A NEGLECTED EPISODE IN THE
HISTORY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

There was no more exciting place in the United States in the
summer of 1864—Washington and the battlefields of the Civil War aside—
than a small tract in northwestern Pennsylvania known as the oil region.
Five years before, in 1859, Nature's storage places for the petroleum
she had been manufacturing through the ages with such secrecy, as well
as a practical method of tapping her reservoirs, had been discovered.

The news had brought thousands to the country, building up a great,
lusty, pushing population in which men of every kind were to be found—
the city-born and the country-bred, the rich and the penniless, the igno-
orant and the cultivated, the honest and the swindler.

In this amazing crowd there was, in the summer of 1864, no more
fascinating member than the brilliant young actor known the country over,
John Wilkes Booth.

There are many people in Franklin today who believe that he looked
over the oil region before he came to settle there at this time. It is
probably true, but so far as I have been able to find there is no proof
of it. The winter of 1863-64 had been a busy one for him on the stage,
and prosperous. That year he made some twenty thousand dollars, so he
says, and he had closed the season with two weeks in New Orleans in April
and five weeks in Boston closing the last week in May.

Certainly it is that the summer found him in the Town of Franklin,
Venango County, Pennsylvania, the county-seat and one of the leading oil
centers. With Booth as a companion was a man who was already or soon to
be established as a dealer in oil lands, Joe B. Simonds. The two were
inseparable. It was not long before it was known in oil circles that
Booth and Simonds, together with two men from Cleveland, Ohio, one of
them a well known theatrical man, John A. Ellsler, and a friend of his,
Thomas Y. Mears, had formed an oil company and were drilling a well on a piece of land which Mears had bought in the spring. They called this company "The Dramatic Oil Company."

If you should look for the charter of this company in Franklin you'd not find it.

Mr. John F. Budke, a leading lawyer of Franklin, who has made a thorough investigation of the activities of this company, collecting certified copies of all existing documents, has been good enough to let me use his findings. He found no record of The Dramatic Oil Company as a corporate entity. In his judgment no such corporation ever existed.

"It was the custom during the oil excitement," he says, "for a company, in a sense that the word company suggests a group of men, to adopt a name for their enterprises."

This seems to have been what happened now. Booth and his friends, Simonds, Mears and Ellsler had decided to try their luck as oil producers and chose a name celebrating their profession. Proof that business was carried on under that name is ample. It is the name under which the company was assessed by the township, the name used on an occasion the land was sold at Treasurer's sale; also it is the name under which the records concerning the land are indexed in the Venango County House.

The new interest helped Booth in Franklin while the well was drilling. He liked the town. Franklin, indeed, was a fine old place. Not even the inundation of men rushing to make fortunes had destroyed its charm. True, there were not enough beds to go around, true, you had to take pot luck for food. But in the general excitement and in the consciousness that Franklin was growing rich—a high grade oil having been discovered in its neighborhood—there was a general gaiety about the hustle. Booth liked the town and soon was very much at home on its streets and in many of its homes.
There are men and women still living in Franklin who remember him. There are scores of theme of middle life who have grown up on legends of him. They show you the house in which he lived, the room he occupied, the site of the oil well across the River in which he had an interest. They bring out momentoes of him, autographed photographs, smart canes, a mirror with its wide old-fashioned mahogany frame he bought for his room. They tell you of his fastidiousness, particularly in the matter of towels. The town, over-run with strangers, was hard pushed even to find enough common towels. Booth insisted on his own and plenty of them, and it is still remembered. They tell how going to and from the house in which he lived he often passed a little shop in the window of which the woman had the habit of placing her child. He always stopped to play with the little one, and if the child was not there, went in to ask if he were sick.

There are a few recollections, not so pleasant, angry outbursts when it was suspected that he had been drinking too much, but nothing of politics. Few remember any expression, even a mild expression of his opinion on the government, of war, of Lincoln. A. W. Smiley, who shared his hotel room with Booth and Simonds when they first came to Franklin and who kept up the acquaintance until Booth left in the fall, says, "I never heard him say a word about any of the leading actors on either side of the Civil War, which was still in progress, or ever make any reference whatever to either the North or the South." They remember him as a likeable, fascinating creature, so much more agreeable to have around than most of the multitude that this mad search for wealth had thrust upon them.

