

ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

MEADVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

DIVISION OF HISTORY AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

February 19, 1937

Miss Ida M. Tarbell
120 East Nineteenth St.
New York City, N.Y.

Dear Miss Tarbell,

I received your letter of the 11th in regard to the story about Booth being in Meadville and the pane of glass.

In the short time I have had to inquire and examine certain sources which I thought might yield something upon the point in question, I have run across one or two things which may help you. First, I wonder if you are familiar with the article by Louis Mason in the Century Magazine for April, ~~33~~ 1896, on the "Four Lincoln Conspiracies?" In case you might not have this, I have copied out the part which relates to the Meadville episode. At the same time there was published in the Meadville Evening Republican the second news item which I am enclosing; it is very similar, in fact, identical with Mason's article and does not contribute anything new. Thirdly, I am enclosing a short notice from the Crawford Democrat which substantiates the story; it was copied from a Pittsburgh paper. This is the extent of the written evidence I have thus far found.

I inquired of Mr. John Reynolds about the matter and he said he would see what he could find, but no report has come from him. I called on Mr. A.G. Richmond of Meadville, who is now 88 years old and of the class of 1870; he said he remembered distinctly about Booth being here and the pane of glass episode. While there, Mrs. Walker, the wife of Colonel Walker, came in and also told me that she, as a girl of about six or seven, remembers this story being told about home.

You now have as much as I have been able to find to date. I shall continue to keep on the watch for other sources and information about the matter. As you will note, there is nothing in what I have found to substantiate the fact that he was in Meadville the night before the murder, as you point out in your letter. It must have been in the summer of 1864; I remember running across him in the oil fields, about Pithole, at that time. Smiley, A Few Oiley Scraps and Otherwise, tells about seeing Booth in the oil fields and Franklin. You may recall Booth had a rather large interest in the Homestead well at Pithole, ~~kkkkk~~ at least it was alleged to be true, and I believe so. I shall forward to you anything else which may come up from any other source.

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I am now back at my regular work at the college but I find that I can scarcely keep my hands off the oil material. I managed to get all of the outlines made and typed but it was far more of a job than I contemplated when I last talked to you. However, they are in rough but usable shape. I can either forward them to you by first class mail or wait to give them to you until Board meeting time, unless you may not be able to come out.

From my point of view I can say that the work done in the last eight months has been a grand experience for me in getting introduced to the early oil industry and I am satisfied one could continue indefinitely at the research end. I only wish I could have every summer free to follow up some fine leads and ideas about the subject. However, I find summer school and its compensation, though small, tempts one to work for the extra in the hope that the wolf can be kept far enough from the door. I wish one might be able to find a foundation or patron interested in such a matter, which could subsidize one for at least two months full work in the summer. It is a fine field but few modern workers.

I hope this finds you well and free from all the flu going around. Thus far we have all been very well. Jack thrives and grows more active each day.

With the kindest regards from both of us, I am

Sincerely yours,

Paul H. Biddens

A Historic Pane of Glass From the Old McHenry House

Among the interesting illustrations in an article in the April number of the Century Magazine, by Louis Mason, on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, is a facsimile, in reduced size of the writing on a pane of glass in the old McHenry House in this city, by J.W. Wilkes Booth, and of the assassin's signature on the Hotel register. Referring to the illustration, Mr. Mason writes as follows.

On August 13, 1864, John Wilkes Booth was playing a dramatic engagement in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Upon his arrival in the city that day, he registered at the McHenry House, then kept by a Mr. R.M.U. Taylor, and after the performance in the evening retired alone to his room. When the servant entered his room the next morning, after Booth had left the Hotel and the city, an inscription was discovered scratched in a large hand on one of the window panes: "Abe Lincoln departed this life Aug. 13th, 1864 by the effects of poison." Little attention was paid to the writing on the glass at the time; but as soon as it was learned that Booth had killed Lincoln, the circumstances connected with the window inscription were recalled, the glass was removed from its sash, a piece of dark velvet being placed at its back to facilitate reading, and was framed in a plain black wooden frame, and the signature of Booth entered on the register on August 13th was cut from the book and attached to the window glass. The photograph on the opposite page was made from the original page, now in possession of the War Department, to which it was presented by the daughter of the owner of the hotel, Miss Mary McHenry, some time after the assassination of the President. All of the circumstances in connection with the glass are certified to by Miss McHenry and by other residents of Meadville.

Meadville Evening Republican, Vol. XIII, No. 2, April 1, 1896

“The evidence in relation to the second plot against the President, in the summer of 1864, is almost entirely circumstantial, but is nevertheless of such a nature as to leave little room for doubt as to its existence.

On August 13, 1864, John Wilkes Booth was playing a dramatic engagement in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Upon his arrival in the city that day, he registered at the McHenry House, then kept by a Mr. R. M. U. Taylor, and after the performance in the evening retired alone to his room. When the servant entered his room the next morning, after Booth had left the hotel and city, an inscription was discovered scratched in a large hand on one of the window-panes: "Abe Lincoln departed this life Aug. 13th, 1864, by the effects of poison." Little attention was paid to the writing on the glass at the time; but as soon as it was learned that Booth had killed the President, the circumstances connected with the window inscription were recalled, the glass was removed from its sash, framed in a plain black wooden frame, a piece of dark velvet being placed at its back to facilitate reading, and the signature of Booth entered on the register on August 13 was cut from the book and attached to the window-glass. The photograph on the opposite page was made from the original pane, now in the possession of the War Department, to which it was presented by the daughter of the owner of the hotel, Miss Mary McHenry, some time after the assassination of the President. All of the circumstances in connection with the glass are certified to by Miss McHenry and by other residents of Meadville.”

Mason, Victor Louis, Four Lincoln Conspiracies
The Century Magazine, April, 1896. Vol. LI. No. 6.