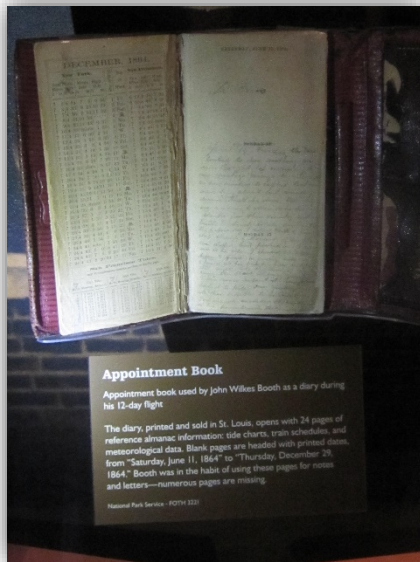


## Prologue

Mainstream history teaches that John Wilkes Booth made elaborate preparations before murdering the President but does not explain why Booth made no plans for life after his crime. Are we to believe that Booth and his entourage did not realize there would be a massive manhunt and bloody retribution for killing Lincoln?

It is safe to say that before killing Lincoln, Booth had no idea his life would end in the same gruesome manner as his victim. Nor did he consider that his legacy would go down as a common cutthroat. Booth did not see his wrong, viewed his crime as a failure by others. He expected to be honored as a Shakespearean hero who dispatched a tyrant killed for the good of the country.



*Booth's book on display in Ford's Theater*

Booth's thoughts are known with certainty because there is a book on display in Ford's Theater written in Booth's handwriting describing his astonishment at being hunted like a dog. Before crossing the river into Virginia, he contemplated returning to Washington and giving himself up. Booth twice wrote that he left evidence behind which could clear his name but believed the government would not allow it to be printed.

History cannot claim to know why Booth attacked Lincoln or who his assailants were because the reason for their proceedings, which he was about to fully set forth, stopped in midsentence, and the bottom half of the page is now a calendar drawn. The following sheet is entirely blank front and back. Two additional sheets or four pages became missing when his book was in the private possession of Edwin Stanton's War Department.

Much of the written records and physical evidence regarding people and events surrounding the Lincoln conspiracy investigation are missing, but not all were destroyed. A large volume of authentic documents, letters, telegrams, confessions, statements, and police reports, are now easily accessible to the public through the National Archives or shared by private individuals.

Yet, many historians, past and present, have chosen to omit anything that may challenge their Confederate conspiracy theory.

This article is a small example of collected evidence other authors deem unimportant.

## Justice or Abuse of Power?

Why was George Atzerodt executed?



*Conspirator, George Atzerodt*

It is a fact that George Atzerodt was an active, willing accomplice in a kidnapping plot, but Atzerodt never killed anyone. He never attempted murder, nor was there any evidence or motive to prove he intended to kill Andrew Johnson. Why then was it so crucial to Secretary Edwin Stanton that Atzerodt be executed?

The fact is: Stanton's conspiracy investigators uncovered many who held a much more essential service to John Wilkes Booth than Atzerodt, as well as having a connection to Richmond. Some even helped Booth during his escape, yet they were unaccountably protected from prosecution.

If Secretary Stanton wished to pin Lincoln's assassination on the Confederate government, there would have been no better suspects to prosecute than Thomas Harbin and Sarah Slater, not to mention Thomas Jones and Samuel Cox.

From the very beginning, Thomas Harbin was every bit an accomplice with Booth as John Surratt. Still, history has never explained why these so-called Confederate agents, such as Harbin, Cox, Jones, and Slater, easily or mysteriously escape Stanton's clutches.



*Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton*

Charles Lee, John Matthews, Lewis Mosby, and William B. Donaldson were also assassination suspects. Still, the military prosecution kept evidence of their connection to Booth a secret during the assassination investigation and conspiracy trial. The most secretly protected suspect of them all was James Donaldson.

Atzerodt talked about many secret accomplices hoping that his cooperation with the military police would prove that his association with Booth was solely to kidnap. According to Atzerodt, the assassination plot was a separate conspiracy by the "New York Crowd" and "friends of the President." All accomplices identified by Atzerodt, apart from Harbin, were from New York. While New Yorker, James Donaldson was a State Department employee for Secretary William Seward, making him a "friend of the President."

None of Booth's convicted accomplices had an escape plan.

The moment Atzerodt learned that Booth had shot Lincoln, he was at a complete loss as to what he should do next. He finally decided his only option was to return to the Washington boardinghouse where he regularly stayed. First thing in the morning, he would get a fresh start out of town. Atzerodt was captured five days later at his uncle's farm just north of the city in the small village of Germantown.

