

Abraham Lincoln's
EXECUTION

Abraham Lincoln's
EXECUTION

John Chandler Griffin



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

Gretna 2006

Copyright © 2006
By John Chandler Griffin
All rights reserved

The word "Pelican" and the depiction of a pelican are trademarks of Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., and are registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Griffin, John Chandler, 1936-

Abraham Lincoln's execution / John Chandler Griffin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58980-395-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865—Assassination. 2. Conspiracies—United States—History—19th century. 3. United States—Politics and government—1861-1865. I. Title.

E457.5.G795 2006

973.7092—dc22

2006003630



Printed in the United States of America

Published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc.

1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053

To my daughter, Alexis Griffin Ballard, one of the most determined and courageous young women I've ever known. All my love to you and yours, and keep up the good work.

Contents

Acknowledgments 9

Introduction 13

- I. Abe Lincoln: His Sordid Political Career 29
- II. The Secret Papers of Lafayette Baker 71
- III. The Case against Stanton and Johnson 101
- IV. The Conspirators and Their Conspiracies 131
- V. Booth's Movements on That Fateful Day 231
- VI. Booth Makes His Escape 265
- VII. The Trial of the Conspirators 313
- VIII. The Escape, Capture, and Trial of John Surratt 373
- IX. Who Is Buried in Booth's Grave? 405

Notes 449

Bibliography 451

Index 455

Acknowledgments

In addition to a great many others who must by necessity remain anonymous, I wish to thank the following persons for giving so unselfishly of their time and efforts on my behalf. Dr. Patrick Scott, Director of Special Collections at the Thomas Cooper Library, the University of South Carolina, made numerous issues of old magazines and journals available to me, materials which proved invaluable to this work. (Plus he permitted me to type a note on Joseph Heller's typewriter, the one he used when writing *Catch-22!*) And there is Nathaniel Orlowek of Silver Springs, Maryland, who spoke with me at great length concerning his work on the John St. Helen/David George theory, and the very real possibility that the body buried in Booth's tomb at Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore is not that of John Wilkes Booth.

My thanks to Gaile Heath, a handwriting analyst with the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division (SLED), for devoting so much of her free time to studying the handwriting of John Wilkes Booth, Lafayette Baker, and others. Her findings proved invaluable. And also my gratitude to Bethany Crooks, a photographic expert with SLED, for comparing photos of Booth with a likeness of John St. Helen. She was unable to reach any definitive conclusions because unfortunately the image of St. Helen is a painting and she can work only from photographs.

A special thanks to F. W. Wilson in Special Collections at Georgetown University for locating and sending me the photos of John St. Helen and David George. These were indeed a rare find and added much to my work.

So many of the finest photos of John Wilkes Booth and his family members are on file in the Harvard University Theater Collection. I wish to thank Virginia Dent, Curatorial Assistant at that institution, for all her help. This volume would not have been the same without those fine photos on file in the Harvard Theater Collection.

As for Lorraine Whiting of Geneva, Florida, my sincere gratitude. Lorraine is the great-grandniece of Lewis Powell and a deep storehouse of knowledge concerning Powell's childhood and adolescence in Fair Oaks, Florida. Lewis Powell was her great-grandfather's youngest brother, and Lorraine's knowledge of Powell is based on numerous family stories passed down from generation to generation. She was most gracious in sharing those stories with me. I am a long-time admirer of Lewis Powell, and I truly enjoyed my long conversations with Lorraine Whiting.

And there is Jim Kushlan, editor of the *Civil War Times Illustrated*, and his assistant, Brenda Wilt, who truly moved mountains in their efforts to track down the authors of several articles that appeared in their venerated journal many years ago. I spoke at some length with those authors and learned a great deal that I did not know.

Too, my gratitude to the widow of Robert Fowler, the original editor of the *Civil War Times*, for her kind permission to republish herein Ray Neff's "The Secret Papers of Lafayette Baker." Neff's discovery of those papers must rank as one of the most sensational finds of the twentieth century, and it sheds much light on who was truly behind the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

I'd also like to thank Rae Emerson, an official with the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site of the National Park Service. She went to a great deal of trouble to send me photocopies of John Wilkes Booth's very controversial diary, the one Edwin Stanton was finally forced to turn over to authorities, the one from which someone had torn eighteen pages.

