

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION - 1

Introduce the participants in this event in United States history:

- **Abraham Lincoln**, president of the United States
- **Mary Todd Lincoln**, his wife
- **Henry R. Rathbone**, major in the Union forces
- **Clara H. Harris**, Rathbone's fiancée
- **Harry Hawk**, actor
- **John Wilkes Booth**, actor
- **Bartender**
- **Patrons** at nearby bar

Narrate the following:



John Wilkes Booth

Abraham Lincoln, our 16th chief executive, was our first president to be assassinated. How did this dastardly deed happen? Let's start with the assassin. John Wilkes Booth was a Southern sympathizer upset as the final curtain rang down on his beloved South by Grant and the Union armies in April 1865. Booth knew he must avenge the South's defeat by striking a blow. He and a few others conceived of a plan to kidnap several Union officials, including President Lincoln. For months these plans were aborted because of obstacles, timing, or cold feet. Finally, in early April 1865, a bold plan initiated by Booth was formulated. One night soon, each conspirator would stalk his prey and kill him—with Booth assassinating the president. Booth wrote later in his diary, "Our country owed all our troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment." But where and how?

The perfect opportunity came on Friday—Good Friday—April 14, 1865. Washington newspapers announced that the president, Mrs. Lincoln and General Grant and his wife would be attending Ford's Theater that night to watch *Our American Cousin*, a comedy. Let's trace Booth's movements from the arrival at Ford's Theater to his escape following the president's murder.

Read slowly while performers pantomime:

It was nearly 8:30 when the president, Mrs. Lincoln and two new guests entered Ford's Theater. The Grants had canceled and in their place were Major Henry R. Rathbone and his fiancée, Miss Clara H. Harris. The play was already underway when the party entered their special box; the play was stopped and the band played "Hail to the Chief." They all took their seats—Miss Harris on the far right, the major next to her, Mrs. Lincoln next, followed by the president on the extreme left, just inside the door to the box. The play resumed with a humorous line about Mr. Lincoln's storytelling ability. Everyone laughed. The president smiled and noticed that Major Rathbone was holding Clara's hand. Seeing that sign of affection, he covered Mary's hand with his own.

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Mrs. Lincoln said quietly to her husband: "What will Miss Harris think of me?" The president replied: "Why, she will think nothing of it." A few minutes later, feeling a chill, Lincoln stood up and put on his overcoat. Then he sat down and got absorbed in the comedy again.

Meanwhile, John Wilkes Booth rode into Baptist Alley, next to the theater. He stabled his horse and entered the backstage area. A familiar face in Ford's Theater, no one really questioned his presence in a place where he had acted many times over the years. He crossed the stage through a passageway *beneath* the stage and went out a door that led toward the front of the theater and saloon next door. Booth turned into the saloon, ordered a whiskey, and chased it down with water. A drunk at the bar recognized him and said, "You—ll never be the actor your father was!"

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Booth smiled, instead of becoming hostile, and said to the drunk: "When I leave the stage, I will be the most famous man in America."

From the saloon, Booth went back into the theater. At 10 p.m., Booth walked through the lobby and upstairs to the dress circle seats. There he paused and looked over the house. Several people looked up, recognized him, and returned their attention to the play. Booth turned and made his way toward the white door leading to the corridor outside the presidential box. Booth was stunned when he neared the door to the box and saw that no bodyguard was there! Everything was going his way. He would kill Lincoln!

On-stage, *Our American Cousin* was nearing a moment of merriment. As laughter filled the theater, Booth slipped into the unprotected box and approached the presidential rocking chair. The president was leaning forward with his hand on the railing, looking down at someone in the audience. Suddenly he turned his head sharply to the left—perhaps because he had glimpsed the pistol pointed at the back right side of his head. An instant later, Booth's small derringer fired its fatal shot. The audience laughed again as Booth's single shot hit the president behind the left ear and tore into his brain.

The president reflexively threw up his right hand. Then, as if nodding off to sleep, he slumped in his rocker. Next to him, Mary Lincoln looked at her sagging husband and reached over to brace him.

Major Rathbone looked around and saw Booth through the smoke. The assassin shouted a word that sounded like "freedom" and Rathbone jumped toward him. Dropping the empty pistol, Booth drew his knife and started at Rathbone. Rathbone raised his left arm which Booth gashed to the bone. As the two men grappled, Booth broke Rathbone's grasp and quickly climbed onto the railing of the box and leaped the