What these friends of Booth did not know, even suspect, was that he carried with him a load of bitter hate, that he was developing a plan that he believed would satisfy it, and that through this oil venture of
he hoped to get money to carry out what promised to be a highly expensive undertaking.

If the tide of the Civil War had not turned against the South as it did in 1863, Booth, in all probability, would never have been more than a rising, rather noisy critic of the man who headed the Administration of the North. From boyhood he had loved the South and all her ways. For the North and her ways he had dislike, even contempt, and now the South he loved was being choked to death. And the man responsible was Abraham Lincoln. As he went around the North playing in all its cities and larger towns he found a great multitude of men and women who felt as he did and were doing something about it. The North in 1864 reeked with subversive activities. Every known technique for embarrassing, overthrowing, a government with which a man did not agree, particularly weakening the power of its leader, flourished through all the northern states. A highly developed form of espionage flourished. There was sabotage on a huge scale, weeks of riot and arson in New York City, threats of epidemic from the poisoning of water, the scattering of disease germs, raids from Canada, the freeing of Confederate prisoners, the protection of deserters from the armies of the North. The most alarming form of anti-Administration activity was what we call today The Bund, openly advocating disunion and slavery. One of these organizations had even set up as an independent government THE ORDER OF AMERICAN KNIGHT, THE OAKS, they were called. They flourished particularly in the Middle West where Booth spent much time. There were thousands of these Oaks handling plenty of money, planning a northwestern Confederacy which was to join the Southern Confederacy in overthrowing the North. They specialized in hindering enlistments, fighting the draft, stirring up discontent of Northern soldiers in the field.

The success of all these undercover efforts to paralyze the North
depended, the plotters realized, on breaking down the people's faith in Lincoln, spreading and intensifying contempt and hate for him. They had much to work on contributed by the very supporters of the Northern cause. Lincoln's conduct of the war was under the continual fire of Congress, the press, the unhappy masses trying to support the army and to keep the country behind the lines fed and clothed.

Lincoln's handling of slavery was held to be arbitrary and unconstitutional, so were his military commissions, arrests, imprisonments, drafts, his suspension of the right of habeas corpus. These were the charges they used to stamp him as an ambitious and brutal tyrant, aiming to fix himself perpetually on the country, establish a dynasty. He was to be King Lincoln.

When in the summer of 1864 Booth came to Franklin, Pennsylvania, he was not long in finding there were many in the town who shared this widespread contempt and distrust of the President. The attitude of a large portion of the population was best expressed by its leading newspaper--The Venango Spectator--which had carried since the summer of 1862 at the head of its editorial page in Black-faced type the following announcement:

OUR PLATFORM

"Mr. Lincoln is not the United States Government. The Government is ours, and we owe allegiance to it; Mr. Lincoln is not ours, and we do not owe allegiance to him. Mr. Lincoln's term of office is short and fleeting; the Government we hope, will last forever."

At this time, the summer of 1864, hostile feeling in both North and South had been intensified by the refusal of Grant, backed by the Administration, to exchange prisoners. The Southern armies were worn out,
dwindling. To release the thousands of Confederates in Northern prisons would give them new power of resistance. That must be prevented. The war must not be prolonged. But the decision was costing the Northern men in Southern power atrocious suffering. The whole North cried out against the sacrifice.
There are people in the O.W.R. who believe Booth Booth had looked the company over in the winter of 1903-1904, but there is no proof that is stronger than word of mouth.

But he must have money—a great deal of money. His season in the theater was over. He would not be earning again until fall. The plot could not wait. So taken, what he had on hand he went into the oil business.

It was not until the end of the summer that he took the next step in his plan, enlisting the necessary considerations. Until we had acted with complete secrecy, he was to test his plan backing it up with the bait of generous pay. The first two approached joined him. It should be remembered that plot he exposed was for murder.

