

The Reason the Federal Government Did Not Want John Surratt Captured



John Harrison Surratt Jr. and his best friend & roommate at the Surratt House, Louis Wiechmann.

Washington celebrated the Civil War's end for two nights, while the city glowed with candles in every window. At 2 AM the following morning, John Wilkes Booth wrote his mother that he had nothing to write about. Everything has been dull, until the bright splendor of last night's Grand Illumination. More so if in a nobler cause, but so goes the world [DT, p. 68].

After 10:16 PM that same day, the city streets were crying out that the President and Secretary of State were murdered. Soon to follow was the first official government announcement that Washington's most celebrated personality, John Wilkes Booth, had shot Lincoln, and Secretary Seward's assassin was John Surratt Jr. How could it be true?

Two Washington police officers harbored no doubts about the communique and rushed to the Surratt House searching for Mary Surratt's son John Jr. They learned from two Surratt House inmates, John Holohan and Louis Wiechmann, that John Jr. was in Canada.

Every legitimate historian knows that John Surratt departed Richmond on April 2, 1865, twelve days before Lincoln's assassination, stopping briefly in Washington on April 3, before continuing north to Canada. Surratt did not return to Washington until February 1867.

Thursday, April 6, Confederate spy Surratt reached Montréal.

April 12, Surratt received his last spy mission from Edwin G. Lee, which placed him on a train south to Elmira, New York.

On April 13, Surratt reached Elmira and registered at the Brainard House under the alias John Harrison.

On April 14, the night of Lincoln's assassination, Surratt retired to his New York hotel room, three hundred miles away from Washington.

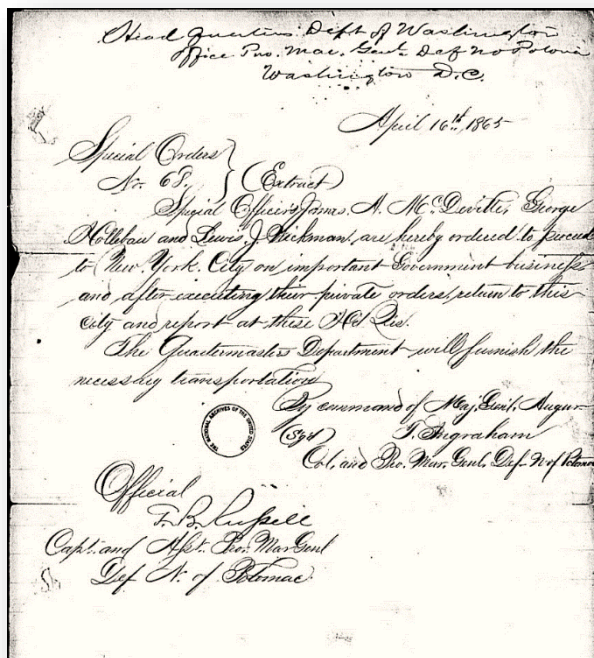
It was not until the following day, April 15, that Surratt learned Booth killed Lincoln and that the newspapers accused him of Secretary Seward's attempted assassination. He immediately left Elmira on a northbound train.

Meanwhile, in Washington, on April 15, Louis Wiechmann joined Metropolitan police detectives searching for Booth's accused accomplices, David Herold, George Atzerodt, John Surratt, Lewis Powell, alias James Wood, and Lewis Paine.

Saturday night in New York, April 15, Surratt reached Canandaigua but was forced to remain there until the first available train could return him to Montréal. He registered at the Webster House that evening and waited there until Monday, April 17.

On April 16, Wiechmann and the same Washington police detectives who searched the Surratt House were appointed special government agents by the military secret service under Major General Augur and Colonel L.C. Baker. Their mission was to find John Surratt and return him to Washington [E&S, p. 72].

NARA document, (7:596-98) of order No. 68, appointing Wiechmann and McDevitt Special Officers to find John Surratt.



