



Apr. 15th 1865.

Dear Father.

It is with sad feelings that I take up my pen & address you. Last Friday night at 10 o'clock, I witnessed the saddest tragedy ever enacted in this country. Not with standing my promise to you not to visit the theatre, I could not resist the temptation to see General Grant and the President, and when the curtain at Ford's rose on the play of Our American Cousin my room mate and I were seated on the second row of orchestra seats, just beneath the presidents box. The President entered the Theatre at 8 1/2 o'clock, amid deafening cheers and the rising of all, Everything was cheerful, and never was our magistrate more enthusiastically welcomed, or more happy-- Many pleasant allusions were made to him in the play to which the Audience gave deafening responses, while Mr. Lincoln laughed heartily and bowed frequently to the gratified people-- Just after the 3d Act, and before the scenes were shifted, a muffled pistol shot was heard, and a man sprang wildly from the national box, falling some 15 or so feet, partially tearing down the flag, then shouting "'sic semper tyrannis', the south is avenged" with brandished dagger rushed across the stage and disappeared. Sic Semper Tyrannis means "thus always to tyrant," which people are saying shows the man's view of our beloved President Lincoln. The whole theatre was paralyzed.

Your Son,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James S. Knox". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, with a large, stylized 'K'.

James S. Knox

Source: Letter from James S. Knox to his father on, Saturday, April 15, 1865. From the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress.

Here is the transcript from the courtroom when Dr. Samuel Mudd took the stand:

Prosecutor: Is this the man who visited your home on at 4 am on April 15, 1864?
(Presents a picture of John Wilkes Booth)

Mudd: Yes, it was he and one other man. I know now the other man was David Herold, but I did not know this at the time.

Prosecutor: Once these two men arrived, what did they want from you?

Mudd: They wanted me to create a splint and care for his injured leg.

Prosecutor: And did you?

Mudd: I could not turn him away! The man was in incredible pain, looked like a pretty nasty fall that caused this.

Prosecutor: How do you know it was caused from a fall?

Mudd: ...I don't. It just looked like a fall may have caused it. I suppose it could have been caused by something else.

Prosecutor: I assume you spoke with these two men while you tended to the injury, right?

Mudd: Well of course, but only of simple things.

Prosecutor: Did you ask the man what caused this injury?

Mudd: I did not.

Prosecutor: I think this is a little strange, Dr. Mudd. Why would you not inquire about the cause of this injury. You are a doctor after all.

Mudd: It just did not occur to me to pry into his personal business.

Prosecutor: I don't believe you. I think it is a little odd that a stranger knocks on your door in the middle of the night -- and you willingly assist these two strangers without gathering any sort of information.

Mudd: (...silence...)

Prosecutor: Had you seen these men prior to this evening?

Mudd: I never saw either of the parties before, nor can I conceive who sent them to my house.

Prosecutor: We have several witnesses saying they saw you, on several occasions, meeting with Mr. Booth and the other conspirators...

Mudd: They must be mistaken. I did nothing wrong but help a man whom I thought was an innocent stranger. I have never seen this man before in my life.

Prosecutor: I'd like to believe you, Dr. Mudd. But, why then does Mr. George Atzerodt claim that, "I am certain Dr. Mudd knew all about it."



POLICE REPORT



Case No: 112-A4189

Date: April 20th, 1865

Location of Arrest: Germantown, Maryland

Name of Accused: George Atzerodt

Incident: Mr. George Atzerodt was arrested at the home of his cousin, Hartman Richter, and is being charged with the crime of being a party to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Detail of Event:

George Atzerodt drew suspicion from the bartender at the hotel of the Kirkwood House, located in Washington D.C. at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th street. Mr. Atzerodt checked into the hotel at 8:00 am on the morning of April 14th, 1865, the day of President Lincoln's assassination. He was staying in room 126. Atzerodt did not draw suspicion until later in the evening when he visited the hotel bar. The bartender, when speaking with authorities, commented that "Atzerodt was guzzling like a Falstaff at 10:15 pm" and began to say things he likely "would not have said otherwise." Atzerodt made several comments about the "job he had to finish upstairs" and the bartender noticed how fidgety Atzerodt became as the evening grew later. It was clear that he was nervous about something that was to happen on this evening. The bartender took special note of Atzerodt's behavior because the Vice President, Andrew Johnson, was also staying at the Kirkwood House on this evening. It became clear that Atzerodt also knew this fact, as he "inquired on more than one occasion as to the location of the Vice President." The bartender quickly contacted authorities because he soon realized that the "job" Atzerodt kept mentioning somehow involved the Vice President and he worried for the Vice President's safety.

Actions Taken:

Authorities arrived at the Kirkwood House to speak with Mr. Atzerodt but he could not be located at the time. Because of his strange actions and of the nearby location of the Vice President, room 126 was searched. In the room we seized a large bowie knife, a map of Virginia, and a bank book that belongs to Mr. John Wilkes Booth. We set out on a search for Mr. Atzerodt, locating his nearby family members and searching the places where he often visits. He was found and arrested at his cousin's residence in Germantown, Maryland. Atzerodt is charged with being an accomplice to the murder of President Abraham Lincoln.

Testimony of Lewis Weichmann, resident of Mary Surratt's boarding house

"I attended college with Mary Surratt's oldest son, John Surratt, and resided in her boarding house for many months. On many occasions, private meetings were held between her, Booth, and a man I knew as Lewis Powell. Sometimes other men attended these meetings, but I did not know these men. Often times Booth would enter the house and ask Mary Surratt if she could 'go upstairs and spare a word,' to which she agreed and they both left the room to speak in secret.

