

The Lincoln Assassination:
Facts, Fiction and Frankly Craziness
Class 3 –
Lincoln Assassination Conspiracies

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Intro

Was it just Booth and a small band of associates that carried out the events of April 14th?

Intro

In this class, we will look at a number of possible other outcomes, and weigh their possibilities

Intro

These include:

1. Andrew Johnson was involved with Booth
2. Lincoln's assassination was the result of a Confederate Plot
3. Lincoln's assassination was the result of a conspiracy of powerful international bankers

Intro

These include:

4. The Roman Catholic Church was behind Lincoln's assassination
5. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was the mastermind behind Lincoln's assassination

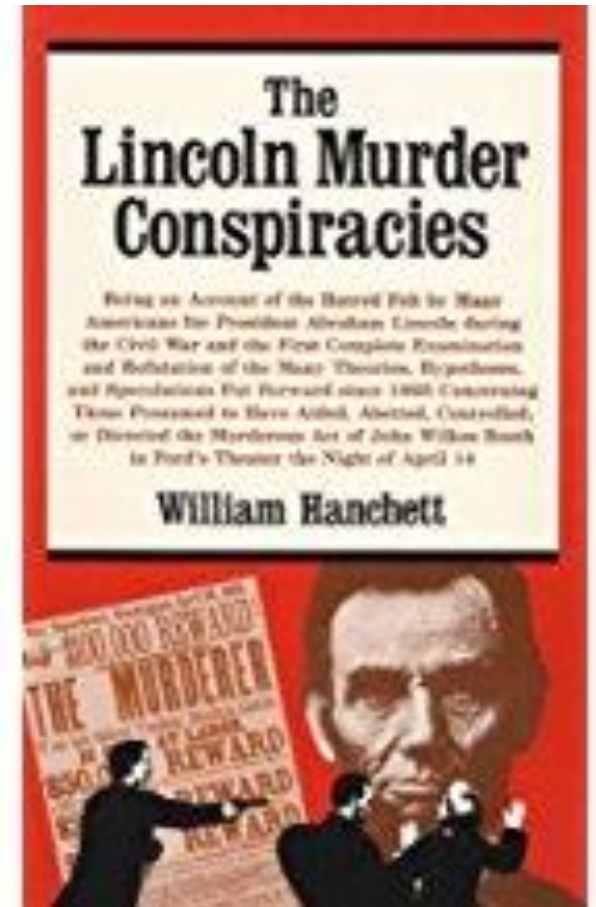
Intro

And, as a bonus.....

Booth did not die at the
Garrett Farm but

1. Moved to India or
2. Later lived and died in
Oklahoma

Although it is now almost 35 years old, William Hanchett's *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* remains the standard in discussing (and debunking) much of today's class



Conspiracy #1 –

Andrew Johnson was involved in the
Lincoln Assassination

Cui bono

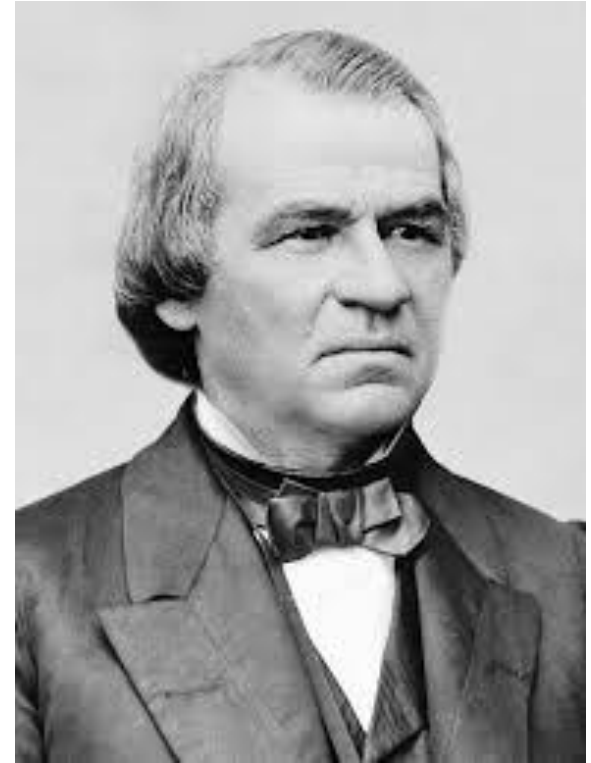
- There is a principle in criminal investigation (for all of you who have watched a *Law and Order* franchise show) – cui bono
- Translated, it means who benefits?
- In investigations, it means who benefits by an action, and that is your suspect for the action

Cui bono

- So who benefited by the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?
- Clearly VP Andrew Johnson, who became President on Lincoln's death

Andrew Johnson

- Johnson was a Democratic Senator from Tennessee who remained loyal to the Union
- After Tennessee was occupied by Union forces, he became Military Governor of the state
- He ran with Lincoln in 1864 on a National Union ticket
- Famously, he gave a rambling, drunken speech at the 1865 Inauguration

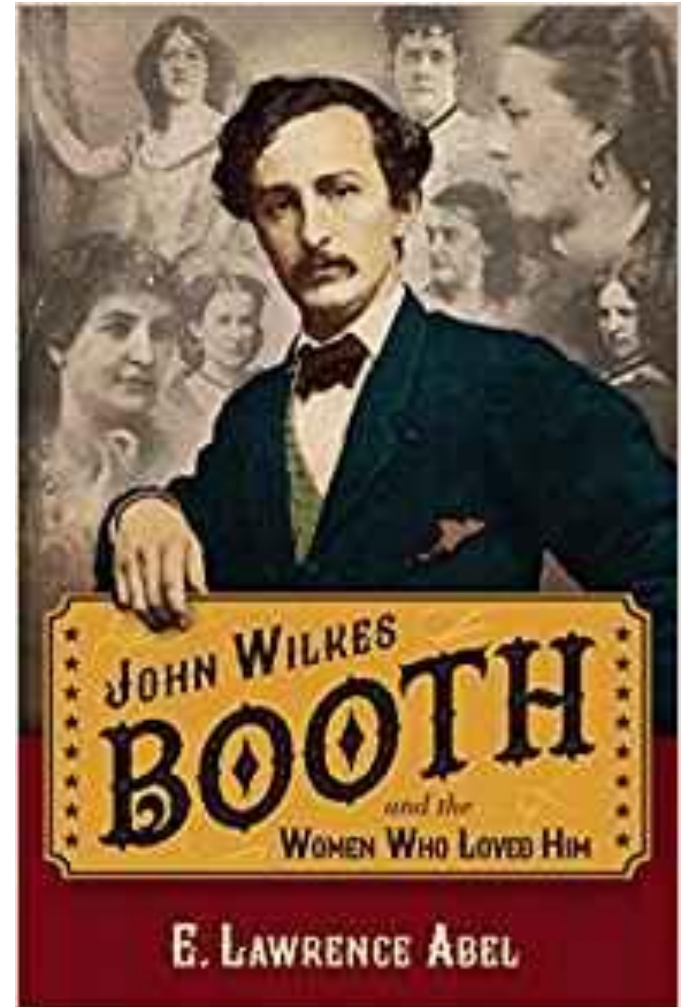


Andrew Johnson

- As noted, on the day of the assassination, Booth left his card at Johnson's hotel with the cryptic note "Don't wish to disturb you; are you at home?"
- Accused Confederate conspirators tried to deflect blame to Johnson as the only one who truly benefited from Lincoln's death