It reads:

*Special Order No. 68, HQ,
Department of Washington, April 16,
1865.*

*Special Officers James A.
McDevitt, George Hollebaw and
Lewis J. Wiechmann are hereby
ordered to proceed to New York City
on important Government business
and after executing their private
orders, return to the city and report at
these Hdqrs.*

*The Quartermaster Department will
furnish the necessary transportation.*

By command of Major General Augur

(sgd) T. Ingraham Col. And Pro. Mar. Gen. Def. of Potomac [E&S, p. 72. DT2, p. 19].

John Holohan accompanied General Augur's newly appointed special agents, and all were provided the necessary transportation to find and arrest John Surratt wherever Louis Wiechmann believed him to be. However, before the posse crossed the US border, New York newspapers had already printed that government agents were headed for Canada in pursuit of Surratt [**E&S, pp. 134-135**]. Some unidentified person or persons were leaking sensitive information.

The Canadian officials, the Montréal police chief, and US Government legal adviser stationed in Montréal, Mr. B. Devlin each teamed together with the Washington search party to share all they knew about the fugitive. Mr. Devlin reported that Surratt and two friends checked out of the St. Lawrence Hall Hotel about 11:30 PM and could be intercepted at Three Rivers [**Ibid**].

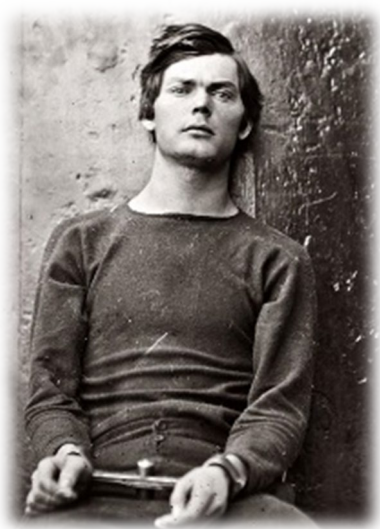
As the search teams in Canada were closing in on Seward's alleged assassin, Stanton's military commissioners in Washington, Colonels H.H. Wells, and H.S. Olcott, ordered a second raid on the Surratt House, where police detectives arrested Lewis Powell [**Article, The Lynching of Mary Surratt**].



Seward's attempted assassin, Lewis Powell, and Secretary Stanton

Three days after Lincoln's assassination, the capture of Seward's true assassin, Lewis Powell, ended the case against John Surratt. Yet, Secretary Stanton's War Department still posted a twenty-five-thousand-dollar reward for Surratt's capture.

Detectives captured Lewis Powell under the alias, Lewis Payne. Yet throughout the trial and beyond, John Surratt continued to carry the stigma of an assassination conspirator.



Lewis Powell was arrested when he showed up at Mary Surratt's house. Police detectives were already at the Surratt House with orders to arrest Seward's attempted assassin before Powell arrived [Article, The Lynching of Mary Surratt. WCE, p.195].

After capturing Lewis Powell, the events that followed forced Secretary Stanton to exercise all his power and authority to bring the conspiracy investigation back under his strict control.

The arrest of Lewis Powell also turned disastrous for Louis Wiechmann.



New York Detective Charles H. Rosch filed a police report the same night he arrested and searched Lewis Powell, and his statement implicated Wiechmann and threatened to expose Stanton's secret plot to kill Lincoln.

THE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES
OF THE
UNITED STATES

Statement of C. H. Rosch
Detective officer in the employ of Col. H.S. Bleeth Sp. Com? War Dept.

who now in his charge we ordered at the Pro. M. office to search this person when we found the following articles: One (1) small new Revolver loaded, a package of cartridges unbroken, a pocket compass, a needle case, a Webster's pocket Dictionary, Twenty five Dollars in Greenbacks and some small change, a pass for an oath of

On the late-night of April 17, Rosch revealed that Powell possessed a pass for Saturday, and in Powell's coat pocket, detectives found a small, loaded pistol and an unbroken box of Colt cartridges [E&S, p.1116].

