

# “Don’t let me fall...please don’t let me fall”!

By Don Thomas



But fall she did, and I can tell you why.

During the Lincoln conspiracy trial, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton’s military prosecution alleged that John Wilkes Booth and his assassination accomplices originated from Mary Surratt’s boardinghouse.

Mary Surratt was executed for that crime without evidence and convicted solely on the testimony of two witnesses (John Lloyd & Louis Weichmann) who were under the threat of being hanged themselves if they did not testify for the prosecution.

Along with their perjured testimonies designed to frame Mary Surratt as a Confederate agent, the prosecution also realized that it was crucial to suppress any evidence that would prove Booth never had a plot to assassinate until the day he shot Lincoln.

Booth’s Diary, Atzerodt’s lost confession, and Powell’s deathbed confession to Reverend Gillett were each vital pieces of evidence that could dispel the myth that Booth’s assassination plot was a long-premeditated conspiracy. For that reason, the military prosecution omitted those documents from the trial evidence and executed each man before they could talk.

Lincoln’s assassination was not planned at Mary Surratt’s boardinghouse. The assassination plot originated in the **Simpson House Saloon**, located at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue - only one block from Ford’s Theatre. Daniel J. Cox and Joe Hilton managed the saloon, while Lewis Mosby, nicknamed “Col. Mosby,” worked as their bartender.

A group of minstrel entertainers from New York would always gather at the Simpson House Saloon whenever they were in Washington. On the week of Lincoln’s murder, the minstrels were performing at Washington’s Canterbury Music Hall on 6th Street & Louisiana Avenue.



George Atzerodt’s suppressed confession told of an earlier scheme by this same **New York crowd**, who had a plan to kill Lincoln using a bomb. Atzerodt confessed that Government employees (referred to as “friends of the president”) would help the New York music entertainers schedule a White House serenade, lure the President into a room, then detonate the bomb planted under the floor of the room. It is unknown whether they seriously considered the plan. Still, they did discuss it, and George Atzerodt overheard the conversations and mentioned it in his lost May 1<sup>st</sup> confession.

The problem the War Department had with Atzerodt overhearing a plan to blow up the White House was that the assassins were New York minstrels, aided by well-known State Department employees, whom Atzerodt called “friends of the president”.



The genuine assassination plan, which the New York entertainers successfully carried out, most likely was given to Booth by his trusted government insider, Secretary William Seward’s aide, James Donaldson, during the early morning hours of the assassination day.

Everyone in Washington, including Booth and his kidnapping conspirators, knew that James Donaldson was a State Department coadjutor, among many influential government officials. However, few knew that Donaldson also had a close relationship with Booth.

On April 14, during an early morning meeting with several New York conspirators, they provided Booth with their *revised* plan to kill Lincoln. Then each co-signed their names to a newspaper letter Booth wrote to justify their motive for killing Lincoln, Seward and Johnson.

The New York assassination plan involved Booth, along with Lewis Powell, killing the President and his Secretary of State. At the same time, Booth believed that another of William Seward’s State Department messengers, Emrick Hansell, the Simpson House bartender, “Col.” Lewis Mosby, and a New York minstrel entertainer, William B. Donaldson, would be the assassins of Vice President Andrew Johnson.

Booth’s New York friends told him that, after deposing the tyrant president, the new administration would welcome him back to Washington as a hero and “*clear his name*”. Booth honestly thought of himself as the historical Shakespearean star Brutus, envisioning Lincoln as the tyrant, Julius Caesar. J. Wilkes Booth even alluded to his insane comparison to Brutus in his suppressed diary confession.

John Wilkes Booth had arranged to have the letter posted in the Washington newspaper the morning after he killed the President, to ensure that the public knew he, his New York friends, and Washington’s government insiders were all in the assassination plot together.

Nothing the New York minstrels told Booth ever happened. Booth’s newspaper letter, signed by his New York friends, was known (before the Trial) to John Matthews, several other arrested conspiracy suspects in the Old Capitol Prison, and Stanton’s military investigators. However, the letter never made it to the trial evidence. Booth’s conspirators from New York who signed his newspaper article, set Booth up, and never had true intentions of killing Vice President Johnson.