Closer to home, I wish to thank Blake Faulkenberry, our computer wizard at USC-Lancaster, for his help on the many occasions when I ran into glitches with my computer. As for

our librarians, much gratitude to Shari Eliades, Linda Guess, and Lori Harris. No matter how obscure the material I needed, they always managed to find it somehow and get it to me straightaway. And always with nice smiles! Very good people to work with.

And what can I say about my Dean at this institution, John Catalano, to whom I owe much gratitude for his moral and financial help while I was putting this little volume together? John truly has his head on straight, and an impressive title has not turned it in the least. And the same is true of our Academic Dean, Ron Cox, to whom I owe a big debt of gratitude. Ron has a new book due out, *1963: The Year of Decision*, which I am truly looking forward to reading.

As for my wife, Betty, my daughter, Alexis, and my granddaughters, Emmalee Grace Ballard and Serrah Roxanne Ballard, I suspect they have heard all they want to hear about John Wilkes Booth and Abraham Lincoln, at least for a while. I promise not to mention either again. Let's just cut on *Barney* and forget about things of lesser importance.

Introduction

Assassinate: 1: to murder by sudden or secret attack. 2: to injure or destroy unexpectedly and treacherously.

Execute: 1: to do what is required by a decree. 2: to put to death in compliance with a legal sentence.

By the summer of 1864 an overwhelming percentage of young Southerners between the ages of eighteen and thirty-eight had been either killed or maimed on far away battlefields while a like percentage had died of various illnesses and diseases. The South of course simply had no way to replace those men. Whereas the South had earlier found itself outnumbered two to one, by 1864 its soldiers were inevitably outnumbered three or even four to one. And the Union by now refused to exchange prisoners of war. The Union, unfortunately, since they had an unlimited supply of soldiers, more than enough to supply their every need, refused to cooperate. But, hoped the Confederates, if they could get their hands on Lincoln, they could use him as leverage to force the Union to exchange prisoners, thereby giving them the manpower they so badly needed.

It might be pointed out that the South's desire to exchange prisoners of war was also motivated by humanitarian impulses. According to Federal War Department statistics, some twenty-four thousand Union soldiers died of wounds, starvation, and disease in Southern prisons during four long

years of war, a very tragic rate. Even more tragic, however, was that some twenty-six thousand Confederate soldiers died in Union prisons during that same period. This despite the fact that the Union army had a wealth of food and medical supplies they easily could have made available to their Southern prisoners; but Union authorities very malevolently refused to do so.

Even apologists for Edwin Stanton admit it was purely from malice that the Union War Department intentionally withheld food and medical treatment from their Confederate prisoners, resulting in such an incredibly high number of fatalities. The Confederates on the other hand made available to their Union prisoners the same food and medical treatment that was available to their own soldiers. Unfortunately, there was very little food and medicine available, especially following the blockading of Southern seaports.

Confederate authorities were only too aware of the desperate situation faced by Union soldiers in their prison camps. Thus Southern representatives visited Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and offered to exchange prisoners of war, man for man. Stanton refused to even consider this proposal, reasoning that if the South was starved for manpower, well, let them starve. Two weeks later, these same Confederate representatives again met with Stanton. This time they proposed a total exchange of prisoners. If the North would agree to release all Southern prisoners, the Confederacy would release all Union prisoners. They offered this exchange despite the fact that the Confederacy held a great many more Union prisoners than the Union did Southern prisoners. Again Stanton refused to even consider the matter. As a result, a desperate South began exploring the idea of abducting Lincoln and using him as leverage to force the Union into a massive prisoner-of-war exchange.

As for Booth's plan to *assassinate* the president, it appears, based on the best available data, that prior to April 14 Booth had never entertained the least intention of harming the president. In fact, on March 20, just prior to his attempt to abduct the president on his way to Soldiers'

Home, Booth had several cases of delicate foodstuffs and toilet articles sent on to Maryland to ensure that Lincoln would suffer no privations during his sojourn to Richmond. And on several occasions Booth was heard to remark that he felt a great deal of admiration, and even some affection, for Abe Lincoln the man. It was Abe Lincoln the president whom Booth was sworn to abduct. During Lewis Powell's trial, when asked why he attempted to assassinate William Seward, he responded, "I am a Confederate soldier. I was simply doing my duty." That was also Booth's attitude.

Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that Booth had ever considered bringing physical harm to Lincoln or anyone else prior to April 14. But on April 14 something happened, something of such extraordinary magnitude that Booth suddenly became convinced that Lincoln must be *executed*, and he must be executed immediately. What that something might have been is open to speculation, but it was of such a sensational nature that Booth, who was by no means a violent man, was persuaded that the president's death was now the only solution to an intolerable problem.

Today there is compelling circumstantial evidence to suggest that it was not Wilkes Booth who first thought of assassinating the president, rather Wilkes Booth was little more than a pawn, a tool, in the hands of certain high-ranking Federal officials who had been waiting and scheming for several weeks, or even months, to rid the Federal government of Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward. In the end, they merely used Booth as a dupe to carry out their nefarious ends.

Who those people were and how they persuaded Booth to become a willing collaborator can only be conjectured. But the best evidence strongly suggests that the prime movers in this scheme were Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Vice Pres. Andrew Johnson. Both men were incredibly ambitious and equally unscrupulous.

Edwin Stanton was known throughout Washington as a man of limitless ambitions, and his greatest ambition in 1865 was to see himself become president in 1868. With

Lincoln no longer in the picture and Congress in recess until December, the door to a military dictatorship in this great nation would stand wide open, with Stanton of course serving as the supreme dictator.

Though Stanton would totally dominate and manipulate Andrew Johnson throughout the early months of his presidency, Johnson was a man of unbridled ambitions. However, since he had made a drunken display of himself at Lincoln's second inauguration in March 1865, Lincoln had repeatedly snubbed him, and Johnson was keenly aware that his political career would soon be over if Abe Lincoln lived, that in fact Lincoln planned to drop him from the ticket as soon as possible. But should Lincoln suddenly die, Andrew Johnson would instantly realize his ultimate ambition: He would become president of the United States.

According to the "Secret Papers of Lafayette Baker" (see chapter II), Stanton, Johnson, and the Radicals in Congress hated Lincoln and were in a fever to rid the government of him. To achieve their ends, Stanton laid the plans, then appointed his chief of the National Detective Police, Lafayette Baker, and his assistant secretary of war, Maj. Thomas Eckert, to recruit the people needed to carry out those plans. And what was their motive in attempting such a daring maneuver? After all, assassinating the president of the United States is not child's play. Obviously they were motivated by greed and a lust for power, and certainly they had nothing to fear concerning punishment or retribution since they would be in charge of any subsequent investigation. Indeed, these two men were well aware that they could totally manipulate any investigative committee (and in fact they did just that), so that they themselves would run little risk of discovery.

But an even greater motive for Lincoln's execution concerned his recently announced program of amnesty for the defeated South. Indeed, after four long years of brutal warfare, Lincoln had in the spring of 1865 suddenly changed his attitude towards the seceded states. Now, under Lincoln's plan of amnesty, the South would not be occupied by a cruel

Federal army, its citizens robbed and pillaged at every turn. To the contrary, Lincoln was now preaching to one and all that the Confederate states should be welcomed back into the Union as though they had never been away. Citizens of the South, he said, would return to the Union with all the constitutional rights enjoyed by citizens of the loyal Northern states.

Such talk was casting a dark pall over the Radicals in Congress and their plans to occupy and loot the devastated Southland.

With Lincoln's new support of amnesty for the South, all those highly outspoken abolitionists who had eagerly supported Lincoln through four long years of warfare were also beginning to look askance at one another. Based on Lincoln's earlier words, as well as his Emancipation Proclamation, they had assumed that with war's end he would immediately make first-class citizens of millions of former slaves, granting them the same civil rights enjoyed by white citizens. But now Lincoln was backtracking there as well, shuffling his feet and looking uncomfortable when asked about the future fate of all those former slaves. Well, perhaps those former slaves would be given the vote, he hemmed and hawed, but only those who were "extremely intelligent and had served in the Union army."

In late 1864 he had confided in William Seward, "I cannot visualize millions of freed black slaves walking the streets of America." Indeed, Lincoln was now saying that all those former slaves would likely be much happier if the government undertook a massive resettlement program that would take them back to their native Africa. In fact, a dozen boatloads had already deposited several thousand former slaves in Liberia.