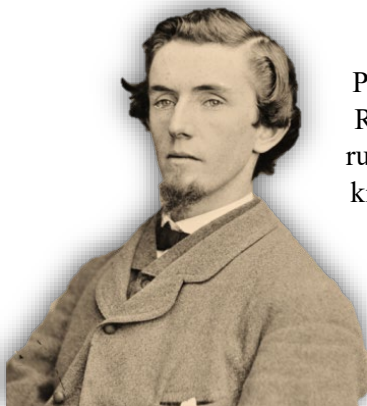
During his days in Germantown, George heard rumors and read the newspaper stories of the assassination, becoming familiar with how the conspiracy investigation was unfolding. On the late-night of April 20, 1865, George Atzerodt was not surprised when soldiers came to arrest him. He was taken to Relay, Maryland, and turned over to U.S. Marshal Robert Murray from New York.

The Marshal handcuffed George and loaded him into a coach back to Washington. Once in the city, the military police imprisoned him on an ironclad ship anchored in the Potomac River.

Marshal Murray interrogated George during their ride, saying to Atzerodt: (paraphrased)

You made a great mistake in having your things in room 126 at the Kirkwood House. You registered your name there. Where is Booth? Murray then turned on him very roughly and told him. I do not believe that any man had ever been arrested and charged with a crime in this country that was fouler than you are. We know as much of your operations during Friday night up to Saturday morning as the Almighty does. We know everyone you talked to, everyone you have seen, traced you to every place you have been. We recovered your coat with the contents in the pockets, which your brother has identified as yours. We have got your pistol and Bowie knife. There is not the slightest chance for you; the only chance would be by opening your mouth and revealing to us who the parties were in the conspiracy. He promised he would do it [E&S p. 959].

At this point, Atzerodt realized there was no hope of claiming that he was not a kidnapping conspirator with John Surratt and John Wilkes Booth. After ten days shackled deep in the chain locker of an ironclad with a canvas bag tied over his head, George was more than ready to reveal all he knew about Booth's conspiracy truthfully.

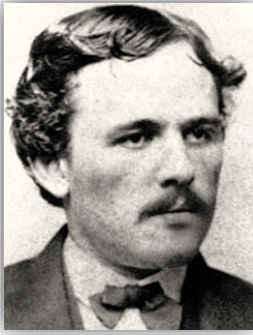


*John Surratt*

Atzerodt began his first statement by explaining how John Surratt came to Port Tobacco in January 1865 to solicit help with a scheme on the Potomac River. At the start, Atzerodt believed the subversion was about blockade running, unaware that Surratt's illicit project was actually Booth's plan to kidnap President Lincoln. Both Booth and Surratt needed to be careful not to reveal the true nature of the intrigue until they were confident their accomplices would keep the kidnapping plot concealed.

Surratt promised George a great prize for his help and assured him that others who had already signed on were from New York and Baltimore. However, that January, Atzerodt was in business with his brother repairing carriages and could not accompany John back to the city.

Three weeks later, John Surratt returned to Port Tobacco and successfully persuaded George to move to Washington. John provided him accommodations at the Surratt House, though Mary Surratt sent him away for drinking in his room after only one week. Atzerodt returned home, but a week later, John again lured him back to the Capital, providing him lodging at the Kimmel House at 357 C St., also called Pennsylvania House [E&S, pp. 62-64].



*Louis Wiechmann*

While confined onboard the *USS Saugus*, Atzerodt made a big mistake during his statement to Stanton's military investigators. He unwittingly placed himself, John Surratt, John Wilkes Booth, and Louis Wiechmann, at the War Department while all four conspirators gathered for their January meeting against President Lincoln. Atzerodt revealed that on the day John Surratt brought him to Washington, he was introduced to Booth for the first time and added that Booth's introduction took place in the Commissary General of Prisoners Office [Ibid].

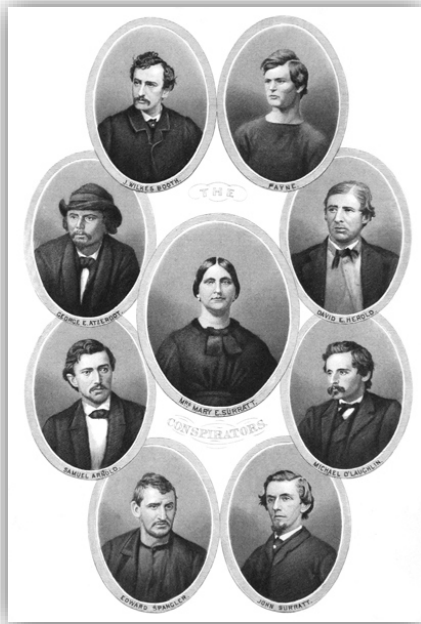
Wiechmann, John Surratt's best friend, served under General Hoffman, head of the Commissary of Confederate Prisoners. Booth's original plan was to capture Lincoln, then exchange him for the release of Confederate prisoners, and Wiechmann had access to prisoner records. Atzerodt's statement directly tied the Lincoln kidnapping to a War Department plot rather than a Richmond conspiracy.