Andrew Johnson

- According to E. Lawrence Abel and other authors , in February 1864, while Johnson was Governor of TN, Booth played there
- While there, Booth and Johnson shared two sisters as their lovers
- If these sources are to be believed, then Johnson and Booth had an “intimate” relationship



Andrew Johnson

- Mary Todd Lincoln, a great hater, would later write (emphasis in original)

...That miserable inebriate Johnson had cognizance of my husband's death...Why was *that card* of Booth found in his box...As sure as you & I live, Johnson had some hand in this...

Summary

- Booth had a tendency to leave evidence where it might involve others, whether letters in trunks or letters to be delivered
- He may have also been trying to fix Johnson's location for Atzerodt to kill him later that night
- Mary Todd is certainly not the most rational analyst, and others had reason to deflect blame

Verdict

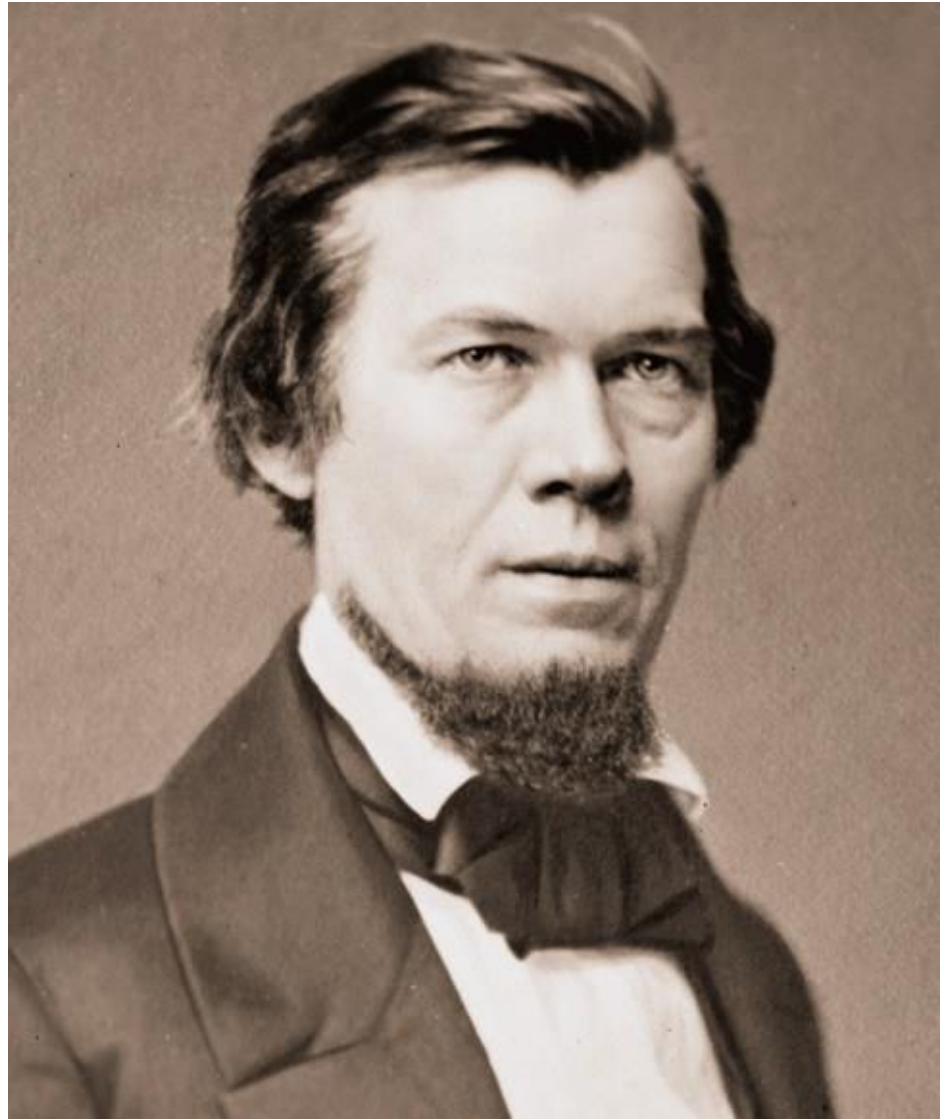
Not Proven!

Conspiracy #2 –

Lincoln's assassination was
the result of a Confederate
plot

First, a little background

- The Confederacy established a Secret Service in 1864, centered in Montreal and Toronto
- The group, headed by Jacob Thompson (r) and Clement Clay, operated quite openly out of the St. Lawrence Hall in Montreal
- From there, they planned raids on St. Albans in Vermont and an attempt to free prisoners on Johnston Island in Lake Erie



First, a little background

- It is known as a fact that Booth was in Montreal in October 1864
- At that time, he checked into the St. Lawrence Hall, which was the HQ of the Confederate Secret Service
- At that time, Booth was more interested in a kidnapping plot – the assassination plot did not begin until later.