For those seeking a final straw, it should be pointed out that the one move that sealed Lincoln's fate was his secret meeting in early April 1865 with Judge John Campbell, a Virginian and a former member of the Supreme Court prior to the war. During that meeting, Lincoln assured Judge Campbell that he would allow the Virginia State Legislature to convene within the coming week at the State House in Richmond to discuss matters of importance to Virginia now that the war was coming to an end. Not only would he allow

them to meet, said Lincoln, but he would order Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, commander of Union forces in Richmond, to furnish military escorts for the individual legislators as they came and went about state business.

According to Chief of Detectives Lafayette Baker, when Weitzel received his orders, he passed the message to Stanton, who flew into a rage and very brazenly countermanded the president's orders, instructing Weitzel to forbid the Virginia legislators to meet. Writes Baker, "Then for the first time I realized his mental disunity and his insane and fanatical hatred for the president. . . . He laughed in a most spine chilling manner and said, 'If he would to know who rescinded his order we will let Lucifer tell him.'" A day later, as Stanton predicted in his above statement, Lincoln was dead.

And what of Lincoln's secretary of state, the rabid Radical, William Seward? Oddly enough, his attitude now towards the Southern states was almost identical to that of the president. Seward had recently denounced any plans to make the South an occupied territory under military governors and martial law, advocating instead a rapid return of the Southern states to full participation in the political life of the nation. To the contrary, he had recently shouted to a stunned Congress that the Southern states should be welcomed back into the Union with all their constitutional rights totally restored.

Thus, in the eyes of Stanton and Johnson, Seward was just as much a traitor to the nation and the Republican Party as Abe Lincoln. Both men were extremely depressed at this recent turn of events and silently pondered the situation. Then, in a flash of inspiration, perhaps it suddenly occurred to Stanton and Johnson that it would be fortuitous if both traitors, Lincoln and Seward, should tragically perish on the same evening. And it could be claimed that their assassins were wild-eyed stooges of Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government.

What Lincoln was preaching now was downright treason, a betrayal of both his nation and his Republican Party. Of course if Lincoln should restore constitutional

rights to citizens of the South, that would include their right to vote. And of course, every former Confederate would vote for the Democratic nominee in 1868. Indeed, that year would sound the death knell for the Republican Party and for all those loyal party workers who had labored so long to see that Republicans stayed in power for the next thirty years. Among those workers, unfortunately, were Edwin Stanton and Andrew Johnson. Johnson was a Democrat, but he was a Unionist and had served as military governor of Tennessee during the war. Certainly come 1868 Johnson would be gone along with all the rest.

Stanton and Johnson were Radicals—highly opinionated, self-righteous, power-mad Radicals, who did not suffer traitors gladly. And now Lincoln and Seward had become the worst of traitors.

If Lincoln and Seward should suddenly be removed from office, the Radicals, aided and abetted by Andrew Johnson, would be free to exact their own terribly vindictive Reconstruction policies towards the South. Under their domination, Southerners would enjoy no constitutional rights; to the contrary, they would be occupied by a hostile Federal army. White males who had supported the Confederacy (about 99 percent of the white male population) would be disenfranchised while all black males would be given the vote, especially if they wished to vote Republican—and of course they all would. Then they would see what would happen to the Democrats and Republicans in the election of 1868.

The Radicals would send their civilian representatives, those thieves and thugs known derisively throughout both the North and South as Carpetbaggers, whose job it would be to see that Radical procedures were being suitably implemented. Their first task was to ensure that certain servile blacks were elected to public office at all levels of government. Then, once they had their black representatives in place, it would be a simple matter to have them raise property taxes for white farmers in their particular locale, at least enough to make sure that few could pay. Then black officials could confiscate farm property and

the Radicals would auction off that land to those Northern industrialists who were constantly searching for cheap natural resources and labor. What wonderful places to build their cotton mills! As for cheap labor, those displaced farmers who were daily watching their wives and children starving before their very eyes would beg for jobs—at any wages. All in all, agreed the Radicals, it was a wonderful and very profitable proposition, a wonderful payback to those Northern industrialists who had financed the Republican Party for the past four years.

And think of those tens of thousands of bales of cotton, white gold, sitting in warehouses and on wharves and hidden in swamps throughout the South. That cotton would be confiscated by the Federal government and auctioned off to the great entrepreneurs of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia who would then sell it to the cotton-starved nations of Europe.