Insert...

True, there are data showing that he had disposed of his interest in the Dramatic Oil Company. This had come about at the end of October when he was well ahead in his undertaking, and wanted to get his oil interest into hands where they would be safe. Through the ownership of the company, made in Sept. Booth now had title to a third of the land the company was developing. He wanted to get it out of his name and as the deed tells, a cold one

ninth of his third to a partner, Simons, who was acting as trustee for the business. At the same time, Booth transferred the remaining two ninths to his brother, Junius Brutus. The consideration in cash was $10,000 dollars. He was out of the Dramatic Oil Co. But not out of the oil business. Jo. Simons was spreading out. Taking leases, buying and in the advanced guard of

But all this has been laid bare by Henry...
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He was not plotting murder. The fact that he did murder Lincoln has obscured the fact that the plan he was working on the summer of 1864 in the Pennsylvania oil region is quite another matter—a plan for kidnapping the President of the United States, carrying him to Richmond with the belief that there his exchange value would be so great that the Northern Administration would release the southern prisoners in order to get their President back.

It was a bold and not impractical undertaking. If the group of Confederates he selected were chosen with care, if its movements were secretly and carefully planned, if its execution was not attempted until each actor was letter perfect in his role, but at no point was the con-
spionage properly executed. George Bryan in his Great American Myth gives the best characterization of the group of conspirators that Booth had selected—"Falstaffian." It was just that. It was an army that moved on last minute rumors and whose undertakings time and again were fooled, so helter-skelter was the arrangement, so dangerous and foolish were the failures that the band finally disintegrated leaving but four on the ground to back up Booth in what, after six months plans and efforts to kidnap, had become a determination to murder and no longer to murder one man, but to murder a Cabinet, the General-In-Chief of the Army.

While Booth was building his crazy structure, transforming himself from a kidnapper to a murderer, he never lost touch with Franklin. So far as I have been able to find out no one of his associates there, business or social, had reason to think that he was active in subversive projects. They knew that he kept his interest in oil. Simonds, his agent, was in constant communication with him, but Simonds and his friends in the oil business, like his managers in the theater, John Ford, McVickers of Chicago, were puzzled by his inattention to business and to profession. "Why," theatrical people asked, "was John Wilkes Booth not filling the engagements he was offered?" As a matter of fact between the end of his prosperous season of 1863-64 and the assassination on April 15, 1965, he filled but three engagements and all three of these benefits. What was the matter with him? Had he become a professional playboy?

Simonds in Franklin was particularly disturbed by his inattention to his oil interests. We know that he talked loudly of them to the men he was to engage in his conspiracy. The rumors of what he said came back to Simonds or perhaps he himself wrote them, for in February of 1865 Simonds wrote him, "You must not tell extravagant stories, John, about me. We work very hard and from the office derived so far a very
comfortable income, but nothing even compares with what you used to make acting. We have not got rich yet, John, but when I do you'll be the first to know of it."

And then Simonds blasted the hope of speedy wealth from their pit-hole investment. They'd been drilling and had the most tragic of oil men's many disasters in drilling. "Tools stuck in the well. I had hoped," wrote Simonds, "and expect when I wrote you last that our well in Pithole would have been tested long before this, but three weeks ago just as the last was being done, the tools with seamer attached, went down and stuck fast. I went to work systematically to get them out and hope to be successful this week and then go on again. The delay has been most vexatious."

Little wonder that Simonds, knowing how insistent Booth was on making quick money should have written him in this letter, "I hardly know what to make of you this winter. So different from your usual self. Have you lost all your ambition or what is the matter. Don't get offended with me, John, but I cannot but think you are wasting your time spending the entire season in Washington doing nothing when it must be expensive to live and all for no other purposes beyond pleasure."

Simonds and all Franklin were as startled into the realization of what Booth had been doing, something so far from pleasure when on the morning of April 16th the news of his terrible deed first reached Franklin. It came to them over the railroad wires.