First, a little background

- One of the biggest plots was to burn down New York
- On November 25, 1864, a fire was started in Barnum's Museum and three hotels
- However, other agents fled rather than start fires
- Ironically, the fire in the Lafarge Hotel interrupted a play in the Winter Garden, where Junius, Edwin and John Wilkes Booth were performing



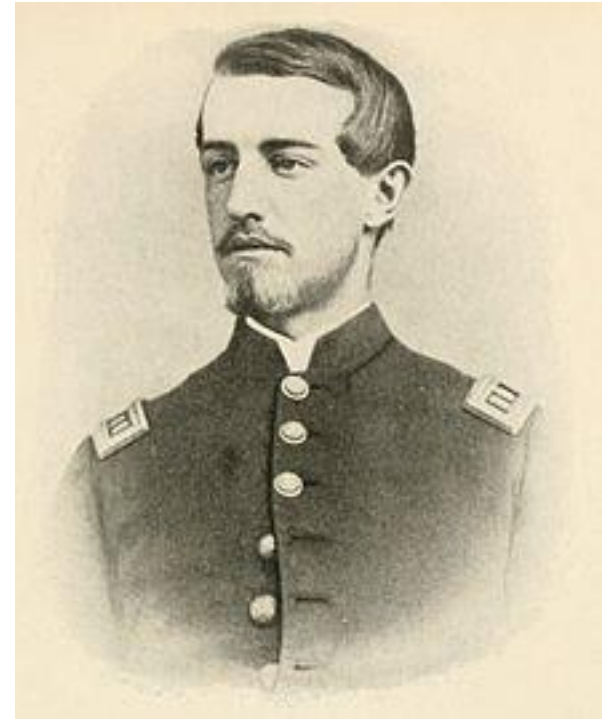
On the Union side

- In March 1864, prior to LTG Grant preparing his overland campaign, BG Judson Kilpatrick led a raid against Richmond.
- The stated goal was to free Union prisoners held at Belle Isle and Libby Prison
- Surrounded by Confederate Cavalry, Kilpatrick never reached Richmond, heading instead down the Peninsula



On the Union side

- One of the detachments was led by COL Ulrich Dahlgren, and got separated from the main force.
- The unit was surrounded, and COL Dahlgren killed
- A young boy, looking for booty, allegedly came across some papers which he turned over to the authorities.



Dahlgren Papers

- The papers included the following inflammatory wording:

The men must keep together and well in hand, and once in the city it must be destroyed and Jeff. Davis and Cabinet killed

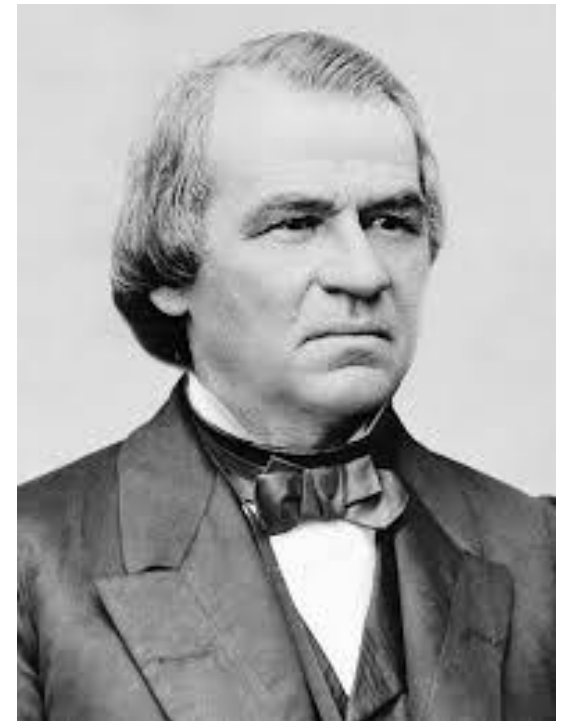
- Most historians consider the papers to be false, used to fire up Confederates

Dahlgren Papers

These papers were thought, in the post assassinations trials, to provide a motive for the Confederate conspiracy

The Confederate Conspiracy at the Military Commission

- Judge Advocate Joseph Holt concluded in a proclamation dated April 24 that “This Department has information that the President’s murder was organized in Canada and approved in Richmond”
- Acting on this proclamation, President Andrew Johnson (r) ordered rewards of \$100,000 for Jefferson Davis and \$25,000 each for the 4 Confederate commissioners in Canada.



The Confederate Conspiracy at the Military Commission

- When the other conspirators were captured and put on trial by the Military Commission, Holt (also the lead prosecutor) saw the opportunity to prove the Confederate conspiracy
- He would go to great lengths – some legal, some not, some ethical, some not – to do so.

