

WHO GOT SHOT IN GARRETT'S BARN?

The tale told in history texts and Hollywood films is that the individual shot on April 25, 1865, in Garrett's barn near Bowling Green, Virginia, was the infamous John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Abraham Lincoln.

But two books—products of painstaking research—do a convincing job in documenting that the man killed by Federal troops that day was not Booth but another man whose initials, strangely, were *JWB*.

Both David Balsiger and Charles E. Sellier, Jr.'s *The Lincoln Conspiracy*, written in 1977, and Leonard G. Guttridge and Ray A. Neff's *Dark Union*, written in 2000, identify the slain man as James William Boyd, Confederate soldier turned Union spy.

The two men—known to one another—were pivotal characters in the plot not to assassinate but kidnap Lincoln.

Interestingly, the kidnapping plot was favored by the Confederacy and a faction of Northern Republicans known as the *Radicals*. While these two groups did not share the same motivation, they nevertheless wished the same end.

The Confederacy was hoping to broker a release of their imprisoned soldiers in exchange for Lincoln's safe return. The Radicals wished Lincoln's removal, if only long enough to keep him from running for a second term, knowing that he favored a charitable treatment of the seceded Confederate states. The Radicals, however, wanted the former Confederacy treated as a conquered country, which would mean big profits for Northern businessmen and politicians through a draconian reconstruction of the South.

Midway through the War Between the States, two business deals were being worked out to allow the North to exchange its beef for the impoverished South's cotton, which the North needed as badly—if not more so—than the South. Europe, too, had been hooked on high quality Southern cotton, and England, in particular, needed a continual flow of the commodity to maintain her thriving economy. The interruption of cotton imports to England had badly damaged her commerce and nearly induced her to enter the war. France, too, had similar designs and even shipped Maximillian and 16,000 troops into Mexico, where they waited to enter the fray most likely with the South.

One of the business deals was somewhat above board and sanctioned by Lincoln, whose goal was to replenish the depleted Treasury with a percentage of the proceeds. Another deal, quite a bit murkier, would line the pockets of speculators on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, among whom numbered many Northern politicians.

The agents for the powers that be, both in business and politics, had designated Booth as the point man for Lincoln's kidnapping, but when they eventually lost faith in Booth's ability to pull it off, they dumped him for a proven military man, one James W. Boyd, a captured Confederate who was granted a parole on the condition he would turn Union spy.

Besides the irony of both men sharing the same initials, Booth and Boyd also had similar physical likenesses: hair color, moustache, and a very strong facial resemblance. Although Boyd was older and taller, he and Booth can easily be confused for one another in photographs.

Now having been ousted for Boyd, Booth was enraged and grew more desperate in his desire to avenge the South, which he accurately assessed was close to capitulating. Boyd immediately went about the business of forming a paramilitary network capable of not only kidnapping Lincoln but conveying him to a ship in the Potomac that would transport him to Richmond.

But before Boyd could strike, Booth had killed the President, and Boyd realized that he, too, would be hunted for his part in the kidnapping conspiracy.

Both took flight through the Maryland countryside, and to make matters more confusing, both Booth and Boyd had picked up sidekicks in their escapes. Booth traveled with Edwin Henson, a fellow smuggler of contraband between the North and South. Boyd, through a twist of fate, fell in with Edward Herold, named in the kidnapping plot begun by Booth, though he was never more than a peripheral character. And if the strange parallels couldn't get any stanger, both Henson and Herold were look-alikes.

Federal forces, tipped that Booth was holed up at the Garrett farm, surrounded the barn and threatened to hang the Garrett patriarch if Booth and Henson didn't surrender. With a rope around his neck, and his body shakily propped up on a tree stump, Garrett continued to maintain that the men bunking in his barn were named Boyd and Herold.

Herold did surrender, stating that the man he had been riding with was named Boyd. While Boyd negotiated from within the barn, a soldier set fire to its back, the same or perhaps another soldier (accounts vary as to who was involved) fatally shot Boyd through a spacing of the slats.

Boyd's body was transported to a prison ship where a doctor who knew Booth did, under coercion, falsely identify the deceased as Booth. The doctor certainly couldn't have made a mistake. He had performed surgery on Booth and found no incision mark on this body.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, allegedly named in Booth's diary as a conspirator, proclaimed Booth dead, though knowing otherwise. Herold was wrongly hanged for his part in the conspiracy; his silence, therefore, permanent.

While Boyd and Booth were still on the run, Booth's diary had been recovered by an Indian tracker and eventually presented to Stanton. It has been stated on the record that Stanton received the diary intact, but when the existence of the diary was made public (not a mention of the diary was made during the conspiracy trial), it was missing at least 16 pages.

Booth, supposedly dead, his diary no longer a threat to Stanton, was probably not vigorously pursued and managed to secure himself a new identity, that of John Byron Wilkes, a British immigrant who had settled in Terra Haute, Indiana. Booth had stayed with this family while on tour with his theater troupe. The true Mr. Wilkes died in 1916 without ever leaving Indiana. However, Booth, using this former British subject's name (the identity theft, it was intimated, was facilitated by "higher ups") obtained a passport through the British consulate in San Francisco and eventually made his way, with his second wife, to the British colony of India.

When Wilkes/Booth died in 1883, his wife importuned U. S. Grant to release his sizable assets in the United States, which had been frozen by the government because of his treachery. Grant and Lew Wallace, a Union General and author of *Ben Hur*, succeeded in securing the release of the assets. Among the heirs bequeathed a portion of his estate were Booth's first wife, their daughter, two other women, and the child of each that he had fathered.

The mystery remains whether or not Federal government and military personnel also conspired in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The missing pages of the Booth diary are believed to identify further perpetrators. Yet the pages themselves are a mystery because in 1977 Stanton's descendants purportedly transferred them to a private citizen who has never made them available for scrutiny.