

**THE UNWRITTEN HISTORY
OF THE ASSASSINATION
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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The Unwritten History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln by Richard Mitchell Smoot

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RICHARD MITCHELL SMOOT

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PRESS OF
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1908

FOREWORD

My only desire in issuing this reprint of the late Richard Mitchell Smoot's manuscript of "The Unwritten History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," is that this valuable contribution to the list of *Lincolnia* may be preserved in a printed form.

The work was originally published for Mr. Smoot by the John Murphy Company of Baltimore, Md., and the first five copies bound by that publishing house were sent to the author for copyright purposes, two of them being forwarded to Washington, D. C., and they are now in the Congressional Library. The other three were presented to personal friends of the author, who, at that time, confidently expected to receive the remainder of the edition from his publishers. Before they could be bound and shipped, however, the great fire of February 7, 1904, destroyed the plant of the John Murphy Company, together with the remaining copies of the entire edition. The author's death followed on

May 8, 1906, and in the interim between the date of the Baltimore fire and his death, no arrangements were made for a re-publication of the work.

The undersigned received the manuscript from the author's daughter, and it is here reprinted without alteration.

ORRA L. STONE.

CLINTON, MASS., November, 1908.

The Unwritten History

OF THE

Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

THE complete history of the plot to abduct and assassinate Abraham Lincoln has never been written, and it probably never will be; for of all who took part in that tragic event only John H. Surratt, whose mother was hung for complicity in that tragic event, alone lives to make of that history a correct recital, and his mouth is closed for personal reasons. Even he owes his life to a fortunate incident, and a chance, which is here written down for the first time, and until this publication known only to himself and R. M. Smoot, who now resides at 922 North 5th street, Fort Smith, Arkansas.* Mr. Smoot was for many years of his life a successful planter in Charles County, Maryland, close to the locality in which John Wilkes Booth took refuge after the commission of his insane act. Mr. Smoot recently disposed of his holdings in Charles County and took up his residence in Fort Smith to spend

*Mr. Smoot died May 8, 1906.

the remainder of his days with his son, who is engaged in business in that city.

Not only does Mr. Smoot know the secret of Surratt's escape from the gallows, but it was he who bargained with him for the sale of the boat in which it was intended to convey Booth and his fellow conspirators across the river Potomac after their flight from Washington on that fatal night when the world was made agape with astonishment, the woes of a nation multiplied many fold, and it was plunged into a sorrow verging on despair.

"So long as there was anyone likely to be injured by a revelation of the secrets I have kept hidden within myself for these forty years and more," said Mr. Smoot to the writer, "I kept my word inviolate, and did no violence to the faith reposed in me; but now, as there are none to be injured by my breaking the long silence, I will add an important bit to that historic event which so shocked the country into a dumb consternation."

And here Mr. Smoot told the following interesting narrative, which explains many things heretofore garbed in impenetrable mystery, and which, if known in the beginning, would have insured the hanging of John H. Surratt, who is now a resident of Baltimore, Maryland, where he has resided for many years.

"At the time of the breaking out of the war," began Mr. Smoot, "I was engaged in farming in Charles County, Maryland, about two miles from the town of Port Tobacco, situated upon a creek of that name which is a branch of the Potomac. When the ravages of war began to take on form, farming became unprofitable, and I was compelled to turn my attention in other directions in order to make a living. I owned a good, large and stout boat, and fell into the way of transporting goods and passengers across the Potomac, and from that occupation to that of running the blockade was but a short step and an inviting one. I was engaged in that hazardous but fascinating undertaking in 1864. In the early part of that year I received a visit from John H. Surratt, who expressed a desire to purchase my boat. He also said that he would have use for two other good boats which, however, must be capable of transporting fifteen persons each rapidly and safely across the Potomac. He was noticeably eager to secure my boat, and incidentally explained his desire to have the boat by saying that it would be needed in an emergency which might arise within a very short time. He also said that if purchased the boat would be immediately removed to a point up King's Creek, which is a branch of the Potomac about ten miles from Port Tobacco, where it was to

be held in readiness for instant use. With reference to the other two boats wanted, Surratt said they were to be stationed at certain unnamed points to meet exigencies which might arise and cause well-laid plans to go astray, and which did arise. I was using my boat, and asked Surratt if he could not do without it for a while; but he declared that if he bought it he would want possession right away, as the need of the boat would be the consequence of an event of unprecedented magnitude in the history of the country, which would startle and astound the entire world. He did not go into any further explanation of the expected event, which I inferred was then in process of incubation, and on the verge of maturity. While Surratt's manner impressed me with the belief that something big was going to happen, I had not the remotest idea that the life of Lincoln was then any more at stake than was the life of any man who was taking active and prominent part in the war, though I was inclined to associate the coming event with a plan to abduct Lincoln, concerning which plan I had heard vague rumors.

"However, after some little time spent in negotiating with Surratt, I finally agreed to sell him the boat for two hundred and fifty dollars, which amount was to be deposited with some third party