Placing a kidnapping meeting at the War Department became one contributing factor for Atzerodt's ultimate demise as well as a motive for why the military prosecution went to such great extremes to censor all of Booth's accused conspirators. Soon after the arrest of each kidnapping suspect, a canvas bag placed over their head further restricted the prisoners from speaking to anyone outside of Stanton's War Department. However, Stanton made sure that Louis Wiechmann not be included among the other accomplices charged with helping Booth.

Stanton methodically removed the President from office by stripping Lincoln of his security (Thomas Eckert, John Parker, etc.) and allowing conspirators from New York and Philadelphia to persuade John Wilkes Booth and Lewis Powell the roles of assassins.

Stanton used his Secret Service network, managed by Thomas Eckert, Joseph Holt, Lafayette C. Baker, and William P. Wood, to negotiate a deal with a political opposition group of Southern sympathizers deeply entrenched throughout every northern state extending into Canada. Most were minstrel entertainers who had their separate plot to kill the President, which operated independently of the Confederate government.

The New York minstrels travel the same circuit as did all the transit performers of their day. The minstrels knew Booth and had an active role in espionage. Many spies on both sides traded secret information between cities using hotels, brothels, saloons, and the Post Office to convey messages.



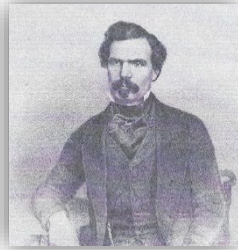
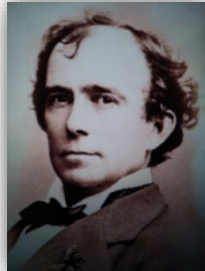
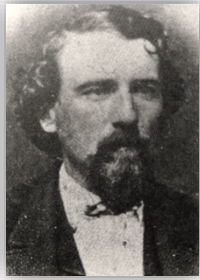
Stanton's hands-off arrangements with the minstrels included immunity from prosecution while letting Booth and his kidnappers take the fall for the conspiracy and killing.

The bargain included a partnership with the Washington blockade smugglers, who also agreed to give up Booth.

Stanton's secret arrangement of immunity explains why Booth wrote that if he returned to Washington, he could "*clear his name.*" On April 17, Booth realized their betrayal against him and used some old 1864 diary pages to rewrite the confession letter he left with John Matthews. However, Matthews destroyed Booth's letter signed by five accomplices, and Stanton captured his old diary.

*Atzerodt, Herold, Arnold, O'Laughlin and John Surratt were kidnappers. Lewis Powell was an assassin. Mary Surratt was falsely accused. Ed Spangler did nothing.*





From left to right:

Thomas Harbin, Samuel Cox, John Matthews, John F. Parker, James Donaldson, Thomas Jones, William B. Donaldson, “Colonel” Lewis Mosby ( no picture) each played a significant role during Booth’s crime spree and escape from Washington. Yet, none ever answered for the evidence against them.

### Defending Stanton

History authors, past and present, who wish to vindicate Stanton and promote his Confederate conspiracy theory, explain this oversight by claiming that the conspiracy prosecution was a legally legitimate commission. They argue that Stanton’s military was accountable and restricted by the rule of law. These compromised historians insist that suspects connected to the Washington blockade smuggling ring had to be released from custody due to insufficient evidence.



*Secretary Stanton’s Military Commission*

The truth is: the evidence against those so-called Confederate agent suspects was not insufficient but concealed by Stanton and his military commission. The War Department acted unhampered as investigators, prosecutors, judges, and juries while having complete authority over all the evidence and testimonies presented during the conspiracy trial.

Stanton's military could arrest anyone and convict anyone of their choosing. The commission could also release anyone they deemed unsupportive of their baseless theoretical case. It was solely their decision to release Samuel Cox, Thomas Jones, and Sarah Slater while completely ignoring John Matthews, James Donaldson, and the many others whom Atzerodt referred to as the "New York Crowd" and "friends of the President."

It was the conspiracy defense attorneys who were hampered by unconstitutional military law, as well as shackled by restricted access to any supporting evidence that would favor their client. In comparison, their defense witnesses were not allowed to speak freely.