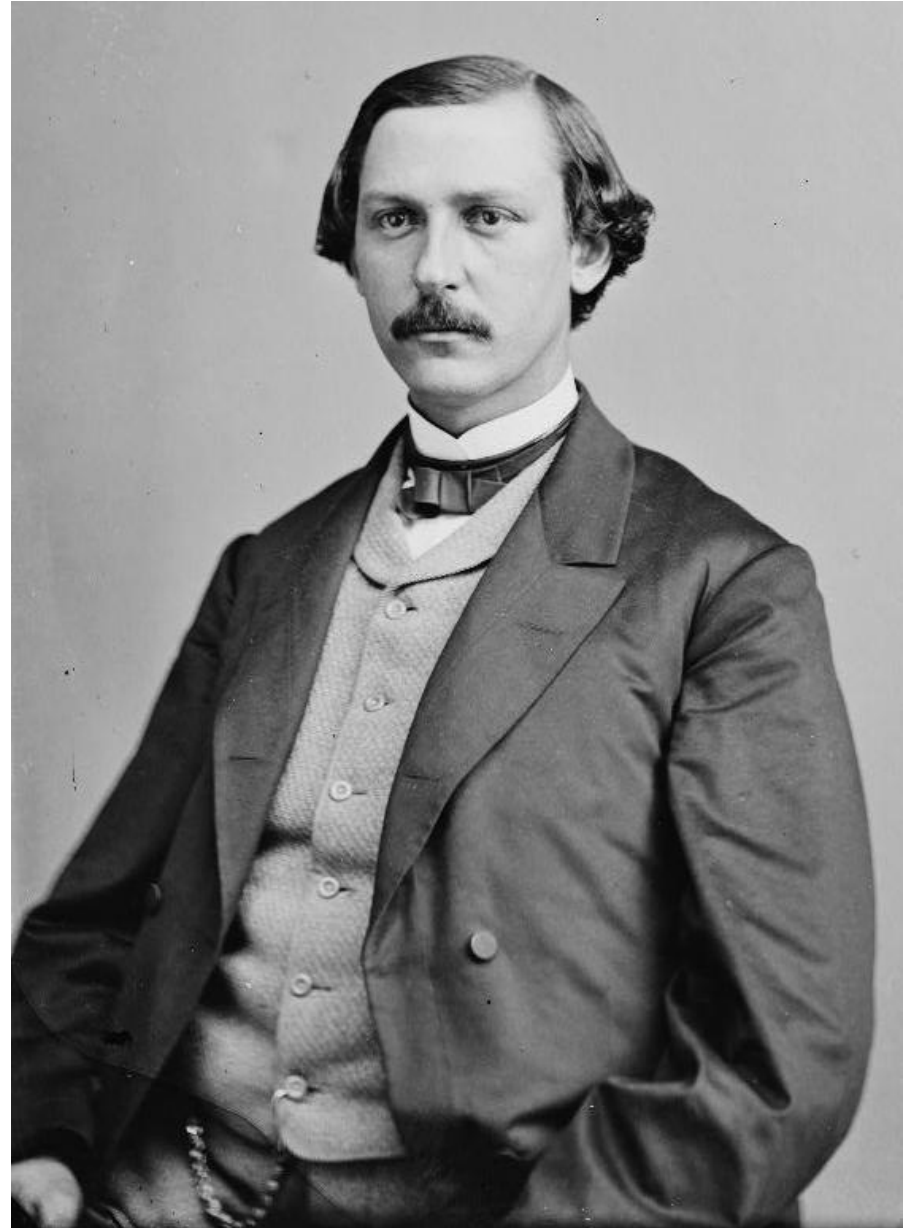


Examples of Testimony

- James Merritt, a Canadian MD, testified that when he asked Confederate Commissioner Clay about the assassination, Clay replied “the end justified the means”
- Richard Montgomery, a spy for the US, testified that Commissioner Thompson told him the South had so many friends in the North, Lincoln could be disposed of at any time.

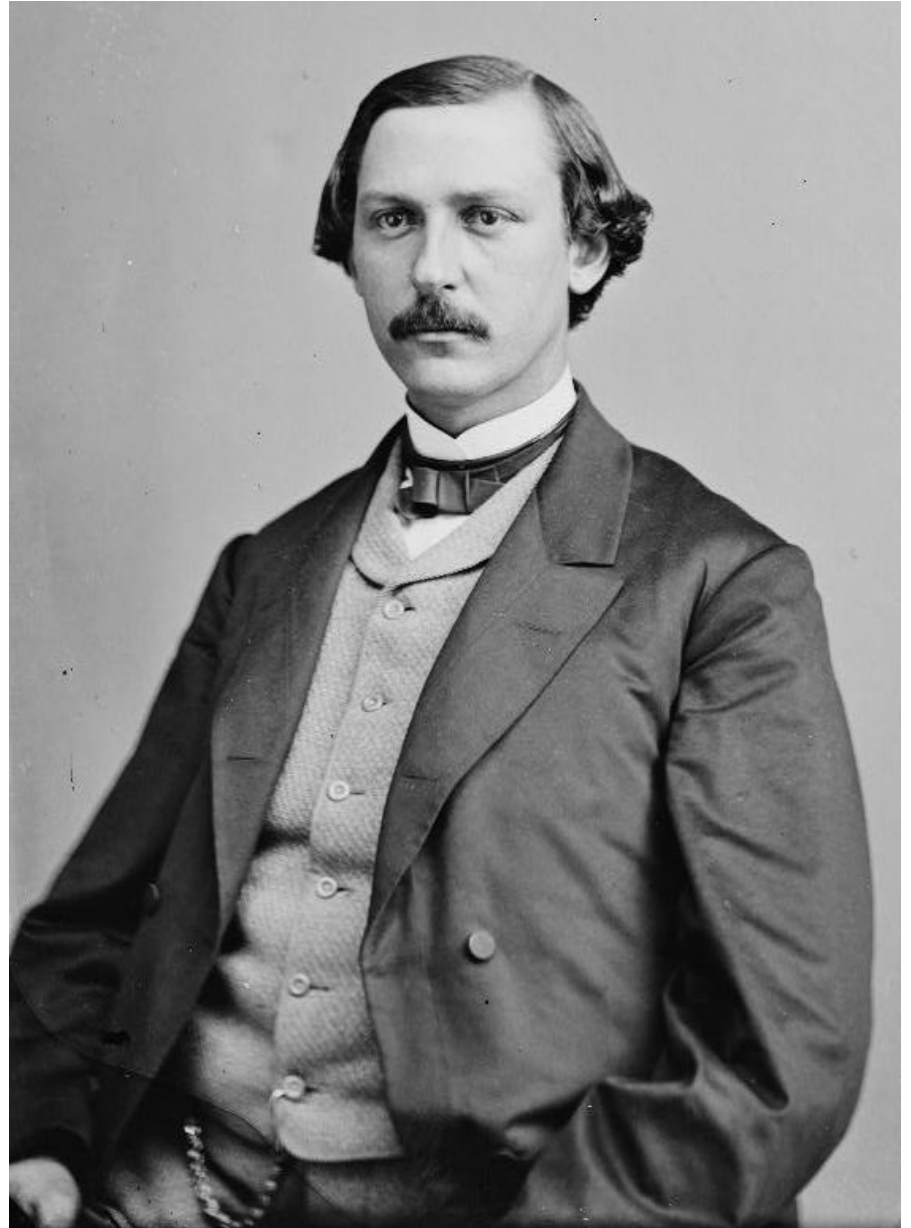
Sandford Conover

- Conover had originally been an official in the Confederate War Dept and fled to the North in 1863
- By 1864 he was a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*
- He testified that Thompson told him of a plan to assassinate the President and asked him to join in it



Sandford Conover

- He further testified that he was with Thompson when John Surratt arrived from Richmond at some time between April 6 and 9 with instructions to assassinate Lincoln
- Remember Surratt was in Elmira at that time.



Problems with Conover

- A letter was soon found, addressed by Conover under an alias to Thompson (and addressed March 20, 1865), which started “Although I have not had the pleasure of your acquaintance...”
- Other problems would crop up later to discredit him

Problems with Conover

- Holt appeared before the House Judiciary Committee in April 1866 and provided affidavits from 8 witnesses supplied by Conover to buttress the case that Davis was behind the assassination
- Unfortunately for Holt and Conover, one of the witnesses quickly and publicly recanted

Problems with Conover

- Holt saw the only way to remedy the situation was for Conover to testify under oath to the Committee
- Conover agreed – and promptly disappeared.
- He was not found until the Fall of 1866

