

The Cover-up of Booth's Unknown Accomplices

By Don Thomas

Who was Charles Lee and what happened to him?

On Maryland's Eastern Shore, April 16, 1865, Charles Lee became the first conspirator captured as an accomplice to John Wilkes Booth. He was also a U. S. Government employee.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and his military investigators covered up many implicated suspects during the Lincoln conspiracy investigation but Charles Lee was the first.

The motive to have so many War Department secrets was twofold. Had any government employees been convicted in Booth's plot against Lincoln, such Federal accomplices would have exposed the actual Washington conspiracy to remove the President from office by assassination. Federal accomplices would also destroy Stanton's assertion that Lincoln's murder was a Richmond plot.

The War Department investigators were provided total control over all the collected evidence and could easily cover-up anything that would expose a Washington conspiracy. They were all Federal officers under Stanton and they had only two choices: honestly reveal their collected evidence which would expose a military coup, or support Stanton's declaration against Richmond.

George Atzerodt was the seventh conspirator arrested on April 20th, four days after the arrest of Charles Lee. During Atzerodt's last interrogation, he implicated many unpublicized Federal, as well as New York accomplices plotting with Booth, even conspirators he referred to as friends of the President.

On May 1, 1865, George Atzerodt further implicated Charles Lee when he told the military Marshal of Baltimore, James McPhail (in his thick German accent) that a man named Charles "Laytz" was to row Booth, all his kidnappers and the President across the river into Virginia.

Atzerodt knew Charles Lee only by his alias, Charles Letz. But the transcriber of his confession recorded "Laytz" as Charles Yates. Atzerodt said that 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 President and party over"*.

On the same day that Atzerodt gave McPhail information about Charles Letz, Judge Advocate Colonel Burnett immediately realized that Atzerodt was talking about his War Department prisoner Charles Lee. Burnett then issued Major William H. Wiegel *verbal orders* to report the secret location the War Department was holding Charles Lee.

That National Archives document is the last of fifteen known documents collected as evidence against Charles Lee. There are also three additional, related documents about another covered up Confederate spy named Sarah Slater.

Stanton's military Judges executed George Atzerodt because of what he knew and not because of what he did. His confession to McPhail was stolen and destroyed by the War Department, but a copy of Atzerodt's destroyed confession was recovered in 1977. The attempt to keep Atzerodt forever silent, has at long last failed and the confession is now public information.

In fact, all collected evidence about Federal and New York accomplices in the plot to kill Lincoln was hidden from the public by the War Department investigators. The military prosecution also withheld that same collected evidence from the conspiracy trial, and those once censored documents were not released to history researchers until 1935. They did not become accessible public information until 2009.

But this War Department cover-up goes much deeper than just Charles Lee!

The same day George Atzerodt implicated the Confederate spy he called Kate Thompson, James McPhail quickly ordered the arrest of Sarah Slater, but no one ever bothered to look for the woman Atzerodt called Kate Thompson.

On May 1st after Sarah Slater was arrested, she was sent to Colonel Burnett. Stanton then ordered Colonel Ingraham to take charge of Mrs. Slater later that night and send her back to Burnett the next morning at 10 A.M.

Early the next morning of May 2nd, James McPhail has Slater as his prisoner and sends word to Burnett that he will deliver Slater back to the War Department by 12 noon. The War Department kept Slater's arrest a military secret and said nothing about Kate Thompson.

During the conspiracy trial, the woman accomplice in Booth's kidnapping plot, whom Atzerodt called Kate Thompson was in truth a Pinkerton agent named Kate Warne, who had infiltrated Booth's kidnapping plot.

If it was ever known that a Pinkerton agent was spying on Booth, it would prove that the War Department knew about Booth and his conspirators long before the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. To maintain the secrecy of agent Kate Warne's identity, Sarah Slater was accused of being the lady Atzerodt called Kate Thompson or by an alias, Kate Brown.

George Atzerodt told McPhail that young Wiechmann ought to know about Kate Thompson, but Atzerodt never mentioned the name Sarah Slater. The investigators never asked Louis Wiechmann, nor anyone from the Surratt House about Kate Thompson, because the military investigators already knew Thompson was a Pinkerton agent.