Stanton's link to Booth was through James Donaldson.

George Atzerodt confessed to Stanton's military investigator Provost Marshal James McPhail of Baltimore that James Donaldson had secret meetings with Booth right up to the assassination day.

The State Department employed James Donaldson to be a personal aide to Secretary of State William Seward. Every military commissioner and investigator knew James Donaldson, but despite being implicated as a conspirator with John Wilkes Booth, the authorities never interrogated nor even confronted him.

Donaldson remained completely edited from this history until 2013 when Don Thomas published his first book on the Lincoln assassination, entitled, The Reason Lincoln Had to Die.

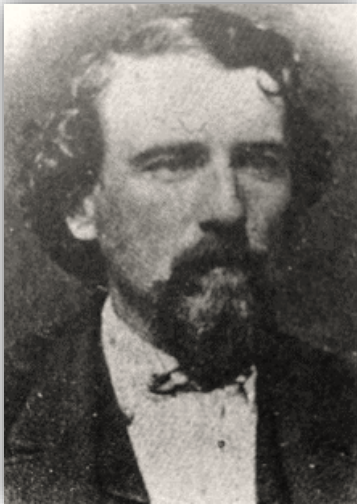
James Donaldson is also detailed in the second book by Don Thomas entitled, The Reason Booth Had to Die.

Stanton's investigators had ample evidence against Thomas Harbin and Joseph Baden, who aided Booth and Herold during their escape from Washington. Both men laid a false trail leading the search party away from the fugitives, provided them directions south, fresh horses, all the while posing as government detectives dressed in Union army uniforms [E&S, pp. 8, 9, 216, 326, 409, 696, 842, 868, 1074, 1233, also see 551-553].

More than once, George Atzerodt identified Harbin as an accomplice in Booth's kidnapping plot. Harbin's role was to meet Booth on the road and guide the kidnappers with the captured President to Richmond. However, Stanton posted no reward for the arrest of Confederate agent Thomas Harbin, nor was he relentlessly hunted like John Surratt. Stanton's conspiracy prosecution gave up on spies Jones, Cox, and Slater, concentrating their resources to convict Doctor Samuel Mudd as a Confederate accomplice. Why?

As for Confederate spy Sarah Slater, Stanton secretly ordered her to be released from War Department custody, and she quietly lived out the rest of her long life in Poughkeepsie, New York, where she died in 1920 [E&S, p. 869].

Marshal McPhail and his two deputies (who happen to be George Atzerodt's brother and brother-in-law) were also well acquainted with Jones, Harbin, and Samuel Cox. Still, despite abundant evidence and witnesses against them, Jones and Cox were set free. The excuse for releasing two well-known Confederate agents was that Mary Swann Kelly's statement contradicted Oswald Swann.



Both Thomas Harbin and Thomas Jones waited twenty-five years before selling their story to the public.

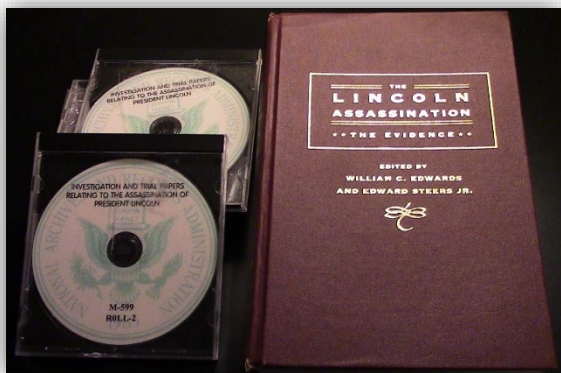
Many historians omit the same evidence Stanton withheld from the trial to accuse the Lincoln conspiracy on the Confederate government.

Today, only those free of political bias will admit that Stanton's abuse of power was a diabolical cover up.

Further research on this topic can be found in related articles on this website, entitled:

- Did Jefferson Davis or Edwin Stanton Plot Lincoln's Murder?
- George Atzerodt's Confession
- How They Got Away with Murder

Also, see:



**National Archives documents from the book, The Lincoln Assassination, The Evidence, edited by William C. Edwards & Edward Steers Jr. [Listed as, E&S].**

In this book, anyone can read the Lincoln conspiracy trial evidence once withheld by the military prosecution. It is an edited collection of M599 National Archives documents and my most significant source for this article. Photographic images are also available on CD cassettes. The book is an absolute must-have for any student of the Lincoln assassination.