A station agent was busy selling tickets for an early train when suddenly he halted his work crying out to his assistant,

"My God, do you hear what is coming over the wires? President Lincoln was shot last night in a theater in Washington by John Wilkes Booth. Can it be possible that that is the John Wilkes Booth who was here last year we all knew so well?"

It did not take long to learn that it was the man they knew so well.
All day men gathered to discuss the meagre news coming in. There was an occasional outburst of rage, a stranger alighting from a train seemed to someone to look like Booth and he cried out his suspicion. It took the police to save the man. There were rare outbursts of satisfaction. "Goody, Goody," cried a girl of sixteen, only to feel a strong hand over her mouth and a stern voice ordering her to shut up. But these were stray expressions. The town as a whole sorrowed. For months he had been a familiar and romantic figure in their streets, a great actor of a family of noble actors he had moved about quiet and friendly, always one of them.

They followed the long search for him. It seemed incredible that he could long elude his pursuers. Where would he go? Would he come to them--his friends? It is still told in Franklin how on the evening of one of these days of doubt a group of well known men gathered in an office, all friends of Booth. What should they do, they asked one another, if as they thought possible he should steal back to Franklin? They were his friends. What does a man do for a friend even if that friend is the murderer of the President of your country?

These friends who had been willing to shield him were not long in doubt. The news of his capture and death sent a wave of sorrow and apprehension to Franklin and the whole oil region. What was their part in this? Had he accomplices? The Governor came to see, but found nothing then or afterward. To make them suppose that Booth's connection with the oil business was any more than a phase of the wild, speculative interest, the hope to get rich quick that had swept the country.

Franklin dropped out of the picture. The fact that Booth had expected to finance by oil operation his plan which turned out to be the most ghastly crime in the history of this country played no part in the Government's trial, intense as it was on pleading that Booth was a tool of the Confederate Government, that it was Jefferson Davis and his
Cabinet that had planned the Assassination.

The Government paid no attention to Franklin and the Dramatic Oil Company, nor have any of the various biographers that have told in recent years, so often and so thrillingly, the story of his life and crime.

But the end of the conspiracy trial, the final burial of Booth in the Booth lot in Baltimore did not prevent a return of the man to the court records of Venango County. As I have said, deeds there show that in October of 1864 he sold to his brother, Junius Brutus, what remained to him of the land owned by the Company. As one would suppose this would be his last appearance in the Franklin records, but there is another and a later one, very puzzling. As we have seen, Joe Simonds was left as Trustee of the land, a one-third owner, a Trustee of Ellsler and the interest Booth had sold. But when he was not looking, as we may conjecture, a railroad was surveyed down the Allegheny River across from Franklin. It ran the length of the three acres of the Dramatic Oil Company. It was not until the summer of 1867, two years and three months after the supposed death of Booth, that Simonds took the matter up, securing by petition to the Judges of Venango County, disinterested persons to assess the damages. They were fixed at $1,400. Now the puzzling thing in the documents is that Simonds sets himself down as Trustee for John Wilkes Booth.

The persons whose bump of credulity is developed to a point where they write books to prove that Booth did not die and was not buried as the Government testimony tells us, might make something out of this document. They would find material too, in the fact that Simonds Petition to the Venango Judges was made in Florida, that is, in Florida he swore before a Justice of the Peace that in 1867 he was acting as a Trustee for John Wilkes Booth.
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Certainly it is that the summer found him in the Town of Franklin, Venango County, Pennsylvania, the county-seat and one of the leading oil centers. With Booth as a companion was a man who was already or soon to be established as a dealer in oil lands, Jos. B. Simonds. The two were inseparable. It was not long before it was known in oil circles that Booth and Simonds, together with two men from Cleveland, Ohio, one of them a well known theatrical man, John A. Ellsler, and a friend of his,
Thomas Y. Mears, had formed an oil company and were drilling a well on a piece of land which Mears had bought in the spring. They called this company "The Dramatic Oil Company."