Rosch's statement reads:

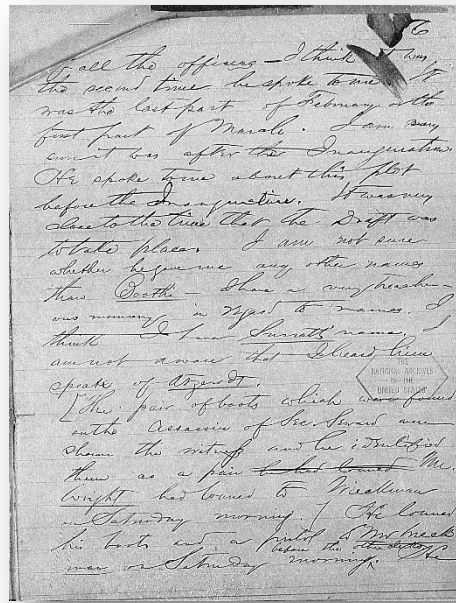
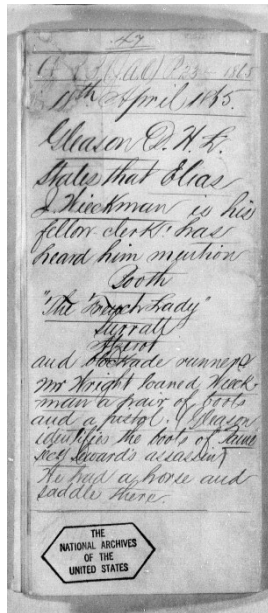
Sampson and myself [were] ordered at the Pro. M. Office to search this person [Powell] when we found the following articles: One (1) small new Revolver loaded, a package of cartridges, unbroken... ~~a pass Sat.~~

Ely Devoe and Thomas Sampson, who also searched Powell, did not file their reports until two days later. Lewis Powell wore a long gray coat without any bloodstains during his arrest, and both officers wrote that the recovered box of cartridges was for Colt's holster pistols. But said nothing about Rosch and left out Powell's revolver [E&S, pp. 436-437, 477, DT2, p. 17].

Ordinarily, those police reports would not have been a problem. However, a credible witness, and Powell's collected evidence turned Stanton's investigation in a wrong direction.

On Tuesday, April 18, Stanton learned that Captain Daniel Gleason, who worked at the War Department with Louis Wiechmann, gave a statement. Gleason identified the boots and pistol found on Lewis Powell as the same boots and gun given to Wiechmann on April 15 [E&S, pp. 1116 & 596, 1325, DT2 p. 17 & Chapters 3 & 4].

NARA document (4:373-80) of Daniel Gleason's statement to the military investigators, identifying the origin of Lewis Powell's boots and revolver (pictured below).



It reads:

The pair of boots, which were found on [Lewis Powell] the assassin of Sec. Seward were shown [to Daniel H. L. Gleason] the witness and he identified them as a pair ~~he had loaned~~ Mr. Wright had loaned to Wiechmann on [April 15] Saturday morning. He loaned his boots and a pistol to Mr. Wiechmann on Saturday morning before the other clerks. He had a horse and saddle there and I supposed all was right in regard to it.

This document shows that on the morning after the assassination, Louis Wiechmann and James McDevitt rode government horses to the War Department just before they began their search for Booth's kidnapping accomplices. While at the War Department, Wiechmann and McDevitt picked up the same boots and gun that were later found on Powell by the three New York police detectives who searched him [E&S, pp. 1116, 596 & 1325, DT2, p. 17].

When Secretary Stanton learned of the police report by Detective Rosch and the statement by Gleason, he flew into a berserk rage [DT, Chapter 13, pp. 99-101].

Stanton also discovered that his military secret service had appointed Louis Wiechmann a special officer and sent him to Canada with several Washington police detectives. At that point, Stanton called off the search just as Wiechmann and McDevitt were about to catch Surratt [E&S, p.1005].

The Secretary of War severely reprimanded Washington's Police Superintendent A.C. Richards for allowing Wiechmann and Holohan to help capture John Jr., calling the search a wild chase. Stanton immediately ordered Richards to leave for Canada, arrest Louis Wiechmann, and personally return him to Washington [Ibid].

On April 19, Washington's Metropolitan police Superintendent Richards returned Louis Wiechmann to Washington from Canada. Wiechmann was delivered to Colonel Burnett at the War Department, but Burnett interviewed and released him **[DT, pp. 99-100]**.