Problems with Conover

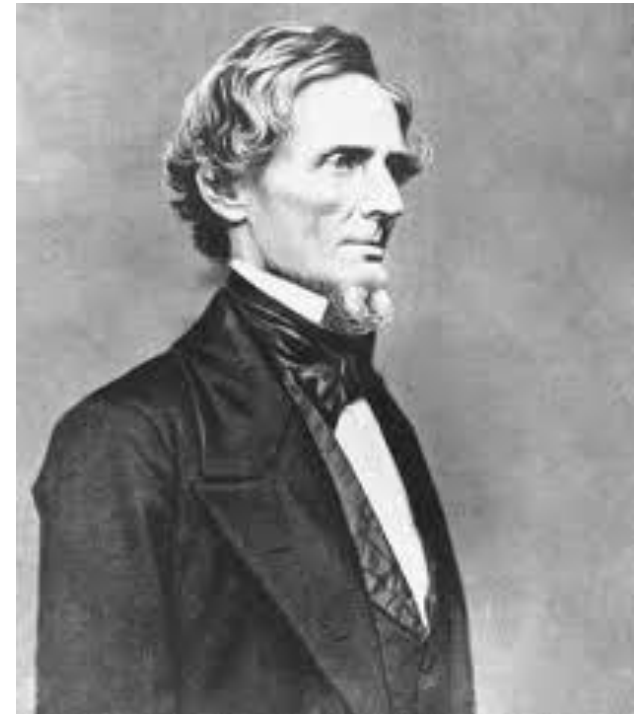
- At that time, he was tried for perjury, under his real name of Charles A. Dunham
- He testified that he had coached witnesses in revenge for Davis having put him in prison
- But he continued to maintain that his original testimony was true

Problems with Conover

- He was convicted on all counts, and sentenced to 10 years in prison
- He largely disappears from public view after that

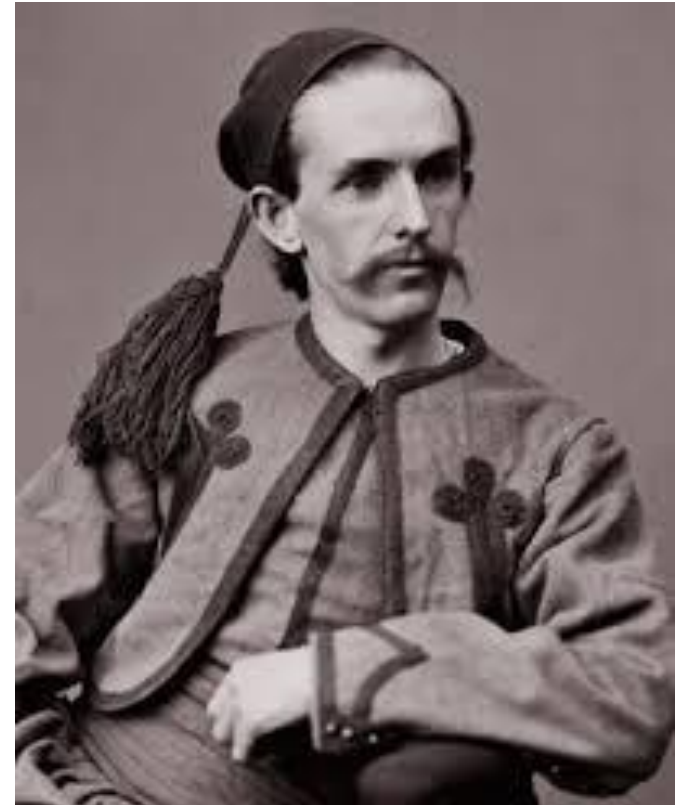
Jefferson Davis

- Meanwhile, on May 10, after the assassination but before the conspiracy trials, Jefferson Davis was captured in GA.
- Not knowing what to do with him, the US cabinet voted to try Davis, in a civil court rather than military, for treason rather than assassination.
- This vote came on July 21, two weeks after the execution of the four conspirators
- The trial would never take place



John Surratt trial

- The final blow to the Confederate Grand Conspiracy was in the John Surratt trial in 1867
- Tried in a civil instead of military court, the prosecution again tried to link Confederate leadership with the assassination,
- The trial ended in a hung jury, and Surratt was never retried.



Summary

- There is ample circumstantial evidence that the Canadian Confederate Commissioners were involved in a kidnapping plot.
- However, it is less clear they had anything to do with the assassination
 - Booth did not turn to assassination until well after his visit to Canada
 - There is no indication of communications or money being sent in furtherance of the assassination

Verdict

Not Proven!

Conspiracy #3 –

Lincoln's assassination was the result
of a group of powerful international
bankers

International bankers

- Reasons:
 - The Union needed money to finance the Civil War
 - The Rothschilds offered money at high interest rates
 - Lincoln declined this offer and financed the loans elsewhere cheaper

International bankers

- Reasons:
 - Also, Lincoln was supportive of protectionism
 - Lincoln also favored a lenient reconstruction policy that would have allowed Southern goods to again flood the market
 - The Rothschilds bet the other way, and needed a strong Radical Reconstruction policy to come out ahead.

International bankers

- Advocates believe that Stanton was somehow involved in the conspiracy (different from the Stanton conspiracy discussed later)
- As an example of fitting things to the conspiracy, it was widely reported that Mary Lincoln, after the assassination, turned to Ford's Theater and uttered, "Oh, that terrible house"

International bankers

- Conspiracy theorists agree
Mary said this
- But they argue she was
referring to Thomas House, a
banker and the Rothschilds'
man in the US (?!?!?!)

International bankers

- Somehow, the conspiracy gets tied up with the Federal Reserve (which was not started until 1913, almost 50 years after Lincoln's death)
- The argument (if you can figure it out) is Lincoln issued notes that somehow didn't pay interest to bankers

Summary

- We are going deep down the rabbit hole with this one.
- While most of the theories have a kernel of possibility, I tend to agree with Hanchett, who stated:

Another lunacy with devoted partisans is that Lincoln was done in by a conspiracy of international bankers, led by the Rothschilds....

Verdict

Not proven!
(really, really, really!)

