

Mudd vs. The Post The Trail Of John Wilkes Booth Flares up Again

The controversy over whether Dr. Samuel Mudd had a role in the plot to assassinate President Lincoln, which has alternately raged and smoldered for more than a century, is on the fire again.

This time the fuel was an article in the Nov. 3 issue of "Potomac", The Washington Post's Sunday magazine, written by Harold O. Wang, which clearly makes Dr. Mudd a conspirator.

The Times-Crescent has published several denials of this, written by Mrs. Judith L. Posey of Nanjemoy, who, with her husband, Calvert R., has written a book about Charles County history and Dr. Mudd and by Mrs. C. Louise Arehart, granddaughter of Dr. Mudd.

Below is another protest written by Dr. Richard D. Mudd of Saginaw, Mich., another grandchild of the controversial Charles County Physician who treated John Wilkes Booth's broken leg and subsequently was imprisoned as one of the conspirators.

THREE PROTEST

Mrs. Posey, Mrs. Arehart and Dr. Mudd all say The Post's article was inaccurate and unfair. All point to the same statements and offer the same evidence that Mr. Wang was not a careful researcher. And all have demanded that The Post retract and apologize or at least give them space to set the record straight.

Thus far The Post has maintained an official silence.

Mrs. Arehart told The Times-Crescent that she has extracted a promise from Mr. Wang, who lives in Bowie, to come to Charles County on Sunday, Dec. 15, talk with his critics and look at their evidence. With Joe Anderson, the editor of "Potomac", Mrs. Arehart has had less success.

But she is persistent. She will carry her fight for clearing her grandfather's name, she says, to the publisher of The Post, if the lesser lights on the newspaper do not act.

Here is the latest protest, written by Dr. Mudd, a grandson:

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Editor,
Washington Post
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

The article on the "Trail of John Wilkes Booth" written by Harold O. Wang appeared in the November 3, 1968 edition of the Post. At that time I was a patient in a hospital and unable to write concerning errors in it. I have received letters from several sections of the country - Miami, Richmond, Washington, D. C., Detroit etc., from persons who have read this article and questioned portions of it.

The maps showing Booth's trail indicates that he went through Waldorf, Bryantown, La Plata, Port Tobacco. He did not go through any of these. The best evidence is that he took the Beantown-Mattawoman road, going behind St. Peter's Church, across the present Isaac Don Levine farm to the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd. When he left there he took the Zekiah Swamp road eventually passing the St. Paul Chapel and Brice Chapel, avoiding Waldorf and Bryantown and La Plata, stopping at the home of Samuel Cox and Thos. Jones. At no time did Booth and Herold go into or near Port Tobacco. So much for the route.

The author states that Mrs. Surratt took a pair of binoculars to John Lloyd on April 14. This has been disputed by several historians concerned with the Surratt story. The contents of the package she took to Lloyd, her tenant, have never been determined definitely.

The author refers to Dr. Mudd as having retired from a non-lucrative practice. The Mudd family know that while he did not have a lucrative practice, he had not retired, at age 32.

The author's statement that

Dr. Mudd was not happy to have the fugitives, give the impression that Dr. Mudd knew they were fugitives. All available evidence points to the fact that Dr. Mudd did not learn of the Lincoln Assassination till the afternoon of April 15 and did not know that Booth was the assassin.

The statement that Dr. Mudd had a "close affiliation with the conspirators" is not born out by the evidence at the trial or subsequent information. Dr. Mudd had never met David Herold, Mrs. Surratt, John Atzerodt, Spangler, Louis Powell (alias Payne) or Michael O'Laughlin. Dr. Mudd had met John Surratt who was not involved in the assassination plot and had met John Wilkes Booth twice, once when he came to his farm in 1864 trying to buy a horse, and once in Washington, D. C. when Dr. Mudd was in town to buy a new stove for his wife for Christmas.

The biggest error in the article is the statement that "a local rebellion was . . . harbored in the woods behind the Mudd farm for the whole summer of 1864 which group was often visited by . . . Booth, John Surratt, Herold and others of the Washington Circle." This statement is taken "out of thin air." There is nothing in the assassination trial to indicate such an arrangement. Booth's original plot to kidnap Lincoln began in the fall of 1864.

The reference to persons hiding in Dr. Mudd's woods pertains to young men who hid in fear of the Union forces in 1861 (Assassination of President Lincoln, - report of the trial, Pittmann, Ben, 1865, 1,179).

The author is especially unfair to Dr. Mudd (since it is inaccurate) when he states (p. 8) "John Wilkes Booth frequently stopped on his visits

to the area to see Dr. Mudd about the purchase of land and horses - also no doubt to talk of many things that culminated in the final mad act of Booth's stage career." The testimony at the trial clearly indicates that Booth visited Dr. Mudd's home once, on a Sunday in the fall of 1864 after being introduced to him at St. Mary's Church in Bryantown. Dr. Mudd told Booth of the availability for sale of a one-eyed horse belonging to Dr. Mudd's neighbor, George Gardiner. Booth bought this horse and there is evidence that he visited Dr. Mudd the following morning when he came for the horse.

On this same page it is stated that "Davey Herold was brought to this tavern (in Bryantown) on his way to Washington. How wrong this is! Herold was taken to Washington by boat from Virginia with the body of Booth.

When the Assassination of Lincoln is referred to in the Washington area papers, the readers expect historical accuracy. It is unfortunate that this article contains so many inaccuracies. There are persons in Washington who could write an accurate story of the Booth Trail. I hope that the Washington Post will see to it that this is done.

Richard D. Mudd, M. D.

The Times-Tribune

The Charles  County Leaf

AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE IN CHARLES COUNTY SINCE 1844

Vol. 124 No. 36

La Plata, Charles County, Maryland Thursday December 5, 1968

10 Cents Per Copy

20 Pages