Franklin Pa.,
Thursd ay
Feb. 16, 1939

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 East 19th. St.,
New York.

Dear Miss Tarbell:-

Since last writing you I have made a further search of the records in the Court House and find that what we know as the Booth property was, finally, sold for taxes as the property of the "Dramatic Oil Company." This is evidenced by Treasurer's Deed dated June 28, 1870 and recorded in Deed Book No. 80, page 150., by which J. R. Grant, Treasurer, conveys to L. H. Fasset the property in question "charged with arrearages in taxes for the years 1868-69, and sold as the property of the Dramatic Oil Company." - - - "Taxes $2.05 and costs $4.37."

By assignment dated September 9, 1871, L. H. Fasset conveys the property to J. H. Simonds, by which transaction I understand that Simonds was merely exercising his right to redeem the property after it had been sold for taxes. The description of the property conveyed by the Fasset assignment is identical with the description in the Mears deed by which Booth and his partners acquired title; so there can be no question that the property redeemed by Simonds is the same property that he, Booth, and Ellsler had purchased from T. Y. Mears. And here is what, I think, a lawyer would call the "title chain" covering the period from 1864 to 1879.

Deed dated Sept. 29, 1864. Thos. Y. Mears to Joseph H. Simonds, John A. Ellsler, and John Wilkes Booth.

Deed dated Oct. 21, 1864. John Wilkes Booth 2/9 of his 1/3 interest to Junius B. Booth. (His brother)

Deed dated Oct. 21, 1864. John Wilkes Booth 1/9 of his 1/3 interest to Moses J. Coleman.

Treasurer's Deed dated June 28, 1870. J. R. Grant, Treasurer to L. H. Fasset.

Assignment dated Sept. 9, 1871. L. H. Fasset to Joseph H Simonds.

Deed dated Dec. 26, 1879. Joseph H. Simonds. to Ella H. Coleman.

I have learned nothing about the Dramatic Oil Co. except that the Booth property was sold for taxes "as the property of the Dramatic Oil Co." My inference is that it was a partnership formed after John Wilkes Booth had sold out, and composed of Jos. H. Simonds, Junius B. Booth, John A. Ellsler, and Moses J. Coleman. At any rate they became the owners when J.W.B. sold out and I could find no record that any of them disposed of their interests up to the time of the tax sale. They probably just called themselves the "Dramatic Oil Company" and, operating under that name, taxes against the property would be levied in that name. A search of the tax duplicates for the period, or of newspapers advertising tax sales at that time, would probably disclose more information, but, since J.W.B. had, years before, disposed of his interest I do not know that it would be of interest to you.

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But there is another matter which might interest you. Since writing last I have read "One Mad Act" by Izola Forrester. On page 209 she quotes Samuel Knapp Chester, an actor, as stating that late in December Booth had offered him $2000 to assist in the kidnapping of Lincoln. Now, we know that by two deeds dated Oct. 21, 1864, Booth conveyed his interest to his brother, Junius, and M.J.Coleman; the consideration being, in each case, $1000. These two deeds were acknowledged, by Booth, in New York on Oct. 29. 1864 which places him in New York on that date with $2000 cash, the exact sum he offers to Knapp about two months later. Could it be that the conspiracy to kidnap Lincoln was being developed, and was approaching a climax while Booth was in Franklin? That funds were needed and he sold his interest here to provide money for that purpose? Or did he merely decide to accept an offer of $2000 for his interest which had cost him $1,333.33 only a month before.

And now, Miss Tarbell, may I tell you that you have revived a long dormont interest in John Wilkes Booth; such an interest that the information I pass on to you was gained as much for my own satisfaction as for yours. Besides, I suspect that I have found very little that is not already known to you, because your interviews with other people and your own researches must have produced numerous duplications. But should you desire further information I would find pleasure in trying to dig it out for you. In the meantime I wish you success in your undertaking and remain,

Very Resp'y.,

Chas. a. Steele

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