Conspiracy #4 –

The Roman Catholic Church was
behind Lincoln's assassination

The Catholic Conspiracy:

Background

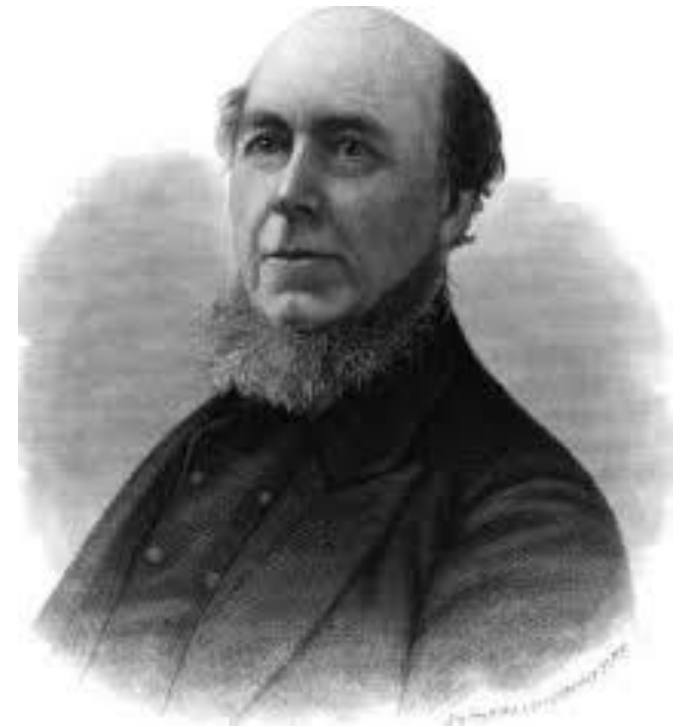
- Immigration during the early years of the country was largely from The United Kingdom – Protestant England, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- However, in the 1840's a series of famines in Ireland led to huge Irish Catholic emigration
- This in turn led to a counter movement in the US – exemplified by the American (Know Nothing) anti immigration political party
- This party, besides electing Congressmen, was able to run former President Millard Fillmore as their Presidential candidate in 1856, receiving 21.5% of the vote

The Catholic Conspiracy: Background

**So it is not surprising, given
this background, that a
Catholic conspiracy would
arise!**

Charles Chiniquy

- Chiniquy was born in 1809 (the same year as Lincoln) and became a priest in Canada in 1833 before moving to Illinois
- While there, he was sued by a Catholic layman, and Chiniquy employed Abraham Lincoln as his lawyer.
- As was his wont, Lincoln settled the case out of court, but Chiniquy thought this was a stinging rebuke to the Church.
- Later, Chiniquy was defrocked by the Archbishop of Chicago, and then left the Catholic Church



Chiniquy and Lincoln

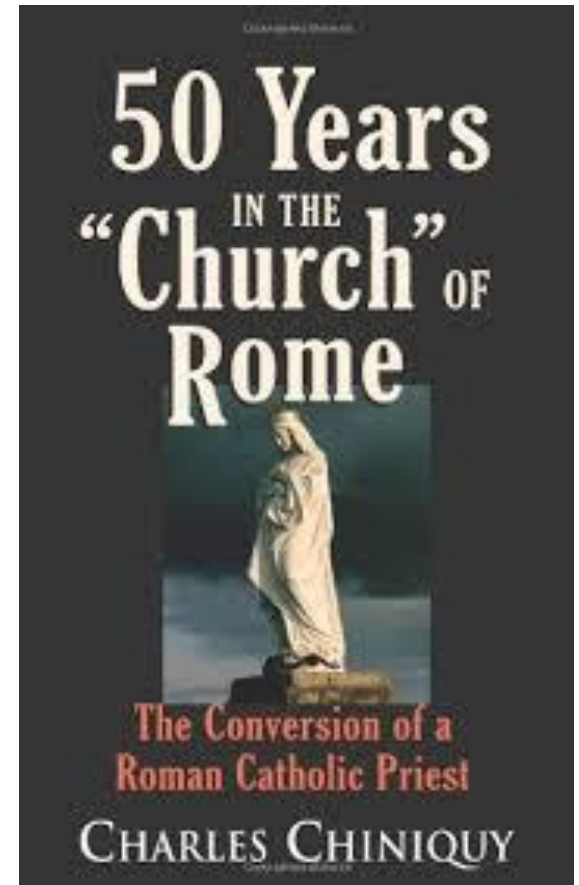
- Chiniquy would later write of his continuing relationship with Lincoln
 - In a August 1861 conversation, after Chiniquy made reference to rumors that Lincoln had been born a Catholic, Lincoln supposedly replied “Thank God I have never been a Roman Catholic”
 - After a later visit in 1862, Lincoln supposedly said in 1864 that “This war would never had been possible without the sinister influence of the Jesuits”

Chiniquy and Lincoln

- Of course, there is no evidence that Lincoln made any such statements
- In fact, there is no evidence that Chiniquy met with Lincoln after his election to the Presidency
- Moreover, Robert Todd Lincoln later wrote to a Catholic magazine that he never heard his father utter a anti Catholic sentiment, but that his father's name was "a peg upon which to hang many things."

Charles Chiniquy

- After his excommunication, he would spend the rest of his life (as a Protestant) attacking the Catholic church and accusing it of everything under the sun, including the Lincoln Assassination
- It was all compiled in a strange book, *50 Years in the Church of Rome* that still remains in print today and is quoted by anti Catholic activists



So what is the evidence
that Lincoln ended up
being killed as the result of
Catholics?

Basis for the Catholic Conspiracy

1. Many of the conspirators were Catholic (in a largely Protestant country)
 - Mary and John Surratt
 - Dr. Samuel Mudd
 - David Herold (at least educated in a Catholic school)

Basis for the Catholic Conspiracy

2. The Pope's letter

- Pope Pius IX allegedly addressed a letter to Jefferson Davis as “Illustrious and Hon. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America”
- If so, this could be construed as granting recognition to the Confederacy
- Actually, it was a personal letter to Davis, addressed to Honorable President of the Confederate States of America
- While not granting recognition, this letter led to a 1867 law preventing diplomatic relations with the Holy See

Basis for the Catholic Conspiracy

3. Early notice

- Chiniquy makes reference to an affidavit from a Protestant minister in St. Joseph MN that at 6:00 (4 hours before the assassination) priests were telling villagers that Lincoln and Seward were dead
- Of course, this pre knowledge would mean that they were in on the secret
- The problem of course being that for a priest in a small town in Minnesota to know the secret, a whole heck of a lot of other people would have to know it, and there is no evidence of this.

Summary

- In support of the conspiracy we have:
 - Statements that Lincoln supposed made to Chiniquy with no documentation, and in fact unlikely historically
 - The fact that a larger than expected number of conspirators were Catholic
 - A letter from the Pope that could be interpreted as supporting the Confederacy, when no formal recognition was made
 - A completely unsupported story that there was early notification of the assassination in an obscure village in MN but nowhere else

Verdict

Not proven!

Conspiracy #5 –

Secretary of War Stanton was the
mastermind behind Lincoln's
assassination

Edwin Stanton

- Stanton, a Democrat, was the last Attorney General in Buchanan's Cabinet
- He replaced Lincoln's first Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, who was involved in shady dealings
- Stanton was forceful Secretary of War, managing the largest military in US history to that point



Edwin Stanton

- He first engaged with Lincoln as attorneys, and did not have a high opinion of Lincoln
- Later, their relationship turned to respect and even love
- Stanton was present at the Peterson House after Lincoln was shot, essentially running the government
- Famously, he said after Lincoln died “Now he belongs to the ages.”