But what about those poor Southern farmers who had lost all their cotton and land? Would they not wish to have their cases heard in court? Well, of course they could have their cases heard in court, military courts directly under the supervision of Edwin Stanton since no civil courts were allowed to function in the South. The outcome of such cases was a foregone conclusion.

And certainly with the Democratic Party essentially disenfranchised in the Southern states, the Republicans were assured power for years. Andrew Johnson, naive as he was, must have greeted Stanton's plans with glee. In 1868 he would simply move from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. With the support of Edwin Stanton, he could remain president for the next two terms.

Stanton smiled benevolently. Of course Johnson could count on his support—at least for a year or two, until it became convenient to dump him. Then Stanton himself would become the nominee of the Republican Party. At last, he, Edwin Stanton, would become president of the United States. Indeed, given enough time, he would become what he had been during the war, the supreme dictator of the United States.

After pondering Stanton's solution to the problem, Johnson very possibly observed, "So you are proposing that we assassinate the president of the United States."

Not the most tolerant of men, Stanton shook his head in exasperation. "No, I am not proposing that we *assassinate* the president of the United States, Mr. Johnson. I am proposing that we *execute* a traitor. There is some difference, you know."

It was a wonderful idea, the perfect solution to a real dilemma. According to Lafayette Baker's secret papers, Stanton unabashedly brought in Radical congressmen, industrialists, bankers, and military leaders to discuss his Reconstruction plans for pillaging the South. Of course, he would then explain quietly and solemnly, Lincoln and Seward would have to be executed in order for any of those plans to be realized.

With big dollar signs floating before their eyes, those who listened to Stanton's whispered lectures reluctantly agreed. Abe Lincoln and William Seward would have to be executed. Besides, traitors generally are executed, aren't they? As reprehensible as such a move might be to them personally, it was certainly the best thing for the nation.

Once that decision had been made, says Lafayette Baker, Stanton assigned him and Maj. Thomas Eckert to arrange the details of the execution. It should happen as soon as possible, now that the war had ended, before Lincoln could do any more damage to the party, before he could further broadcast his policy of amnesty for the South. Likely, Friday night, April 14, would be an opportune time for the executions. That night the Lincolns, accompanied by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, would be in attendance at Ford's Theatre. It would be a simple matter for an assassin or two to slip into the president's box and execute him. As for the fate of the assassins following the execution, it would be up to those worthies to plan their own escape, though they would certainly receive all the help the War Department could furnish. Indeed, the War Department wanted them to escape, or die, since dead men tell no tales.

Which would explain Boston Corbett's inexplicable murder of John Wilkes Booth on the morning of April 26. (Murder charges against Corbett were later dropped upon orders from Edwin Stanton.) It would also explain why the four conspirators who were known to have spoken with Booth on April 14 were later arrested and held totally incommunicado until all four were hanged on July 7, silencing their tongues forever.

And just how did John Wilkes Booth enter into this plotting and conniving? Back on February 20 a boarder at Mrs. Surratt's boardinghouse, Louis Weichmann, a clerk in the Commissary Office, reported to his commanding officer, a Captain Gleason, that he had observed many strange occurrences and many strange characters back at the boardinghouse, and he suspected that they might somehow be conspiring against the president. Weichmann then rattled off the names of the various strange characters he had observed, including that of John Wilkes Booth. Captain Gleason, afraid that Weichmann might be on to something, then reported the matter to Edwin Stanton's War Department.

Thus, as early as February 20, the War Department had the names of all those involved in the conspiracy to abduct the president. And once the decision was made to execute Lincoln, it would have been a simple matter for Major Eckert to contact John Wilkes Booth. No one knows what transpired between the two (or if such a meeting did in fact take place), but it is likely that Eckert could have persuaded Booth, who really did not require much persuading, that Abe Lincoln intended a vindictive Reconstruction policy that would totally destroy what remained of the South. But should Lincoln be eliminated, said Eckert, then Andrew Johnson, a Southern boy born and bred and a good Southern Democrat from Tennessee, would become president, and Johnson had privately sworn to welcome the South back into the Union with open arms. Under Johnson, there would be no reprisals. The Southern states would become full-fledged members of the Union, with all the rights enjoyed by other citizens.

And besides, it was well known that Johnson and Booth were old friends and had been for several years.

But in order for that to take place, Eckert cautioned, they would first have to execute Abe Lincoln, along with his major henchman, William Seward.