Stanton ordered Wiechmann arrested a second time. After a two-hour interview with the Secretary of War, Wiechmann changed from a War Department agent assigned to find John Surratt to Stanton's prisoner incarcerated at the Old Capital Prison.

Before Lincoln's conspiracy trial had ended, the War Department prosecution already knew these facts. If the government captured John Surratt after the conspiracy trial ended, his civilian defense counsel would present this evidence making it impossible to place him in Washington on April 14, 1865. The case against him would be a worthless endeavor, while a review of Mary Surratt's execution would uncover Stanton's assassination conspiracy fraud.

The government finally captured Surratt, and despite all the department administrators knew, the Washington District Attorneys still tried to kill him but failed. Meanwhile, history still dredges forward with the Surratt conspiracy theory.

After John Surratt's trial (as an assassin), he became a legally free man. Surratt attempted to correct the misinformation written about him during a public lecture, admitting that he was in Richmond on Friday, March 31, 1865. While there, he met with Confederate Secretary of War Benjamin at the Spotswood Hotel and was paid \$200 in gold to deliver a dispatch to Canada. Surratt said he left Richmond Saturday, April 2, returning to Washington Monday evening, April 3, 1865 **[John Surratt's 1870 Lecture at Rockville, Maryland]**.

During the assassination investigation, Louis Wiechmann and John Holohan placed Surratt leaving Washington early April 4 (which is not historically contested) **[E&S, pp. 140, 1324]**. Moreover, Maryland detectives admitted that they were working to arrest Surratt before and during his last mission for the Confederate government but could not catch him **[BP, p. 119 & E&S, pp. 1244, 1333, 1180-1181, DT2, p. 16]**.

On March 10, 1865, General Lee in Petersburg sent a dispatch informing Richmond that his army could "neither hold the lines before Richmond nor remove from them." Grant's army intercepted Lee's message proving that well before April 1, Washington and Richmond knew that the Confederate capital would fall **[Supreme Court Historical Society. Recollections of the Evacuation of Richmond by John A. Campbell, p. 15]**.

After March 31, there would be no chance of holding Lincoln in exchange for Confederate prisoners. April 2, Benjamin sent Surratt to Canada on an assignment that put him at the Brainard House in Elmira, New York, on April 13, a day before Booth attacked the President.

The fact is: If Richmond plotted with Booth and Surratt to kill Lincoln, Benjamin would have had no motive to send Surratt to Canada. The federal government realized these indisputable facts, but the newspaper media quickly convinced the public that John Surratt was an assassination accomplice who got away.

The government always knew that Surratt was not in Washington before or after the assassination. However, without a captured John Surratt and his civilian trial, their secret remained safely concealed.

Stanton's War Department did all they could to keep John Surratt a fugitive, but circumstances beyond their control forced the government to extradite him to the United States. The rest is mainstream history's misinformation.

There is a sinister purpose for distorting the line between fact and fiction. Still, adopting a fictional history in place of known facts only works on hypocritical opinions based on bias rather than the integrity of credible evidence.

Why would any knowledgeable person still choose to believe John Surratt got away with murder?

Recap & a summary of the John Surratt trial:

Before 2 AM, April 15, 1865, police detectives McDevitt and Clarvoe believed the bulletin stating John Surratt attacked Secretary Seward. Whomever first implicated Surratt to the police as Seward's assassin had to have also known about Booth and his kidnapping accomplices long before Lincoln was shot. However, that realization has remained completely ignored [WCE, p. 153].

When McDevitt and Clarvoe arrived at the Surratt House, Louis Wiechmann told them Surratt was in Canada [E&S, p. 1324]. Louis also added that Surratt exchanged gold coins for greenbacks with roommate John T. Holohan before leaving Washington and that they had not seen John since April 3 [BP, p. 117, 139, WCE, pp. 150-151].