Booth was left alone to take the fall for killing Lincoln, hunted down by 26 soldiers under the command of Washington’s corrupt Chief of Detectives, Lafayette Baker, then cornered and shot to death by Baker’s civilian detective, Everton Conger. Secretary Stanton, Judges Holt and Bingham, along with a host of military officers, worked to suppress or destroy any evidence that

would expose the New York conspirators who were secretly collaborating with the War Department to overthrow Lincoln's administration.

Investigators (independent from the War Department's staff) learned that William B. Donaldson and "Col." Lewis Mosby were suspected assassination accomplices, and the military police arrested both men. Yet Stanton quickly and quietly released them without further investigation.



### **Booth's Newspaper Letter, & the Men Who Signed Their Names to it**

Secretary of War Stanton appointed Special Judge Advocate John Bingham to handle most of the witness examinations before the conspiracy trial and to conduct cross-examinations during the Trial. Bingham knew that at least 35 people in Washington had helped Booth assassinate Lincoln, but rather than seeking to identify them, he did what he could to conceal that information.



Sometime during the day of Lincoln's murder, and after Booth wrote a 2 am letter to his mother, he composed a newspaper article to be published, boldly informing the public the reason he and his accomplices wanted Lincoln dead. Each abettor was making a political statement, risking everything, including their lives, by publicly attacking the President in the heart of Washington and then signing their names to Booth's suicide mission.

Booth chose John Matthews to deliver the reason for their terrorist attack.

On the morning after Lincoln's murder, Matthews was to deliver the confession to the editor of the *National Intelligencer*, stating the reasons for their proceedings. However, Matthews allegedly destroyed the article Booth wrote, and the whole affair remained unknown to the public until two years later.



In 1867, the newspapers printed Booth's recovered diary text, which only partly included what Booth had initially written about the article that Matthews never delivered. John T. Ford then testified to Congress that Matthews had informed him about the Booth confession letter. Ford stated that on June 1, 1865, he talked with John Matthews, who admitted that Booth gave the confession letter to him the same day he shot Lincoln.

Matthews told Ford that Booth instructed him to deliver the letter to the newspaper faithfully the next morning, *no matter what occurs*.

On April 17, 1865, during Booth's escape and while hiding from soldiers in Zekiah Swamp, Maryland, he began to panic that the newspaper editor had not yet posted his letter explaining why he and his accomplices wanted Lincoln assassinated. Nor had his New York friends joined him in Virginia, as promised.



Booth then repeated the letter's confession in his Diary (the only means he had at that point) to tell the world about their political motives for killing Lincoln.

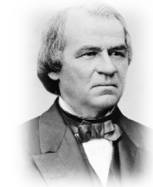
Meanwhile, Stanton initially accused Atzerodt of being Secretary Seward's attacker. However, to cover the release of W. B. Donaldson and Col. Mosby, the military prosecution accused George Atzerodt of planning to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson and hanged him without decisive evidence or motive.



Investigator-Judge Bingham was one of the commissioners who voted to hang David Herold and George Atzerodt for being Confederate spies attempting to assassinate the Vice President. Judges Bingham and Holt also withheld trial evidence that would prove Herold and Atzerodt never agreed, nor tried to kill anyone.

Two years later, Judge Bingham and Holt reversed their position and brought charges against President Johnson for being a Confederate spy.

Congress asked Secretary Stanton, along with Judges Bingham and Holt, to explain why the prosecution suppressed Booth's Diary.



Their answer to Congress was that the Diary was of no use as evidence against anyone but Booth. However, the diary confession would have shed light on the short decision to assassinate the President, which the conspiracy prosecution commissioners felt should never be known.

There is little doubt about why Stanton and his judges desperately needed to conceal (from the conspiracy trial evidence) David Herold's statement, Atzerodt's confession, Booth's Diary, and Powell's disclosure of how he learned about Seward's home, Doctor, and medicine. As well as why each man had to be executed before they could talk.

If anyone assumes this overview is just another baseless conspiracy theory, one must first explain why history has edited so many credible public documents that support this revised narrative.



At the top of the list of edited documents is the 1977 FBI examination of Booth's diary confession. Before anyone can argue that Lincoln's assassination was not a government cover-up, one must account for the many alterations made to the pages of Booth's Diary during the two years Booth's book was kept a secret in the home of Joseph Holt.

For almost half a century (since 1977), the FBI document has been in the public domain. Yet American history ignores the fact that the exam proves the War Department altered Booth's Diary after Booth's death and before Congress reviewed the book.