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They followed the long search for him. It seemed incredible that he could long elude his pursuers. Where would he go? Would he come to them—his friends? It is still told in Franklin how on the evening of one of these days of doubt a group of well known men gathered in an office, all friends of Booth. What should they do, they asked one another, if as they thought possible he should steal back to Franklin? They were his friends. What does a man do for a friend even if that friend is the murderer of the President of your country?

These friends who had been willing to shield him were not long in doubt. The news of his capture and death sent a wave of horror and apprehension to Franklin and the whole oil region. What was their part in this? Had he accomplices? The Governor came to see, but found nothing then or afterward. To make them suppose that Booth's connection with the oil business was any more than a phase of the wild, speculative interest, the hope to get rich quick that had swept the country. Franklin dropped out of the picture. The fact that Booth had expected to finance by oil operations his plan which turned out to be the most ghastly crime of the history of this country played no part in the Government's trial, intended as it was on pleading that Booth was a tool of the Confederate Government, that it was Jefferson Davis and his
Cabinet that had planned the Assassination.

The Government paid no attention to Franklin and the Dramatic Oil Company, nor have any of the various biographers that have told in recent years, so often and so thrillingly, the story of his life and crime.

But the end of the conspiracy trial, the final burial of Booth in the Booth lot in Baltimore, did not prevent a return of the man to the court records of Venango County. As I have said, deeds there show that in October of 1864 he sold to his brother, Junius Brutus, what remained to him of the land owned by the Company. As one would suppose this would be his last appearance in the Franklin records, there is another and a later one, very puzzling. As we have seen, Joe Simonds was left as Trustee of the land, a one-third owner, a Trustee of Ellsler and the interest Booth had sold. But when he was not looking, as we may conjecture, a railroad was surveyed down the Allegheny River across from Franklin. It ran the length of the three acres of the Dramatic Oil Company. It was not until the summer of 1867, two years and three months after the supposed death of Booth, that Simonds took the matter up, securing by petition to the Judges of Venango County, disinterested persons to assess the damages. They were fixed at $1400. Now the puzzling thing in the documents is that Simonds sets himself down as Trustee for John Wilkes Booth.

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A NEGLECTED EPISODE IN THE

HISTORY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY

IDA M. TARBELL
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There was no more exciting place in the United States in the summer of 1864--Washington and the battlefields of the Civil War aside--than a small tract in northwestern Pennsylvania known as the oil region. Five years before, in 1859, Nature's storage places for the petroleum she had been manufacturing through the ages with such secrecy, as well as a practical method of tapping her reservoirs, had been discovered.

The news had brought thousands to the country, building up a great lusty, pushing population. Men of every kind were to be found--the city-born and the country bred, the rich and the penniless, the ignorant and the cultivated, the honest man and the swindler.

There was no more fascinating member of this amazing crowd in the summer of 1864 than a brilliant young actor known the country over, John Wilkes Booth.

There are people in the oil region today who believe that Booth had looked the country over the winter before he settled there. It may be so, but if he came his visits were short for the season had been a busy one for him on the stage. He was making Twenty Thousand Dollars a year, so he says, and that means work. It was not until the last week in May that he had closed his season.

Certainly it is that the summer found him in a town on the Allegheny River, Franklin, the county-seat of Venango County and one of the leading oil centers. With Booth as a companion was a man who was already or soon to be established as a dealer in oil lands, Jo. B. Simonds. The two had probably met in the theater. It was not long before it was known in oil circles that Booth and Simonds, together with two men from Cleveland, Ohio, one of them a well known theatrical man, John A. Ellsler,
and a friend of his, Thomas Y. Mears, had formed an oil company and were drilling a well across the River from Franklin on a piece of land which Mears had bought in the spring. They called this company "The Dramatic Oil Company."

If you should look for the charter of this company you'd not find it. Mr. John F. Budke, a leading lawyer of Franklin, has made a thorough investigation of the activities of the Dramatic Oil Company, collecting certified copies of all existing documents. In his judgment no such corporation ever existed.