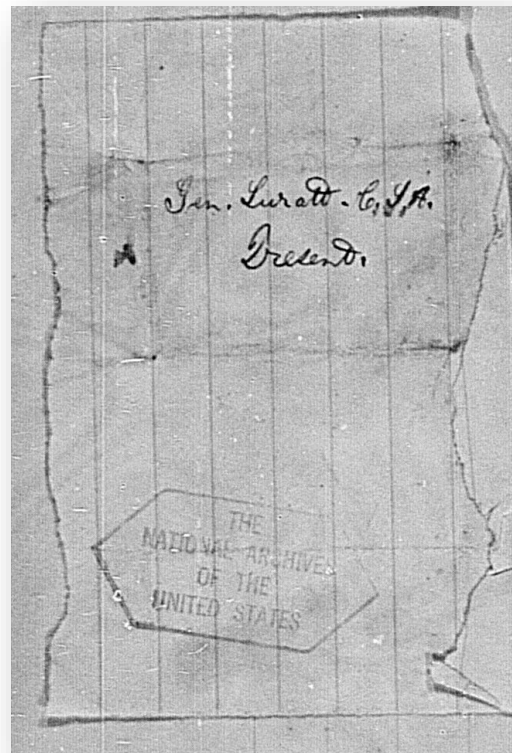
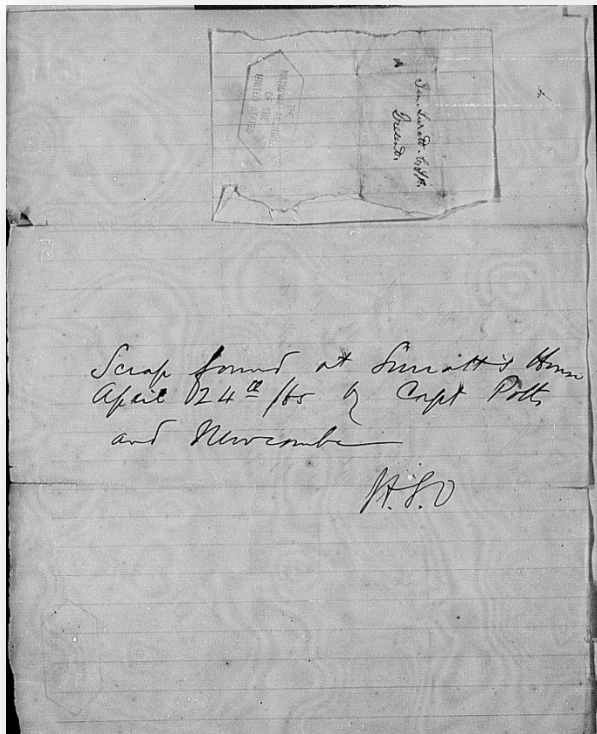
On April 17, two different teams of detectives searched Mary Surratt's home a second time explicitly to arrest Lewis Powell and collect paper evidence that the conspiracy prosecution could use against John and Mary Surratt as being Confederate spies [WCE, p. 195].

Lewis Powell's capture at the Surratt House ended the false allegation that Surratt attacked Seward, yet John Jr. remained Booth's chief assassination accomplice [Article, **The Lynching of Mary Surratt**].

During the conspiracy trial, Wiechmann admitted he told investigators that John registered at a hotel in Canada. Wiechmann said that he saw a letter John Surratt sent his mother from Canada on April 14, 1865, which, if presented as evidence, could prove John Jr. was in Montréal before, during, and after the assassination [BP, p. 117].

On the night of her arrest, Mary gave a statement and talked about John's letter from Canada, saying: "I have hunted my house over, but cannot find the letter he wrote me. When I read it, I felt very vexed and pitched it on the windowsill and have not seen it since"[E&S, p. 1244].

Detectives recovered 108 letters from the Surratt House, but investigators did not find John's April 14 letter during their search. However, it is a fact that a portion of recovered evidence from the Surratt House was a War Department forgery to frame John Surratt as being a secret-services CSA. General [E&S, pp. 1221, 1244, DT pp. 110-111].