## William B. Donaldson & “Col.” Lewis Mosby

William B. Donaldson was an avid gambler and a noted Burnt Cork minstrel, a song-and-dance entertainer who played the banjo left-handed. Donaldson is also credited as the first to sing “The Boatman’s Dance,” which later became the impersonator of the now-infamous “Jim Crow” minstrel character.

William Donaldson was born in 1822 to Gertrude Van Every and James S. Donaldson, both of whom were from Poughkeepsie, New York. At 18, William began traveling with the circus throughout the United States and later toured Europe, performing his banjo act.

In 1853, William Donaldson formed a new band, which played at Hope Chapel on Broadway in New York. He later joined Charlie White’s minstrel company, performing at the Melodeon, 59 Bowery, New York, along with Dan Emmett, Lilly Coleman, and Dan Bryant.



Dan Emmett wrote the famous song “Dixie.” Lilly Coleman, a former dancer, became part-owner of the Ballard House Hotel in Richmond, Va., where she conducted Civil War espionage.

Dan Bryant was such a close friend of John Wilkes Booth that he gave Booth the same diamond stickpin. Atzerodt overheard Booth tell Lewis Powell that he might give his stickpin to Secretary Seward’s chambermaid.

All these entertainers performed on the same circuit and had known Booth for a long time. George Atzerodt referred to them as the New York crowd.

### Many conspirators ran from Ford’s Theatre after J. Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln.

Moments before Booth shot Lincoln, neighbors around Ford’s Theatre heard suspicious whistling signals back and forth between the streets. After the shot, witnesses reported people running and hearing the trampling of horses as they left the alley at the rear of the theater.



William Birch, his brother, and his sister, along with Treasury clerk A.Q. Stebbins, were among the witnesses investigated who gave statements about hearing three shrill whistles, then horses and people running from the theater during Booth’s escape from Washington. When Conger captured Booth, he was carrying a whistle. Still, those reports were never made public.

Only witnesses who gave testimony about Booth’s *kidnapping* accomplices were pursued or made public. John Wilkes Booth, David Herold, and George Atzerodt each gave written statements confessing that there were many



*assassination* conspirators in Washington, some of whom were “**friends of the President,**” which also included a separate conspiracy by a large **crowd from New York**. Yet, the War Department effectively suppressed that information.

Shortly after the assassination, William (Bill) Donaldson fled Washington for Philadelphia, leaving so quickly that he did not even bother to pack a bag. Bill Donaldson’s best friend and owner of the Simpson House Saloon, Daniel J. Cox, was the only person who knew where Bill had gone.

The Simpson House was a popular hangout for the New York minstrels while visiting Washington, and the working girls at Eliza Thomas’s bordello (also known as Mollie Turner) would frequently entertain at the saloon.

Secretary Stanton’s War Department assassination investigators collected many thousands of letters and statements, which included evidence about anyone possibly associated with Booth. The evidence was evaluated and compiled by Stanton’s three War Department officers under the overall direction of Judge Advocate Colonel Henry L. Burnett.

Lincoln’s assassination plot was a state-sponsored inside job, and Secretary Stanton’s War Department staff conspired to destroy any evidence that would expose the government’s plot to kill Lincoln. Among those surviving pieces of the War Department’s edited evidence was a Dan Cox letter to Bill Donaldson, delivered to his secluded Philadelphia address, postmarked April 18, 1865:

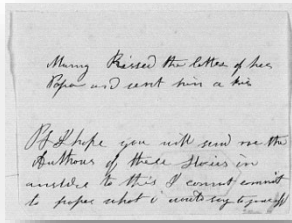
*Friend Bill, [William Donaldson]*

- *I will send your clothes as soon as possible by Adams Express... Everything is merged into one thing: the assassination. Ella Johnson has abused you for everything and tried her best to get Col. Mosby hung for carrying a message saying that I requested her to send you your clothes. Mosby was arrested twice but got clear. **(The documents of Col. Mosby’s two arrests are also missing from the collected E&S evidence book.)***

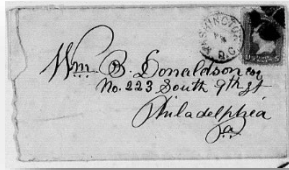
Cox goes on to tell Donaldson that Mollie Turner’s girls (a.k.a., Eliza Thomas) are very angry with him for what he had done against Booth. (All the girls knew both Booth and Donaldson, and W.B. Donaldson set Booth up to take the fall for Lincoln’s murder).