"It was the custom during the oil excitement," he says, "for a company, in a sense that the word company suggests a group of men, to adopt a name for their enterprises."

This seems to have been what happened now. Booth and his friends, Simonds, Mears and Ellsler had decided to try their luck as oil producers and chose a name celebrating their profession. Proof that business was carried on under that name is ample. It is the name under which the company was assessed by the township, the name used on an occasion the land was sold at Treasurer's sale; also it is the name under which the records concerning the land are indexed in the Venango County House.

The new interest kept Booth in Franklin while a well was drilling. He liked the town. Franklin, indeed, was a fine old place. Not even the inundation of men rushing to make fortunes had destroyed its charm. True, there were not enough beds to go around, true, you had to take pot luck for food. But in the general excitement and in the consciousness that Franklin was growing rich—a high grade oil having been discovered in its neighborhood—there was a general gaiety about the hustle. Booth liked the town and soon was very much at home on its streets and in many of its homes.
There are men and women still living in or near Franklin who remember him. There are scores of those of middle life who have grown up on legends of him. They show you the house in which he lived, the room he occupied, the site of the oil well across the River in which he had an interest. They bring out mementoes of him, autographed photographs, a smart cane, a mirror with its wide old-fashioned mahogany frame he bought for his room. They tell you of his fastidiousness, particularly in the matter of towels. The town, overrun with strangers, was hard pressed even to find enough common towels. Booth insisted on his own and plenty of them, and it is still remembered. They tell how going to and from the house in which he lived he often passed a little shop in the window of which the woman had the habit of placing her child. He always stopped to play with the little one, and if the child was not there, went in to ask if he were sick.

There are a few recollections, not so pleasant, angry outbursts when it was suspected that he had been drinking too much, but little of politics. Few remember any expression, even a mild expression of his opinion of the government, of war, of Lincoln. A. W. Smiley, who shared his hotel room with Booth and Simonds when they first came to Franklin and who kept up the acquaintance until Booth left in the fall, has written in his recollections: "I never heard him say a word about any of the leading actors on either side of the Civil War, which was still in progress, or ever make any reference whatever to either the North or the South." They remember him as a likeable, fascinating creature, so much more agreeable to have around than most of the multitude that this mad search for wealth had thrust upon them.

What these friends of Booth did not know, even suspect, was that he carried with him a load of bitter hate, that he was developing a plot he believed would satisfy it, one that through this oil venture he hoped to
get money to finance what promised to be a highly expensive undertaking.

If the tide of the Civil War had not turned against the South as it did in 1863, Booth, in all probability, would never have been more than a rather noisy critic of the Administration of the North. From boyhood he loved the South and all her ways. For the North and her ways he had dislike, even contempt, and now the South he loved was being choked to death. The man responsible was Abraham Lincoln. As he went around the North playing in all its cities and larger towns he found a great multitude of men and women who felt as he did and were doing something about it.

The North reeked with subversive activities. Every known technique for embarrassing a government with which a man did not agree, particularly weakening the power of its leader, was being tried out. A highly developed espionage flourished. There was sabotage on a huge scale, weeks of riot and arson in New York City, threats of epidemic from the poisoning of water, the scattering of disease germs, raids from Canada, the freeing of Confederate prisoners, the protection of deserters from the armies of the North. The most alarming form of anti-Administration activity was what we call today "The Bund", openly advocating disunion and slavery. One of these organizations had even set up as an independent government THE ORDER OF AMERICAN KNIGHTS, THE OAKS, they were called. There were thousands of these Oaks handling plenty of money, planning a northwestern Confederacy which was to join the Southern Confederacy in overthrowing the North. They specialized in hindering enlistments, fighting the draft, stirring up discontent of Northern soldiers in the field.

The success of all these undercover efforts to paralyze the North depended on breaking down the people's faith in Lincoln, spreading and intensifying contempt and hate for him. They had much to work on contributed by the very supporters of the Northern cause. Lincoln's conduct of the war was under the continual fire of Congress, the press, the unhappy masses
trying to support the army and to keep the country behind the lines fed and clothed.