An interesting excerpt from George Atzerodt's lost confession but recovered in 1977 reads: (paraphrased)

*Booth said he had met a party in New York who would get the President [for] certain. They were going to mine [blowup] the end of the President's house, near the War Department. They knew an entrance to accomplish it through. Spoke about getting friends of the President to get up an entertainment and they would mix it in, have a serenade and thus get the President and party. These were understood to be projects. Booth said if he did not get him [the President] quick the New York crowd would.*

Stanton tried to destroy Atzerodt's confession because it revealed:

- Booth had a close association with a crowd from New York.
- The New York crowd had a plot to lure the President into a White House room and then blow up the room using a secret entrance near the War Department.
- The New York scheme was to entertain President Lincoln with a serenade and celebrate his death with a party afterward.

Minstrel entertainers (also referred to as the circus) had a long history of performing at the White House. An example being: in early 1844, the friends of President John Tyler arranged to have The Original Boston Serenaders give a special show at the White House for the President, his family, and friends. Tambourines, accordions, banjos, and bones were the instruments used for the serenade.

In 1865, a left-handed banjo-playing minstrel entertainer from Poughkeepsie, New York, assassination suspect William B. Donaldson was a longtime member of the American Ethiopian Serenaders. He was first to perform as the now infamous Jim Crow character.

The New York minstrels were in Washington before Lincoln's assassination spending their evenings at the Simpson House Saloon located just a few doors down from Ford's Theater. Suspect "Colonel" Lewis Mosby was the Simpson Saloon bartender, arrested but secretly set free.

Had the New York minstrels been invited to entertain Lincoln at the White House, William (Bill) Donaldson would have performed with them.

Immediately after Lincoln's murder, Bill Donaldson fled from Washington to Philadelphia so quickly that he did not even pack a bag.

- On April 18, 1865

Bill Donaldson's best friend, Daniel J. Cox of the Simpson House Saloon, revealed (in a letter) important information about suspects involved in Lincoln's assassination, including the arrest of "Colonel" Mosby, the Simpson House Saloon bartender [E&S p. 395].

- On April 26,

War Department agent and spy Charles Cowlam investigated suspects mentioned in the letter from Cox to Donaldson, including "Colonel" Mosby [E&S p. 394].

- On April 30,

More letters to Donaldson revealed more suspects, including Booth's prostitute mistress, Nellie Starr [E&S p. 370]. Lincoln's bodyguard, policeman John F. Parker spent the night of

Lincoln's assassination at the Simpson House with prostitute Lizzie Murtry, but that too was covered-up.

- On May 2,

Another friend of both Donaldson and Cox, Harry Bradford, also revealed those same suspects in his letter, along with "Colonel" Mosby and Nellie Starr **[E&S p. 193]**.

- On May 4,

D. J. Cox writes Donaldson again, revealing even more suspects, and he too talked about Lizzie Murtry and "Colonel" Mosby **[E&S p. 396]**.

- On May 6,

R.C. Morgan reported from Philadelphia to Special Commissioner Colonel H.S. Olcott (who had returned to his post in New York). Morgan said that William Donaldson is suspected of having a connection with the assassination **[E&S p. 1009]**.

Morgan had been notified by two New York detectives, Captain Franklin, and Roach that William B. Donaldson fled Philadelphia on the late-night train back to Washington. Olcott issued Morgan orders to send his detectives after Donaldson, and once they reached Washington, confer with Provost Marshal Colonel Ingraham about arresting the New York circus performer **[E&S pp. 916-917]**.

- On May 7,

During Bill Donaldson's arrest and search, incriminating evidence was confiscated from him **[Ibid]**.

- On May 9,

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered the superintendent of the Old Capitol Prison, William P. Wood, to discharge Donaldson from prison custody without reason or a statement. **[E&S p. 261]**. Soon after Stanton released William Donaldson, he returned to his New York home where he died in 1873, while proprietor of the Lockwood Saloon.

When Booth realized his accomplices set him up, he wrote, "So ends all."

Days later, while trapped in a barn on Garrett's Farm, a pistol bullet severed his neckbone killing him slowly. Booth never lived to reveal the letter he tried so hard to make public. A letter Booth wrote before killing Lincoln. The same letter containing evidence he believed could clear his name.

Twice Booth referred to his letter in the old diary book Stanton captured and kept secret during the two years before Congress learned that Booth had left a confession. The FBI forensic team examined Booth's diary confession and filed a report that proved someone unbound the original pages during the two years Joseph Holt had it secretly locked away in his home. Also, that the replacement pages in Booth handwriting are edited, transposed copies of the originals. Four replacement sheets were cut into single halves and glued into the book, out of chronological order after a forger traced them.

For more on this topic, visit: Don Thomas YouTube videos about Booth's Diary, or purchase [The Reason Booth Had to Die](#), @ this website heading, Buy A Copy.