Stanton's military investigators not only could conceal or plant phony evidence, but this NARA document is just one small example of a corrupt investigation into Lincoln's murder plot. Throughout the conspiracy trial, Stanton's War Department commissioners and judges withheld or destroyed any evidence that would challenge their case [DT & DT2].

Two years after the conspiracy trial ended, and during John Surratt's trial, Judge George P. Fisher and Washington's district attorneys disgraced the United States judicial system during their fraudulent attempt to place John Surratt in Washington on the night of April 14, 1865.

Stanton's conspiracy prosecution and Washington's District Attorney, who tried John Surratt, knew about the movements of Lewis Powell from January 1865 to the night he attacked Seward. Both departments knew that Wiechmann and McDevitt gave aid to Lewis Powell on the morning after he attacked Secretary Seward. Both departments still tried to frame John Surratt [Article, Secretary Stanton's Bait and Switch Cover-Up, see section about Major General Lew Wallace. DT2, p. 27].

During John's Escape:

On April 18, 1865, Surratt's Canadian friends smuggled him away from Montréal, where he remained hidden 40 miles from the city in the home of a Catholic priest. On September 15, under the alias of McCarty, his friends arranged a boat to transport the assassination fugitive to Québec. From there, a steamer carried him across the Atlantic to Liverpool, England.

Stanton's reward money served him well during the conspiracy investigation and trial, as documented in the article, **(Stanton's Bait & Switch Cover-Up)**. However, the enormous bounty for the capture of John Surratt turned the tables against the Secretary of War.

Motivated by a \$25,000 prize, John's steamer boat Captain, Lewis J.A. McMillian, immediately contacted the United States vice-consul in Liverpool about his fugitive passenger. The authorities in Liverpool notified Mr. Adams at London, who contacted Secretary Seward in Washington.

To McMillian's deep disappointment, Washington decided not to pursue his tip, and the matter was dropped. The steamer pilot's second, more aggressive attempt to collect the bounty revealed John Surratt's location to the American Consul in London. Once again, Washington learned that Surratt was still in Liverpool preparing an escape to Rome.

Secretary Seward requested the Attorney General to procure an indictment of extradition, but nothing came of it. The only definitive action taken by Secretary Stanton and conspiracy Judge Advocate Joseph Holt was to publicly withdraw the \$25,000 reward offer for John Surratt's arrest.



Surratt in Italy

Surratt safely traveled to London, Paris, and Rome, where he remained throughout the winter. During the spring of 1866, John joined Italy's Zouaves using the alias Watson. While on garrison duty 40 miles from Rome, it was no coincidence that John came upon Henry B. St. Marie, an old Canadian friend. St. Marie, too, was serving as a Zouave soldier from America.

Henry St. Marie had previously met both Surratt and Wiechmann in Maryland three years earlier. Soon afterward, Henry was taken prisoner while serving in the Union Army. John's old acquaintance quickly followed Surratt's trail and joined the Zouave army with the express purpose of collecting his winnings from the capture of the United States' most unwanted fugitive.

While on military leave, Henry hurried to the American Embassy in Rome to reveal the whereabouts of Booth's alleged number one accomplice. Ambassador Rufus King alerted Washington, and, in turn, Washington instructed King to obtain a sworn statement from St. Marie that Surratt confessed his role in the assassination.

Meanwhile, Stanton and Holt argued that extradition of a fugitive was a State Department issue. Secretary Seward claimed that his heavy workload would not allow any additional duties until his obligations were completed.

However, Rome's Cardinal Antonelli assured Ambassador King that Surratt would be surrendered without an extradition treaty, but weeks passed before Seward responded. It was Cardinal Antonelli who quickly ordered Surratt arrested, without a word from Washington.

On November 2, 1866, while Italian guards were escorting John Surratt to a military prison holding cell, he escaped after jumping down a deep ravine, making his way to a steamer bound for Egypt. On November 27, John reached Malta, where the informed American authorities took him into custody.

Stanton willingly surrendered the prisoner to Washington's civic authorities, and John's trial was now forced upon the District Attorney, E. C. Carrington. On June 18, the prosecution addressed the jury with an opening statement by Nathaniel Wilson. He claimed that on April 10, Booth called for Surratt in Canada and that John arrived in Washington on April 13.