Lincoln's handling of slavery was held to be arbitrary and unconstitutional, so were his military commissions, arrests, imprisonments, drafts, his suspension of the right of habeas corpus. These were the charges they used to stamp him as an ambitious and brutal tyrant, aiming to fix himself perpetually on the country, establish a dynasty. He was to be King Lincoln.

When in the summer of 1864 Booth came to Franklin, Pennsylvania, he was not long in finding there were many in the town who shared this widespread contempt and distrust of the President. The attitude of a large portion of the population was best expressed by its leading newspaper--The Venango Spectator--which had carried since the summer of 1862 at the head of its editorial page in black-faced type the following announcement:

OUR PLATFORM

"Mr. Lincoln is not the United States Government. The Government is ours, and we owe allegiance to it: Mr. Lincoln is not ours, and we do not owe allegiance to him. Mr. Lincoln's term of office is short and fleeting; the Government we hope, will last forever."

This platform of the leading Franklin paper is proof enough that Booth found himself in a town where there was strong copperhead sentiment. Strong enough to let it pass if he dropped an embittered word about Lincoln. It was a town where he could escape the antagonism which he ran up against in the theater, strongly loyal to the North, which made him see red, often tempted him to violence. Here he could secretly mull over his plot to help the South. It was a plot born of a situation which the Northern Government had itself created and which was causing cruel suffering to both sides. No more prisoners were to be exchanged. This resolution
of the Northern Administration came out of its determination to keep
the Confederate Army as weak as possible. To exchange men meant that
the Southerners went back into the ranks. It prolonged the War. The
result was that prisons on both sides were soon filled with half-starved,
half-clothed men. The misery in the Northern prisons, particularly Camp
Douglas near Chicago and Johnson's Island in Lake Erie, was intensified
by cruel cold. The horde of southern sympathizers in the North was making
its chief aim the helping of these men to escape and it was to this end
that Booth was plotting.

But he must have money. A great deal of money to carry out his
undertaking. His season in the theater was over. He would not be earn-
ing again until fall. The plot could not wait. He looked to the oil
business to help him out. It was not until the end of the summer that he
felt sufficiently sure of the Dramatic Oil Company to take the next step
in his plot, that was enlisting the necessary Confederates. So far, he
had no confidants, but now he must place his scheme before somebody who
would sympathize and go along. He was greatly encouraged when the first
two he approached joined him. It should be remembered that what he was
asking of these men was not murder.

The fact that he did murder Lincoln has obscured the fact that he
intended quite another matter—to kidnap the President of the United
States, carry him to Richmond with the belief that there his exchange value
would be so great that the Northern Administration would release the
southern prisoners in order to get their President back.

It was a bold and not impractical undertaking, if the group of con-
spirators he selected were chosen with care, if their movements were
secretly and carefully planned, if execution was not attempted until each
actor was letter perfect in his role. But at no point was the conspiracy
properly/executed. George Bryan in his Great American Myth gives the best
characterization of the group that Booth had selected,—"Falstaffian." It was just that. It was an army that moved on last minute rumors and whose undertakings were so helter skelter, so dangerous and foolish, that they always ended in failures. Alarmed by the futility of their efforts, the band finally disintegrated leaving but four on the ground to back up Booth in what, after six months of efforts to kidnap, had become a determination to murder and no longer to murder one man, but to murder a Cabinet, The General-In-Chief of the Army.

While Booth was building his crazy structure, transforming himself from a kidnapper to a murderer, he never lost touch with Franklin. So far as I have been able to find out no one of his associates there, business or social, had reason to think that he was active in subversive projects. They knew that he kept his interest in oil.

True, there are records to show that at the end of October, 1864, when he was well ahead in his plot, he switched his ownership in the land of the Dramatic Oil Company. By this time changes had been made in ownership so that Booth had a title to a third of the land the Company was developing. He evidently wanted to get it out of his own name and as the deed tells, he sold a ninth of his third to a partner of Simonds who was acting as Trustee of the business. At the same time he transferred the remaining two-ninths to his brother, Junius Brutus. The consideration in each case was a thousand dollars.