Otto Eisenschiml

- The most famous proponent of the Stanton conspiracy was Otto Eisenschiml
- Born in Vienna, Austria in June 1880, his father had emigrated to the US, served as an officer in the Union Army in the Civil War, and lived in the US until 1872 when he returned to Austria



Otto Eisenschiml

- After Otto graduated from college in Vienna with a degree in chemistry, he also sailed for the US
- First working as a chemist, he later founded a manufacturing company and became rich
- He took up history as an avocation, particularly Civil War military history

Otto Eisenschiml

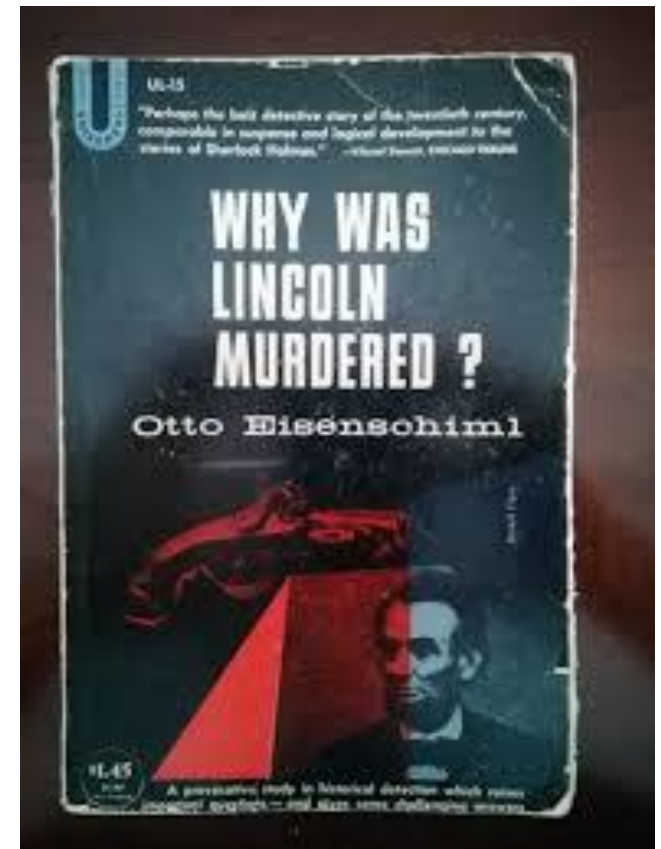
- Eisenschiml tells the story that he answered the question in his head while driving in Chicago
- With the answer, he jammed on the brakes, causing the car behind him to hit him
- When the driver demanded to know what he was thinking, Eisenschiml replied “I now know why Grant didn’t accompany Lincoln to the theater!”

The Stanton Conspiracy

- The only possible reason (at least to Eisenschiml) was that Grant was ordered not to
- And the only person with the authority to so order would be Secretary of War Stanton

The Stanton Conspiracy

- Eisenschiml would set out his theory and evidence in a book entitled *Why was Lincoln Murdered*
- In it, Eisenschiml argues that he is just asking questions based on the evidence



The Stanton Conspiracy

- Planks of evidence in the Conspiracy
 - When telegrams were sent out to watch roads, the actual road Booth and Herold took were not mentioned
 - There was a two hour interruption of the telegraph from Washington to the outside world
 - There was no coordination among the search parties

The Stanton Conspiracy

- Planks of evidence in the Conspiracy
 - Booth was killed so he could not spill the beans
 - The prisoners were hooded at the trial so they could not do likewise
 - There were 18 missing pages of Booth's diary which, according to Eisenschiml, could have incriminated Stanton

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- When telegrams were sent out to watch roads, the actual road Booth and Herold took were not mentioned
 - First, while afterwards, it was known that Booth took this route, there was no immediate evidence that he did
 - Also, the Union had no troops or telegraphic facilities in Southern MD

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- When telegrams were sent out to watch roads, the actual road Booth and Herold took were not mentioned
 - Stanton did warn the Naval Station at St. Inigoes MD, nearest where Booth would have crossed, before midnight on the night of the assassination
 - Finally, if Booth had not been injured and needed to stop at Dr. Mudd's house, he would have been deep into VA if he took the Southern MD route

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- There was a two hour interruption of the telegraph from Washington to the outside world
 - What was interrupted for two hours was the commercial telegraph branch from DC to Baltimore
 - It did not affect the military telegraph or other commercial telegraph

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- There was a two hour interruption of the telegraph from Washington to the outside world
 - It was clear that Stanton was in constant telegraphic communication with MG Dix in New York
 - Chief Telegraph Officer Eckert, in Congressional testimony, essentially indicated that this minor break was not worth investigating

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- There was no coordination among the search parties
 - Finally, with rewards in the hundreds of thousands, if one search party received a lead, they were not going to coordinate with another party, and possibly have to split up the reward

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- There was no coordination among the search parties
 - Having multiple intelligence sources about Booth's escape route, search parties were sent in every direction
 - Multiple parties went to Southern MD, at different times and different places, but in the heat of the moment, were not coordinated, just as those sent to other locations

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- Booth was killed so he could not spill the beans
 - Eisenschiml argues that Everton Conger, acting under Stanton's orders, had Booth killed so he could not reveal details about the assassination plot.
 - To do so, Eisenschiml must overcome the notion that Boston Corbett fired the fatal shot.

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- Booth was killed so he could not spill the beans
 - He first argues correctly that Corbett was 30 feet away from the barn
 - However, it is also clear as the situation went on, the soldiers changed their position and moved closer to the barn

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- Booth was killed so he could not spill the beans
 - There is no one there who ever said anyone but Corbett fired the fatal shot
 - Finally, Booth remained conscious for hours until his death, and did not reveal any details of a plot during those hours – when clearly if Stanton ordered him to kill Lincoln, this would have been Booth's final revenge

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- The prisoners were hooded at the trial so they could not also speak
 - To ensure that the prisoners remained silent, they would have been all condemned to death
 - According to Eisenschiml, those not condemned to death would be sent to a civil prison in Albany NY, so Stanton intervened to send them to the Dry Tortugas

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- The prisoners were hooded at the trial so they could not also speak
 - Even if in isolation in the Dry Tortugas, the prisoners had plenty of time to speak to guards and sailors on the ship taking them to confinement
 - Also, Spangler, Mudd and Arnold all lived after release (Arnold for almost 40 years) and they never made any statements incriminating Stanton or anyone else