Wilson stated: we shall provide numerous witnesses that saw Surratt in Washington during the day of April 14, as well as at the theater at night. We shall further prove that "the butchery that ensued was the ripe result of a long-premediated plot, in which the prisoner was the chief conspirator" [**John Surratt Trial, pp. 117-119**].

The prosecution had known all along that John Surratt was not in Washington on April 14, 1865, yet introduced witnesses who swore they saw him there on that day.

Conversely, Surratt's defense provided Booth's newly discovered diary, proving that Booth only conspired to kidnap the President for six months, while his plot to kill Lincoln did not begin until the day of the assassination [**Text of John Wilkes Booth's Diary, DT, pp. 213-215, 19-20**].

John's defense also provided three witnesses who proved the prosecution's witness did not see Booth, Surratt, nor Spangler in front of Ford's Theater the night of April 14, as claimed by Assistant District Attorney Wilson. In truth, the three men Sergeant Joseph M. Dye saw were James Gifford, Louis Carland, and C.V. Hess [See Article, **Is There Evidence of a Lincoln Conspiracy Cover-Up**].

Even if the prosecution could have convinced a jury that Surratt was in Washington the night Booth shot Lincoln, it would not prove that he took part in the murder, much less having the role of Booth's chief conspirator.

John Surratt lived in Washington, and there was no crime for being in the city on that day unless there was also evidence of his involvement in the murder plot.

There has never been anyone to explain what John Surratt did to help Booth kill Lincoln or Powell attack Seward. Any novice student of the Lincoln conspiracy can attest that there is no longer any argument about John Surratt **not being** in Washington on the night of the assassination.

That fact alone proves that the entire conspiracy to kill President Lincoln was without any assistance from John Surratt. The conspiracy trial and John Surratt's murder trial were both nothing more than a Lincoln conspiracy cover-up. Yesterday, as well as today.

Notes:

Secretary Stanton's military commission investigated and tried The Great Lincoln Conspiracy, convicting eight conspirators charged as assassination accomplices.



Secretary Edwin Stanton and his military commission.

Yet, none convicted did anything to help John Wilkes Booth and Lewis Powell attack President Lincoln and Secretary Seward.



Dr. Samuel Mudd

Why is John Surratt still depicted as an assassination conspirator?

The prosecution had to hide the Colt revolver recovered during Powell's arrest and search because the military investigators had already produced a phony, planted pistol in Seward's home to use against him [DT2, Chapter 4].





Lewis Powell, dressed in the clean long gray coat, blood stained hat, and new boots, which came from the War Department on the morning after he attacked Seward.

His small Colt pistol was hidden from trial evidence. Only the Colt cartridges were presented as evidence by the prosecution.

The War Department's prosecution also had to present two coats as trial evidence against Lewis Powell because the coat Powell wore to the Surratt House during the night of his arrest had no bloodstains [DT2, pp. 23-27].



Powell in the coat given to him after he attacked Seward.



Powell in a second coat used as trial evidence.



The type of Colt pistol given to Wiechmann and found on Powell after his arrest.



The pistol used as trial evidence.

Abbreviations:

Articles - www.reasonlincoln.com, *The Lincoln Conspiracy Cover-Up*.

BP - Benn Pittman – *The Assassination of President Lincoln*, Benn Pitman trial transcripts. United States Army Military Commission Lincoln's assassination 1865.

DT - Thomas, Don. *The Reason Lincoln Had to Die*, second edition. Pumphouse Publishers Chesterfield, Virginia 2013.

DT2 - Thomas, Don. *The Reason Booth Had to Die*. Pumphouse Publishers Chesterfield, Virginia 2017.

E&S - Edwards Williams C. and Steers Edward Junior., *The Lincoln Assassination: The Evidence*, University of Illinois Press Urbana and Chicago, 2009.

WCE - Edwards, William C. edited and transcribed, companion volume to E&S – *The Lincoln Assassination, The Reward Files*, by William C. Edwards, copyright 2012. E-book, a transcription of the microfilm file M619 from the National Archives.