transcript copy].

[Note: Atzerodt had told way too much, and the interrogation had to be abruptly ended. The transcript concluded with a statement that was clearly not consistent with Atzerodt's choice of words].

My Uncle Mr. Richter and family in Monty. Co. Md. knew nothing about the affair either before or after the occurrence & never suspected me of any thing wrong as I was in the habit of visiting

and working in the neighborhood & staying with him. My father formerly owned part of the property now owned by Richter.

Finis. [Finished]

[Note: McPhail's detective who made the transcript of Atzerodt's statements was John L. Smith, the brother-in-law to George Atzerodt, as well as George's brother John Atzerodt who was also a detective for Marshal McPhail. If George Atzerodt was found guilty his entire family would be under suspicion of being involved in the assassination plot, and the lives and property of the entire Atzerodt family would be most definitely in jeopardy].

[The final paragraph of the transcript was to clear the detectives on McPhail's staff of any implications. Nothing more was asked about James Donaldson, Mr. Seward's chambermaid, James Hall, Kate Thompson, Louis Wiechmann, Thomas Harbin and Charles Yates, the New York crowd or the friends of the President].

[Atzerodt's confession was withheld from the conspiracy trial evidence, stolen and destroyed. It remained unknown until a copy was discovered in 1977. In 2009, Don Thomas read the recovered copy, and after several years of investigating the conspiracy cover-up, Thomas was able to identify all the people and events that Atzerodt had voluntarily given to the Secretary of War, his military investigators, as well as Stanton's Judge Advocates. Atzerodt's confession was given two weeks before the conspiracy trial began. Booth's implicated government accomplices were never made public and Atzerodt was executed].

[All of the McPhail evidence is now published, public information in two books by historian William Edwards. Both books contain edited documents (letters, telegrams, reports, etc.) collected during the investigation, which are housed in the National Archives, but were never presented during the conspiracy trial].

Further details and sources about the people and events identified in this annotated version of Atzerodt's recovered confession transcript can be found in two books published by Don Thomas, The Reason Lincoln Had to Die and its sequel The Reason Booth Had to Die.