But what about Johnson's fate following the execution? Everyone knew that since his faux pas at Lincoln's second Inaugural (Johnson had become falling-down drunk), the president had snubbed him at every opportunity and was actively searching for an excuse to dump him. And now, following Lincoln's assassination, he should suddenly become president of the United States? Would that not strike people as suspicious? Would there not be certain individuals, people of great authority even, who might suspect that the ambitious Johnson had played some role in the assassination?

Yes, decidedly so, and this explains why Booth assigned poor George Atzerodt to assassinate the vice president. It is well known that Atzerodt was the most cowardly man east of the Mississippi River. Yet, on the evening of April 14, according to Atzerodt's later confession, Wilkes Booth assigned him of all people to murder Vice Pres. Andrew Johnson. Was Booth serious? What possibly could have motivated Booth to assign passive George Atzerodt to murder Andrew Johnson, the second-highest-ranking figure in American government? Certainly Booth was an unusually intelligent and perceptive young man, and he doubtlessly knew that Johnson would live forever if he waited for George Atzerodt to assassinate him. Obviously Booth never intended for Atzerodt to make a move against the vice president.

In the first place, Booth knew that if any attempt were made against the life of Andrew Johnson, then Abe Lincoln, the primary target, would definitely not appear at Ford's Theatre on the intended evening. He and his entire cabinet would be in hiding under heavy military guard. So why then would he even mention such a daring assignment to poor Atzerodt? The answer may be conjectured: If Johnson was involved in the conspiracy to execute Lincoln and Seward, then Booth created a very clever ploy to divert suspicion from

the vice president. Certainly there would be those who might suspect that Andrew Johnson, the primary beneficiary of Lincoln's death, had played a role in the execution conspiracy (and in fact, his accusers were legion), but now Johnson would have a plausible cover story, an iron-clad alibi. Would he be foolish enough to plot his own assassination? Of course he had nothing to do with it!

Such reasoning also explains why Booth instructed David Herold to plant the revolver and knife in Atzerodt's room at the Kirkwood House late in the afternoon of April 14. Booth knew that once the news of the president's assassination had become public, the desk clerk at the Kirkwood would inform authorities that a highly suspicious character was registered there in a room directly above that of Vice President Johnson. Once those authorities searched Atzerodt's room they would find the incriminating evidence, and it would be only a matter of time before Atzerodt was arrested. And Booth, an astute judge of human character, was fully aware that once Atzerodt was arrested, he would immediately crumble before his interrogators and tell everything he knew concerning the conspiracy, including the fact that he had been assigned to assassinate Vice Pres. Andrew Johnson.

If Johnson did conspire with Stanton, Baker, Eckert, and others in planning and carrying out Lincoln's execution, then it would be well for him to be able to swear that he was totally innocent of any such plot. And now he could. Why, he himself had been a target of the assassins! It was only a matter of luck that he had escaped with his life! All in all, if this scenario is accurate, then it was a very clever ploy.

Too, it should be remembered that in 1865 the vice president was second in rank only to President Lincoln. If Booth truly wished to throw the government into disarray by eliminating the heads of state, as numerous historians have claimed, he would have targeted the vice president and not the secretary of state. And he would have assigned Lewis Powell to carry out the execution, not George Atzerodt. Had Lewis Powell been given the assignment, there would have

been no failure. By Saturday morning, Andrew Johnson would have been just as dead as Abe Lincoln.

Therefore, it seems safe to conclude that those who planned the executions were not after the heads of state. They were after Lincoln and Seward, the two officials who advocated a conciliatory Reconstruction program for the South.

(It might be pointed out that had Seward succumbed to his wounds, he was slated to be succeeded as secretary of state by Sen. Ben Butler, the infamous Ben "The Beast" Butler, to whom "amnesty" meant hanging every Southerner in America, making him just the man the Radicals wanted to see in that office.)

Eckert might also have promised Booth help from the War Department in making his escape. For example, the army telegraph (Eckert was also head of the army's Telegraph Office), which had functioned without a hitch during four years of war, suddenly went silent at almost the exact moment that Lincoln was shot and did not begin functioning again for another four hours. Thus news of the execution and Booth's identity could not be telegraphed across the country for another four hours, certainly enough time for Booth, had he not broken his leg, to have made his escape through Maryland and to the coast of Virginia, where he hoped to catch a ship for Matamoros, Mexico.

