Lincoln Conspirators Trial: Partial Cast of Characters

Characters

Absolom R. Bainbridge, William Jett and Mortimer B. Ruggles—young Confederate soldiers who helped Booth and Herold cross the Rappahannock River.

Boston (Thomas) Corbett—former hatter from Troy, NY; volunteers with NY infantry and taken prisoner at Harper’s Ferry; paroled by Gen. Stonewall Jackson and reenlists in NY cavalry; taken prisoner in 1864 and sent to Andersonville. Testifies as prosecution witness at trial of Captain Henry Wirz for war crimes. Helped surround Booth in barn and when he saw Booth pick up a rifle, shot him. Treated as hero but vilified by Stanton. In later years, became religious zealot, went mad, castrated himself with scissors, was institutionalized, escaped and vanished.

Samuel Cox & Thomas A. Jones—Confederate sympathizers who harbored Booth and Herold after their flight.

John T. Ford—owner of Ford’s theatre where Lincoln was shot; was in Richmond at the time of the assassination; he was jailed for 40 days and his two brothers were also arrested.

Andrew Johnson—Lincoln’s Vice President; a drunk detested by Lincoln. Appointed the members of the commission trying the Lincoln conspirators. Served as President following Lincoln’s death, narrowly escaped impeachment. Sympathetic to the Confederate cause, he pardoned many of the defendants who were not executed. Was apparently a target of the assassination plot although widely rumored to have been involved in it himself.

John M. Lloyd—the drunken innkeeper who rented Mrs. Surrat’s tavern in December when she moved to Washington to open a boarding house. Lloyd gave Booth and Herold carbines, rope and whiskey before their flight.

William Seward—Secretary of State; attempted unofficially to negotiate with Confederacy before breakout of hostilities.

Edwin Stanton—Secretary of War (now known as Secretary of Defense).

Superman—has absolutely nothing to do with the Lincoln Conspirators trial.

Louis Weichmann—a boarder with Mrs. Surratt; he informed the War Department of the kidnapping plot weeks before the assassination. After his arrest and release, he served as one of the prosecution’s main witnesses.

Conspirators and Suspects

Samuel Arnold—connected to original kidnapping plot, which defense claimed he dropped out of; no evidence of involvement in assassination. Sentenced to life in prison, later pardoned by President Johnson in March 1869. Wrote “Memoirs of a Lincoln Conspirator”.

George Atzerodt—German immigrant who assisted Confederate soldiers in crossing the Potomac; generally known as a coward. Alleged to have been instructed to kill VP Andrew Johnson but seemingly made no attempt. Confessed to having known about the plot only a few hours before, and said that David Herold was to shoot Johnson while he was to act as backup. Hanged July 1865.

John Wilkes Booth—noted stage actor, rabid anti-abolitionist; worked as secret agent for Confederacy. Began formulating kidnapping plan in 1864, where he hoped to take Lincoln to Richmond and exchange him for Confederate POWs. Following surrender of General Robert E. Lee, plan became moot. Incensed by speech by Lincoln calling for giving freed slaves the vote, he targeted Lincoln, Vice President Johnson, Secretary of State William Seward, and possibly General Ulysses S. Grant.

David Herold—went with Powell to house of Secretary Seward; held Powell’s horse. Captured in barn where Booth was killed. Alleged to have been tasked with killing VP Andrew Johnson; said to have had a childish intellect. Hanged July 1865.

Samuel Mudd—physician who set Booth’s broken leg and gave directions to Booth and Herold. Lied about having recognized Booth when asked to fix his leg. Sentenced to life in prison (life was spared by one vote), but pardoned by President Johnson in March 1869. .

Micahel O’Laughlen—served in Confederate army; was to be involved in kidnapping plot but had an unknown role in the assassination. Voluntarily turned himself in to authorities in April 1865. Was spotted at Secretary Stanton’s home but apparently spent the night drinking; prosecutors claimed he was supposed to assassinate General Ulysses S. Grant. Sentenced to life in prison; died 2 years later of yellow fever.

Lewis Powell—former Confederate soldier, was also a member of the Confederate Secret Service. Introduced to Booth by John Surrat. Assaulted Secretary of State William Seward’s son, bodyguard and Seward himself (while yelling “I’m mad! I’m mad!”). Makes wrong turn, spends night in cemetery, later shows up at Mary Surrat’s late at night with a pick-axe claiming he was hired to dig a gutter (while wearing Booth’s boots). Defense did not contest his guilt. Attempted suicide by banging head on wall in prison but hanged July 1865.

Edmund Spangler—worked at theatre and prepared President’s box; tended Booth’s horse and then handed it over to Joseph Burroughs. Sentenced to 6 years in prison; served 1 ½ before being pardoned by President Andrew Johnson. Spent rest of life living on plot of land given to him by Dr. Mudd.

Mary Surrat—owned a tavern she rented to John Lloyd. A widow, her eldest son was in CSS. She petitioned for habeas corpus, which Johnson suspended. She was convicted of conspiracy, but 5 out of 9 committee members recommended life in prison rather than death; Johnson refused clemency saying she “kept the nest that hatched the egg.” She was hanged July 1865—first woman executed by federal government and last until Ethyl Rosenberg nearly a century later.

John Surrat, Jr—member of the CSS, was introduced to Booth by Dr. Mudd; at time of assassination was in NY on spy mission. Fled to Canada and remained there until his mother’s execution. Captured in Egypt in 1866 and tried in 1867 before civilian court with 170 witnesses—ended in hung jury. Government dropped charges thereafter. Went on lecture tour where he admitted role in kidnapping but denied any knowledge of the assassination plot; stopped touring due to public pressure.