On the day of the assassination I found it quite strange when Mary left the house carrying a strange looking package. It was wrapped up in paper and was about six inches in diameter. She thought nobody was watching but I saw her. She was gone for quite some time, several hours in fact. Once she returned, Mary's demeanor had changed entirely. She was very nervous, agitated and restless, to the point where I grew fearful that something was the matter.

Given the horrible events that have transpired, it makes sense what Mary Surratt was doing on this trip. She was taking firearms, or what she called 'the shooting irons,' to another tavern to be picked up by Booth after he killed the president. May God have mercy on her soul."

Testimony of Mary Surratt

“He led the meeting. It was all him. Sure, they held the meeting at my boardinghouse, but how am I to be blamed for this? He was very clear and adamant in what he wanted. At first, the plan was simply to kidnap Mr. Lincoln and use him as ransom to get our Confederacy the demands they so desperately sought. But, he kept insisting that more must be done. I tried to calm him but I could not. He dreamt up this master plan that he said would ‘destroy the entire Union government.’ It was all to happen at the same time, at 10:15 pm. He said that he would kill the president, since he had easy access to Ford’s Theater and had been an actor in there for years. George Atzerodt was to murder Vice President Andrew Johnson and Lewis Powell would kill Sectary of State William Seward. David Herold, with his knowledge of the area, would guide Powell to Seward, then meet with John to take him south where he will be viewed as a hero. I know I am not innocent but to think that President Johnson is saying that I ‘kept the nest that hatched the egg’ is appalling.”

Here is the transcript from court when Willie Jett, a Confederate soldier seen with John Wilkes Booth, took the stand.

Prosecutor: Did you encounter David Herold and John Wilkes Booth on April 24th?

Jett: Yes, I did, but I did not know this at the time. We were waiting on a ferry to take us across the Rappahannock River.

Prosecutor: Did you know these two men were involved in the assassination of the president?

Jett: No.

Prosecutor: Can you describe your encounter with the two men as you waited for the ferry?

Jett: The two men claimed they were Confederate soldiers and that their names were David E. and James William Boyd. I found this odd, since they had the same last name but did not mention being brothers. Eventually I heard their real names.

Prosecutor: What did they say?

Jett: It was Mr. Herold first. He said his name was David.

Prosecutor: When did you hear John Wilkes Booth real name?

Jett: It was very strange and my memory is kind of fuzzy because I was so taken back by what I heard. It was almost like Mr. Herold was bragging. I did not ask and he had no reason to tell me this, but he openly told me "We are the assassins of the President...Yonder is the assassin, John Wilkes Booth." He said this while he was pointing to his friend. He may have said "Lincoln" instead of "President." I am not sure, but it was one of the two.

Prosecutor: What was your impression of Mr. David Herold?

Jett: I did not think much of him. He seemed to just be a guide for the true assassin.

Prosecutor: Did you know there was manhunt underway to catch these two?

Jett: No sir, the mail service has been down with the final days of the war so news travels slowly.

Prosecutor: Why did you not immediately report this to the authorities?

Jett: I feared for my safety, sir. I worried that if I did this I would be killed too.

Prosecutor: What happened next?

Jett: They wanted me to help them move further south, but I could not since I did not have the funds or ability to. Then, they asked if there was a place they could stay. I asked the locals nearby for a place to stay, and we were directed down the road to a home owned by Richard Garrett. Then, the Union army tracked me down since people saw me with the assassin. When the troops barged into my hotel room, I told them exactly, "I know who you want; and I will tell you where they can be found." I was referring to Booth.

Prosecutor: What happened to Booth and Herold?

Jett: They were staying in a barn at Garrett's farm. Herold surrendered, but authorities lit the barn on fire to try to get Booth to give up. I think Booth drew his gun but was shot first by a soldier. I'm pretty sure he died right there.

Testimony of Frederick Seward, Son of Secretary of State William Seward

“My father, William, had been injured in a carriage accident earlier in the month, and was confined to rest until his doctor said otherwise. On the night of April 14th, around 10 pm, a man knocked on our door. Our butler answered the door. He did not know the man, whom we now know as Lewis Powell, but he claimed to be sent by our family physician, Tullio Verdi, with medicine that was needed for William. The butler offered to take the medicine and administer to my father, but Mr. Powell insisted on doing so himself. This seemed rather odd since he was only a messenger, not a doctor himself. Why would a messenger be instructed to give the medicine to a patient?

I was with my father at the time in his upstairs bedroom and heard the commotion downstairs. I remember peering outside the window and noticed a man holding two horses outside, which I did not think was strange at the time. But, now that I think about it, why would a messenger need a guide? They should know the ins-and-outs of this city better than anyone. Knowing what I know now, this surely was David Herold.

I emerged from my father’s bedroom and confronted Lewis Powell. He pulled his gun on me and fired, but his gun jammed. We wrestled for some time before everything blacked out. I am told he used his gun handle to hit me, fracturing my skull in the process. My sister was at William’s bedside when Lewis entered the room. She says he threw her aside, then pounced on William and began stabbing with his knife. She said blood was everywhere, but she frequently heard the clanging of ‘metal on metal’ which may very well have saved his life. My father was wearing a metal headress from his carriage accident that blocked all of the blows that would have killed him. Thinking he was dead, Lewis left and rode off with Herold. Little did he know, however, was that my father is tougher than he looks!”