Also, on May 1st, Chief investigator Colonel John Foster interrogated "young" Louis Wiechmann who said that he met Slater when she stayed at the Surratt House. That she was a Confederate spy, short, thin and he never saw her face, because she always wore a veil. Wiechmann's ridiculous statement, which claimed that: *Sarah Slater always wore a veil*; inspired the renowned history researcher James O. Hall to write the enduring legend about Sarah Slater, who he labeled, the mysterious lady in the veil.

After George Atzerodt gave Marshal James McPhail information about Charles Lee and Kate Thompson, they both were never heard from again.

Sarah Slater was said to have also vanished without a trace, even though the War Department had her secretly under arrest. Slater's cover-up kept Kate Warne's undercover identity as Kate Thompson a War Department secret. The War Department claimed that Sarah Slater could not be found for a trial witness, but there is no history of her release or escape.

The military investigators also knew that the woman Atzerodt thought was alias, Kate Brown, was not Kate Thompson nor Sarah Slater, but a third woman accomplice in Booth's plot named Fanny Brown. Fanny was a New York actress and a close friend of John Wilkes Booth.

A photograph of Fanny Brown was recovered from Booth's body when he was captured, but she was never investigated. Fanny was put-up at the National Hotel where Booth lived. Fanny was good-looking, well-dressed, black hair and eyes and had a round face. Just like Atzerodt described Kate Thompson or Kate Brown and added that she was known by both names. But he never mentioned Sarah Slater.

Atzerodt was describing just Fanny Brown because she was the only woman he ever saw. He never realized that his overheard conversations were about three separate women accomplices. The military investigators knew about all three of Booth's women accomplices: Fanny Brown, Kate Thompson and Sarah Slater but that too was kept a military secret.

It is a well-documented fact that the War Department investigators knew that Sarah Slater was friends with both the fugitive John Surratt, a Confederate spy, as well as a blockade runner named Augustus Howell, who had already been arrested by the War Department before Booth had a plot to kill Lincoln.

It is also well-documented that Mrs. Slater's last known location (two weeks before the conspiracy trial began) was in the custody of the War Department.

However, Sarah Slater remained a historical enigma until just recently when author John F. Stanton completed Sarah's life story, right up to her death in 1920. It is now known that she never tried to hide from anyone, and that she also chose never to talk about her days as a Confederate spy.

The only mysteries still to be solved are: Why would the military prosecution cover-up Charles Lee who could be tied to Richmond? Why release Sarah Slater from the War Department's custody, when the military investigators knew that she was a Confederate spy. A spy who had information that could help locate the hunted fugitive John Surratt?

Why did the military investigators withhold evidence, and keep a select group of Booth's implicated accomplices a War Department secret throughout the conspiracy investigation and trial?

To find the answer to those questions, and so much more, (**Read: The Reason Lincoln Had to Die** and its sequel **The Reason Booth Had to Die by Don Thomas**, and discover just how much of your opinion about the Lincoln conspiracy is based on what you don't know.

Purchase both books at Amazon.com. Visit Don Thomas on YouTube, along with all the articles posted at: www.reasonlincoln.com.



Fanny Brown

“Good-looking, well-dressed, black hair and eyes, round face.”

Fanny Brown was not Kate Thompson or Sarah Slater!

Other covered up suspects were: *[James Donaldson, William Donaldson, Col. Lewis Mosby, Samuel Thomas, Thomas Harbin, Fanny Brown, Nellie Starr, John F. Parker, Mollie Turner, Lizzie Murtry, John Matthews, Dan Bryant, Secretary William Seward’s chambermaid along with Kate Thompson, Charles Lee and Sarah Slater.]*

Sources:

Listed are eighteen surviving microfilm National Archives documents about Charles Lee and Sarah Slater, edited by historian William C. Edwards:

E&S – Edwards, William C. and Steers Edward Jr., editors. *The Lincoln Assassination: The Evidence*, University of Illinois press Urbana and Chicago, 2009. Microfilm Reels M599 1-7.

WCE- Edwards, William C. edited & transcribed, companion volume to **E&S** -*The Lincoln Assassination: The Reward Files*, by William C. Edwards, 2012. E-book, A Transcription of the Microfilm file M619 from the National Archives.

All posted National Archives documents are from Reel No. 2: Files, 0212-0878.