Eckert also might have told him that sentries posted at the Navy Yard Bridge would receive instructions to allow him to pass. Nor would Union cavalry be dispatched to search the route Booth would surely travel (the same route taken by Confederate agents throughout the war) until he had long passed that area. Indeed, Union cavalry was alerted in such far off areas as Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia, but *not* on the route that any sane Confederate agent would travel.

Doubtlessly Eckert would have advised Booth that he need not fear the presence of bodyguards at the theater. Stanton had already agreed to forbid Grant's presence, and as for Eckert (called the strongest man in Washington), certainly he would make up a plausible excuse not to attend. Probably he would be too busy with his telegraphic work.

And that is exactly what happened. Grant, a West Point graduate, was very much aware that an army officer does not snub a social invitation from his commander in chief. But inexplicably that is what Grant did, and for the flimsiest of excuses: at five that afternoon he sent Lincoln a note explaining that he and his wife had decided at the last minute to catch the afternoon train out of Washington for Brunswick, New Jersey, where they planned to visit their children. So sorry. Maybe next time. Please give his best to the hundreds of citizens gathered at Ford's Theatre that evening to shout their congratulations for his winning the war. Love, Sam.

As for Major Eckert, Lincoln himself, once he learned of Grant's sudden impulse to cater to his paternal instincts, went to Stanton and requested that the major be allowed to accompany him and Mrs. Lincoln to the theater. But Stanton responded that the major had too much work to do in the Telegraph Office that evening. Obviously disappointed, Lincoln then walked next door to Eckert's office and personally appealed to Eckert. But Eckert echoed Stanton's remarks. He shook his head and stated that he simply had too much work to do that evening to take off for the theater.

In fact, later testimony would prove that both Stanton and Eckert were lying. Eckert left the office at five that afternoon, went home, and did nothing for the rest of the evening—except to await the startling news from Ford's Theatre.

Certainly Booth was fully aware before he ever accepted his grim assignment that the president would be without bodyguards at the theater. Why else would he have armed himself with nothing more reliable than a small *single-shot* Derringer? He had in his possession several army Colt *six-shot* revolvers. Had he anticipated any resistance whatsoever, he would have carried one of those Colts. But he knew before he arrived at the theater that neither Grant, Eckert, nor any other bodyguards would be present. The question is, how could Booth possibly have known that the president would be alone and unprotected, unless he had been assured of that fact in advance.

The president would have *one* bodyguard, an officer from the Metropolitan Police Department, a drunken debauchee by the name of John Parker would be assigned to sit in a chair just outside the president's box. Officer Parker unfortunately had a lengthy record of reprimands for his drunken misadventures while on duty. Yet, Mrs. Lincoln herself, at Stanton's urging, had naively requested that Officer Parker serve her husband on this night of all nights. And sure enough at the moment that Booth entered the president's box, Parker was standing at the bar in the saloon next door becoming quite inebriated. Parker then vanished following the shooting and did not reappear until the next morning when he staggered into police headquarters with a disheveled woman in tow, a woman whom he happily claimed he had arrested for prostitution. He himself was immediately arrested and charged with dereliction of duty. (Charges against Parker were later dropped thanks to an order from Edwin Stanton.)

Eckert might well have concluded his persuasive talk with Booth by pointing out that everything was ready and in place. Booth had only to agree now to pull the trigger, and Lincoln's execution was an accomplished fact. Would Booth refuse and allow an evil tyrant to remain in office, or would he perform a deed that would win the lasting gratitude from citizens throughout the nation, especially those in his beloved South?

Sen. Ben Butler, during Johnson's impeachment trial of 1867, shouted from the floor of the senate:

How clear himself? By disclosing his accomplices? Who were they? If we had only the advantage of all the testimony, Mr. Speaker, we might have been able to find out who, indeed, were these accomplices of Booth; to find out who it was that could profit by assassination who could not profit by capture and abduction, who it was expected would succeed to Lincoln if the knife made a vacancy.

Ben Butler did everything but name Pres. Andrew Johnson as the moving force behind Lincoln's execution, an opinion held by many. Unfortunately, at this late date,

no one will ever know for certain just who Booth's "accomplices" were. We can only speculate based on circumstantial evidence.

What is known for certain is that Booth did execute the president on the night of April 14, and with Lincoln's death died his great and benevolent plans for a constitutional Reconstruction program for the South.