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

- There were 18 missing pages of Booth's diary which, according to Eisenschiml, could have incriminated Stanton
 - Booth used an 1864 date book as a diary while on the run
 - Some of the pages are covered with justifications for Booth's actions
 - Others were known to have been used by Booth for notes during the escape

Answers to Eisenschiml's Questions

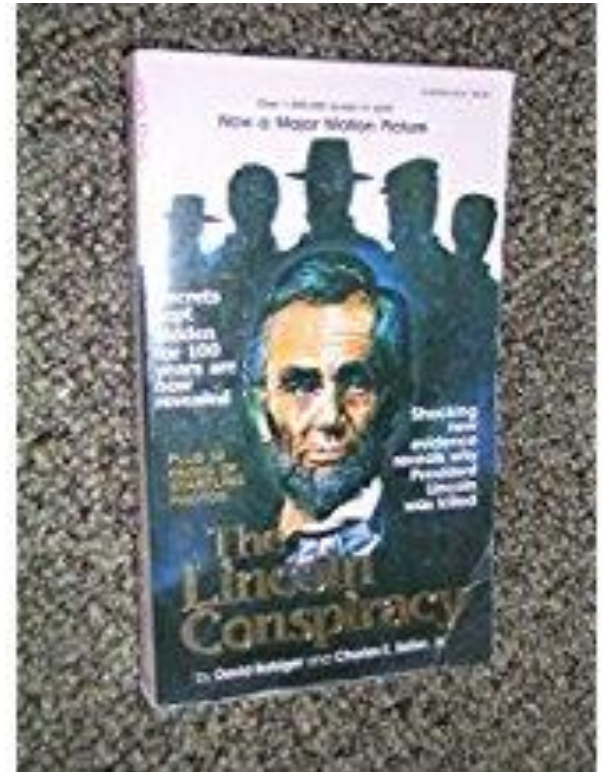
- There were 18 missing pages of Booth's diary which, according to Eisenschiml, could have incriminated Stanton
 - However, there were still a large number of pages cut out
 - Since this was an 1864 date book, there is no conclusive evidence that materials from the 1865 assassination were the ones cut out
 - And certainly nothing that would implicate Stanton

Initial Verdict

Not proven!

The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- Based on this analysis, the Eisenschiml conspiracy basically was sent to the dustbin of history
- That is, until the publication of *The Lincoln Conspiracy* in 1977.
- The authors modestly contended “We have advanced the Lincoln assassination study more in one year than it has been advanced in the previous 112 years”



The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- The authors argue that they were able to do so because they used original sources, particularly the 18 missing pages of Booth's diary
- These pages were found by unnamed descendants of Stanton
- Supposedly, the Stanton descendant, wanting anonymity, refused to let the authors see the original papers, but for \$6,500, provided a 3,000 word transcript

The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- Problem 1 – none of the identified descendants of Stanton had any idea about these papers
- A supposed diary entry of Radical Congressman George Julian of Indiana makes reference to the diary pages being in the possession of Stanton

The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- The route of these papers were from Julian's daughter to Claude Bowers, who wrote *The Tragic Era*, an anti Radical history of Reconstruction
- Bowers supposedly returned the entries to the daughter, who then burned them
- The transcript of the diary pages was not in Bowers' papers, but rather in the papers of a pro Eisenschiml author, Ray Neff

The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- So Bowers, who was anti Stanton and anti Radical, would have had a smoking gun and did not use it
- Moreover, the Julian diary entry for April 24, when he supposedly saw the Booth papers, had been copied for the *Indiana Magazine of History* in 1915, and had no mention of Booth's diary

The Lincoln Conspiracy: Eisenschiml Revisited

- While *The Lincoln Conspiracy* authors would receive honorary doctorates, and the book turned into a pot boiler film, in 1977, prominent Civil War historians writing in *Civil War Times Illustrated* demolished point by point the thesis
- In the wreckage of *The Lincoln Conspiracy* was the wreckage of the Eisenschiml thesis

Verdict

Not Proven!
(Once again!)

Occam's razor

- This is the logic theory that among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected.
- Or more straightforwardly put the simple explanation is usually better than the complex one

Occam's razor

- So the simple conspiracy is that Booth and a number of picked associated accomplished the assassination
- There is much to recommend this as compare to the complex conspiracies noted above, many of which would require hundreds if not thousands of participants

And finally.....

Was it actually John Wilkes
Booth who was killed at the
Garrett Farm?

Did Booth Escape?

- The historical evidence supports the idea that Booth was killed at the Garrett Farm in April 1865
- When his body was brought back to DC, it was identified by numerous individuals
- Moreover, after his body was released to the Booth family in 1869 for reburial, his identity was reconfirmed



However.....

There are numerous theories that Booth escaped and lived many years thereafter, including having a family with current descendants

Booth escapes the Barn

Version one:

- Booth asked an overseer named Ruddy to fetch some papers, and it was Ruddy in the barn (Booth had left earlier) who was killed
- Taking the name John St. Helen, Booth moved to Texas when he appeared near death, confessed to be Booth

Booth escapes the Barn

Version one:

- He committed suicide in Enid OK in 1903, then under the name of David George
- His corpse was mummified and displayed in carnivals throughout the Midwest and south until it disappeared in the 1930's

Booth escapes the Barn

Version two:

- After escaping the barn, Booth headed to his Shenandoah farm, where a fortune provided him by the Confederacy, and his wife Izola Mills Booth were awaiting him
- Feeling the heat, he traveled to SF to be reunited with his mother and brother Junius
- Izola and his children (!) soon joined him

Booth escapes the Barn

Version two:

- In 1867, Booth decided that he needed to leave the country, and decided to head to India
- He needed a passport, and obviously couldn't get one in the name of John Wilkes Booth, so he obtained one in the name of John Byron Wilkes

Booth escapes the Barn

Version two:

- India is not the place to be, so they return to the US, and a series of adventures separate Booth and Izola
- Booth heads to Mexico, where his support of Maximillian makes him persona non grata

Booth escapes the Barn

Version two:

- He then returns to the US and takes the name of John St. Helen, and follows version one

Summary

- There were multiple family, friends and authorities who identified Booth after the Garrett Farm
- “Booth” as noted remained conscious and speaking after he was shot, and did not make any indication he was anyone but Booth

Summary

- The post Garrett Farm stories are too fantastic for belief
- While people up to the present day still identify themselves as Booth “descendants” there is no supporting evidence that Booth survived or had children.

Verdict

Not Proven!

Feel free to
resume wearing
your tinfoil hat!