E&S, p. 797, Doc. 1 & 2 -- 2: 0751-63, (Charles Lee was a U.S. Government employee in Booth's kidnapping plot to capture Lincoln.)

E&S, p. 1349-50, Doc. 3 – 6 -- 2: 0216-18, (The arrest of Charles Lee and 5 witnesses against him. Captain Thomas Wenie, "*What disposition shall I make of him?*")

E&S, p. 1148, Doc. 7 & 8 — 2: 0876-78, (Major General Lew Wallace to Colonel John Wooley, *put the prisoner in irons and send him to the Old Capitol Prison under strong guard. Keep his paper carefully.*)

E&S, pp. 764-65, Doc. 9 - 14 -- 2: 0212-152, (Brigadier General John Kenly of Delaware, to General Wallace in Baltimore, *Charles Lee is now in my custody and closely confined at the city jail [in Wilmington]. "You might deem it better to cause him to be examined at Wilmington before taking other steps in relation to him."*)

Doc. 15 - 2: 0752 not listed in E&S, May 1st, Col. Burnett gives verbal orders: *find out where Charles Lee is being held*. The last known document on Charles Lee. **(See unedited Doc. 15, at the end of this article.)**

E&S pp. 869, 871, Doc. 16, 17 & 18- 2: 0765-77, are the three documents about Sarah Slater's arrest and interrogation. **(See unedited Doc. 18, at the end of this article.)**

Also see:

Author, Suzanne Adair. Posted in Relevant History, March 29, 2016: The Veiled Lady: Sarah Slater, Courier for the Confederacy. Article from Author, Susan Higginbotham, "*Hanging Mary.*" Permalink [<http://www.suzanneadair.net/2016/03/29/the-veiled-lady-sarah-slater-courier-for-the-confederacy/>]

James O. Hall, "*The Saga of Sarah Slater.*" Reprinted in *In Pursuit of: Continuing Research in the Field of the Assassination* (Surratt Society, 1990.)

John F. Stanton, "*A Mystery No Longer: The Lady in the Veil.*" *Surratt Courier*, August 2011 and October 2011.

Secretary Stanton's military officers who covered up Charles Lee:

- Major General Lew Wallace, who was also a Judge in the conspiracy trial.
- Lieutenant Colonel John H. Wooley, Chief of Staff for 8th Army under the command of Major General Lew Wallace.
- Major William H. Wiegel, Ass. P. M. 8th Army under the command of Major General Lew Wallace.
- Brigadier General John R. Kenly, Commanding the District of Delaware & Eastern Shore of Maryland.
- Lieutenant Colonels N. Shaurman, 9th N.Y. Vet. Battalion & Samuel B. Lawrence, Assistant Adjutant General.
- Brigadier General James A. Hardie Inspector General at the War Department, & Colonel T. Ingraham P.M. Defense North of Potomac.
- Captain Thomas M. Wenie, Provost Marshal for Wilmington Delaware.
- George H. Hooker & Captain W. M. Boon, both Assistant Adjutant Generals.
- Major Witmeyer, Assistant Provost Marshal 8th Army Corps of Wilmington, Delaware, Eastern Shore of Maryland.
- Lieutenant Colonel N. T. Colby, Acting Superintendent of Carroll Prison.
- Judge Advocate Colonel Henry L. Burnett.

Doc. 15 is the last about Charles Lee.

“A”216 (JAO) 1865.

