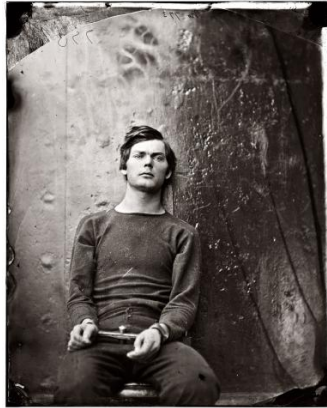




Lewis Powell showed-up at the Surratt boardinghouse, on H Street, just before midnight on April 17, 1865. It was three days after President Lincoln had been shot.

One of the investigators - R. C. Morgan - testified what happened when Powell arrived:

On the night of the 17th of April, I was in the service of the War Department, acting under the orders of Colonel Olcott, special commissioner of that department. About twenty minutes past 11 o'clock, on the evening of the 17th of April, Colonel Olcott gave me instructions to go to the house of Mrs. Surratt, 541 H Street, and superintend the seizing of papers, and the arrest of the inmates of the house.

I arrived there about half-past 11 o'clock, and found Major Smith, Captain Wermerskirch, and some other officers, who had been there about ten minutes. The inmates were in the parlor, about ready to leave.

I had sent out for a carriage to take the women arrested in the house to headquarters, when I heard a knock and ring at the door. At the same time Captain Wermerskirch and myself stepped forward and opened the door, when the prisoner, Payne, [pointing to Lewis Payne,] came in with a pickaxe over his shoulder, dressed in gray coat, gray vest, black pants, and a hat made out, I should judge, of the sleeve of a shirt or the leg of a drawer.

As soon as he came in, I immediately shut the door. Said he, "I guess I am mistaken."

Said I, "Whom do you want to see?" "Mrs. Surratt," said he. "You are right; walk in."

He took a seat, and I asked him what he came there at this time of night for. He said he came to dig a gutter; Mrs. Surratt had sent for him. I asked him when. He said, "In the morning." I asked him where he last worked. He said, "Sometimes on I Street."

I asked him where he boarded. He said he had no boarding-house; he was a poor man; who got his living with the pick. I put my hand on the pickaxe while talking to him.

Said I, "How much do you make a day?" "Sometimes nothing at all; sometimes a dollar; sometimes a dollar and a half."

Said I, "Have you any money?" "Not a cent," he replied. I asked him why he came at this time of night to go to work. He said he simply called to find out what time he should go to work in the morning.

I asked him if he had any previous acquaintance with Mrs. Surratt. He said, "No." Then I asked him why she selected him. He said she knew he was working around the neighborhood, and was a poor man, and came to him.

I asked him how old he was. He said, "About twenty." I asked him where he was from. He said he was from Fauquier County, Virginia.

Previous to this he pulled out an oath of allegiance, and on the oath of allegiance was, "Lewis Payne, Fauquier County, Virginia."

I asked him if he was from the South. He said he was. I asked him when he left there. "Some time ago; in the month of February," I think he said.

I asked him what he left for. He said he would have to go in the army, and he preferred earning his living by the pickaxe.

I asked him if he could read. He said, "No."

I asked him if he could write. He said he could manage to write his name.

Captain W. M. Wermerskirch told the Commission about Mrs. Surratt's reaction to Powell (Payne), after he arrived at her house late on the evening of April 17:

On the night of the 17th of April I was at the house of Mrs. Surratt, in this city, and was present when the prisoner, Payne, came in, about midnight.

Major Smith asked Mrs. Surratt whether she knew him, and Mrs. Surratt, in the presence of Payne, held up one or both her hands, and said "Before God, I have never seen that man before. I have not hired him; I do not know any thing about him;" or words to that effect. (Testimony given on 19 May 1865 during the conspiracy trial. See The Assassination of President Lincoln And the Trial of the Conspirators, Compiled and Arranged by Benn Pitman, Recorder to the Commission, at page 123.)

Whether she denied knowing Powell/Payne because she could not see him (due to dim lighting or her failing eyesight) or because she simply didn't want to acknowledge she had seen him before, that brief conversation would play a significant role in the developing case against Mary Surratt.

Because of mounting testimony against him—especially due to his actions against William Seward and his family—Lewis Payne (despite any relationship he may have had, or not had, with Mary Surratt) was already in very serious trouble.

Credits:

Image of Lewis Thornton Powell (Lewis Payne) online, courtesy Surratt House Museum.

PD

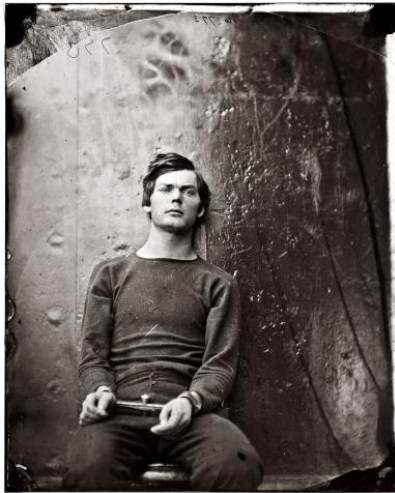
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Lewis-Payne-Arrested-At-the-Surratt-House>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Lewis-Payne-Arrested-At-the-Surratt-House>

Media Stream



Lewis Payne - Arrested At the Surratt House

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