- *Since Mosby’s arrest, all the boys stay clear of the Simpson House. “These are trying times.” Mollie Turner and all her girls have been arrested and are being held in the Old Capital Prison along with Ned Costello, Harry Krebs, and Broom. **(Again, there are no documents about their arrest or statements.)** Cox ends his message to Donaldson: no news.*

Over the next couple of weeks, Bill Donaldson received more letters from Cox, along with two letters from Mollie Turner's girls, Minnie and Ella Johnson. Only the very bottom portion of Minnie's letter to Donaldson survived the edits by the War Department investigators.



Minnie's letter is now recorded in the archives with the same envelope used for the second letter to Donaldson from Cox (**an obvious War Department edit**). And the letter from Ella Johnson, *which revealed her anger and knowledge of the assassination plot*, is no longer in the files.



The only surviving part of Johnson's letter is her envelope, recorded in the National Archives as envelope no. 6 and now attached to a letter from Lilly Coleman to Cox, dated April 30. (**The National Archives has several other related letters also attached to the wrong envelopes.**)

On May 2, Harry Bradford, another Simpson House patron and New York entertainer, also identified "Col." Mosby to the military investigators as the bartender at the Simpson House. Then, on May 4, Cox again identified "Col." Lewis Mosby as his Simpson House bartender during a second letter to W. B. Donaldson.

Stanton's War Department investigators were aware of Lewis Mosby's close association with B. Donaldson and Booth well before the conspiracy trial began. Yet, they deliberately covered up his role in the assassination plot to kill Johnson.

On May 6, Stanton's Special Commissioner, Col. H. S. Olcott from New York, ordered his top detective in Philadelphia, R.C. Morgan (who also arrested Mary Surratt and Lewis Powell), to investigate numerous reports and rumors about a second assassination suspect alleged to kill Johnson, William B. Donaldson, who was also widely known to be closely associated with Booth, Mosby, Mollie Turner, all her girls, and Lincoln's body guard John F. Parker.

Olcott's New York Police Officers Morgan, Franklin, and Roach followed behind William Donaldson as he fled Philadelphia back to Washington, where the military police arrested him as soon as he stepped off the train. Who could have tipped off Donaldson that detectives were assigned to arrest him?

A Washington newspaper article reported that William Donaldson had incriminating evidence involving a "large number" of Confederate letters and papers, including a worthless \$100,000 C.S.A. bond. The article announced that Bill Donaldson was being held at the Old Capital Prison to be interrogated by the War Department's chief investigator, Col. Burnett. Two days later, Stanton ordered the release of William B. Donaldson without investigating or providing a reason for his discharge, despite the evidence collected against him.

The War Department investigators withheld evidence about all of Booth's New York accomplices, and the military prosecution chose only witnesses who supported their fraudulent case against Booth's kidnapping gang members as also being Booth's assassination conspirators.

Many people had reported to investigators about William B. Donaldson and "Col." Mosby's involvement with Booth. Yet, the War Department tried to persuade that the man in Booth's conspiracy plot called Mosby was either Confederate commander Col. John Mosby or accused Lewis Powell of using the nickname of "Mosby."

The military prosecution claimed Lewis Powell was the man Samuel Arnold named as Mosby in his confession about the March 15 kidnapping meeting at Gautier's Restaurant. However, a combination of recovered National Archives evidence strongly suggests that the Simpson House bartender, Lewis Mosby, was the man Arnold identified, and not Secretary Seward's attempted assassin, Lewis Powell.

Lewis Powell used two different aliases: Lewis Paine, while in Baltimore, and James Wood, while in Washington, to hide his identity as a former Confederate soldier in Colonel John S. Mosby's regiment. Why then would Powell compromise his disguise by also wanting everyone to call him Mosby?

George Atzerodt twice stated in his lost confession that Lewis Powell, alias James *Wood*, *did not go on the Street in the daytime for fear of being arrested*. Before the assassination, Powell was well aware that the police could arrest him if spotted on the streets of Washington or Baltimore.

The myth that Powell used the nickname "Mosby" is an obvious War Department lie to hide the true identity of the Simpson House bartender, Lewis Mosby, who actually went by the nickname "Colonel" Mosby.

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