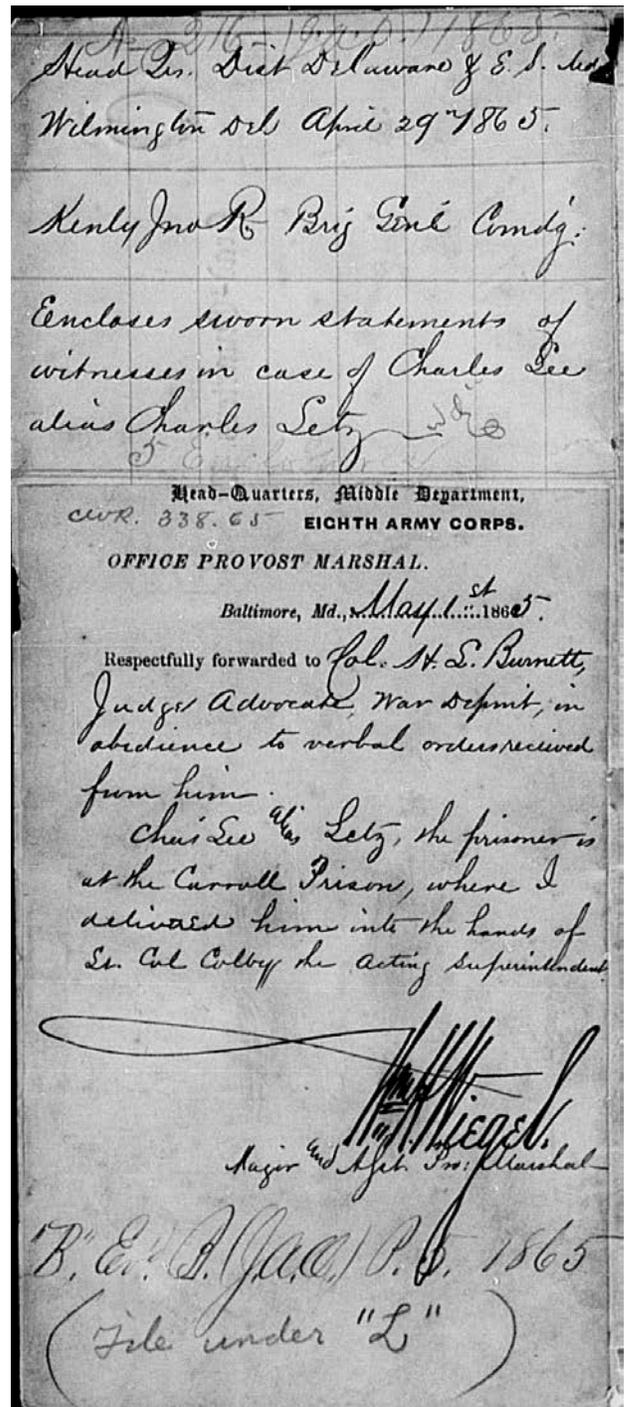
It reads:

May 1st, 1865

Col. H. L. Burnett, Judge Advocate,
War Department, in obedience to verbal orders
received from him.

Charles Lee alias Letz, the prisoner is
at the Carroll Prison, where I delivered him
into the hands of Lt. Col. Colby, the Acting
Superintendent.

Major William H. Wiegel



Doc. 18 is about Sarah Slater while she was at the War Department.

“Mc”218 (JAO) 1865. (2: 0766)

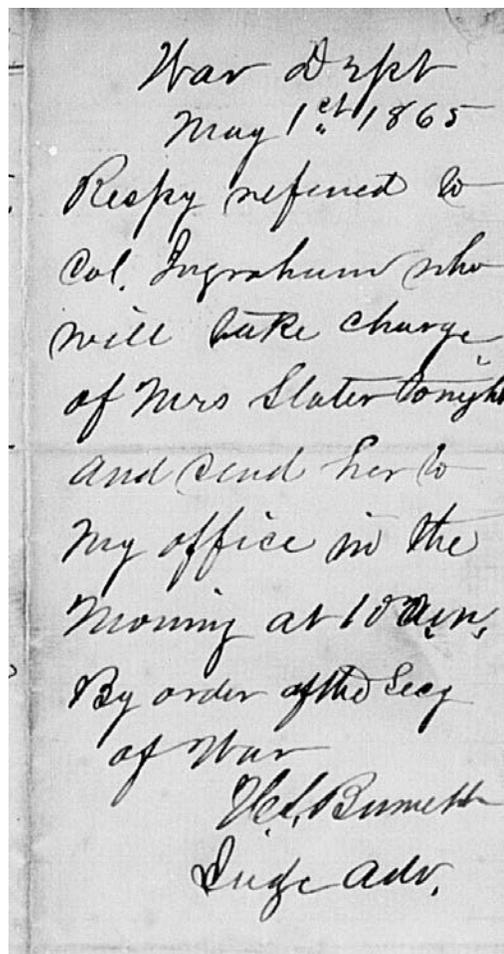
It reads:

War Department May 1st, 1865

[Respectfully] referred to Col. Ingraham who
will take charge of Mrs. Slater tonight
and send her to my office in the morning at 10 A.M.

By order of the Secretary of War.

Col. Burnett
Judge Advocate



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