Booth was out of the Dramatic Oil Company as far as the records show, but not out of the oil business. Jo. Simonds was spreading out, taking on leases, buying land, wild catting. Booth had an interest in his ventures, how large I have never been able to settle satisfactorily but that interest brought large hopes to him in the beginning of January, 1865 when a wild cat lease Simonds had taken on Pit Hole Creek was great and suddenly made tremendously valuable by a flowing well on an adjoining lease. But to Simonds disappointment as well as perplexity the good luck
did not persuade Booth to give proper attention to the business.

His managers in the theater, John Ford, McVickers of Chicago, were puzzled by his inattention to his profession. "Why," theatrical people asked, "was John Wilkes Booth not filling the engagements he was offered?"

As a matter of fact between the end of his prosperous season of 1863-64 and the assassination on April 15, 1865, he filled but three engagements and all three of these benefits. What was the matter with him? Had he become a professional playboy?

Finally, in February of 1865 Simonds took him to task. Evidently Booth had been talking loudly about the value of his oil interest. Simonds did not like it. "You must not tell extravagant stories, John, about me. We work very hard and from the office derived so far a very comfortable income, but nothing even compares with what you used to make acting. We have not got rich yet, John, but when I do you'll be the first to know of it."

And then Simonds blasted the hope of speedy wealth from their Pithole investment. They'd been drilling and had the most tragic of oil men's many disasters in drilling--tools stuck in the well. "I had hoped," wrote Simonds, "and expected when I wrote you last that our well in Pithole would have been tested long before this, but three weeks ago just as the last boring was being done, the tools went down and stuck fast. I went to work systematically to get them out and hope to be successful this week and then go on again. The delay has been most vexatious."

Little wonder that Simonds, knowing how insistent Booth was on making quick money should have written him in this letter, "I hardly know what to make of you this winter. So different from your usual self. Have you lost all your ambition or what is the matter. Don't get offended with me, John, but I cannot but think you are wasting your time spending the entire season in Washington doing nothing when it must be expensive to live and all for no other purpose beyond pleasure."
Simonds and all Franklin were startled into the realization of what Booth had been doing, something so far from pleasure when on the morning of April 16th the news of his terrible deed first reached Franklin. It came to them over the railroad wires.

A station agent was busy selling tickets for an early train when suddenly he halted his work crying out to his assistant,

"My God, do you hear what is coming over the wires? President Lincoln was shot last night in a theater in Washington by John Wilkes Booth. Can it be possible that that is the John Wilkes Booth who was here last year we all knew so well?"

It did not take long to learn that it was the man they knew so well.

All day men gathered to discuss the meagre news coming in. There was an occasional outburst of rage, a stranger alighting from a train seemed to someone to look like Booth and he cried out his suspicion. It took the police to save the man. There were rare outbursts of satisfaction.

"Goody, Goody," cried a girl of sixteen, only to feel a strong hand over her mouth and a stern voice ordering her to shut up. But these were stray expressions. The town as a whole sorrowed. For months he had been a familiar and romantic figure in their streets, a great actor of a family of noble actors he had moved about quiet and friendly, always one of them.

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These friends who might have been willing to shield him were not long
in doubt. The news of his capture and death sent a wave of horror and apprehension over Franklin and the whole oil region. What was their part in this? Had he accomplices? The Government sent Agents to see. The only witness summoned to Washington was Jo. Simonds and practically all they got from him was that Booth had invested $6000 in the oil business and had not taken a dollar out. They found nothing then or afterward to make them suppose that Booth's connection with the oil business was any more than a phase of the wild, speculative interest, the hope to get rich quick that had swept the country. Franklin dropped out of the picture.

The fact that Booth had expected to finance by oil operation a plot which had turned out to be the most ghastly crime in the history of this country played no part in the Government's trial, intent as it was on proving that Booth was a tool of the Confederate Government, that Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet had planned the Assassination.

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