



While he was on the run, following his escape from Washington, John Wilkes Booth recorded his thoughts in the diary pictured above. It was a day planner, for 1864, and could easily fit into his pocket.

Lafayette Baker, the National Detective Police Chief, sent two of his best detectives with soldiers from New York to the Port Royal area of Virginia. After talking with a Confederate soldier, the investigators went to the Garrett farm where they found Booth and David Herold in a tobacco barn.

Herold gave up and left the barn, but Booth refused to be captured. He was shot by one of the New York soldiers.

The bullet, which fatally wounded Booth, passed through his neck and severed part of his spinal chord. On the porch of Garrett's farmhouse, Booth began to move his lips. One of Lafayette Baker's detectives - Everton Conger - leaned down and listened. He heard Booth say:

Tell ... my ... Mother ... I ... die ... for ... my ... country.

Booth died just after 7 o'clock on the morning of April 26, 1865. Conger emptied the dead man's pockets. Among other things, he found a picture of Booth's finance, Lucy Hale, inside the small day planner.

Some of the items which the soldiers retrieved at the scene were later introduced at the conspiracy trial - including a compass - but the diary was locked away in a safe. It showed up two years later and was introduced during President Johnson's impeachment trial (which he won, by a single vote).

Lafayette Baker testified about the diary at Johnson's trial. The following is an excerpt of the testimony:

Q. You are still of the opinion that the book [Booth's diary] is not now in the condition it was when you first saw it?

A. That is my opinion.

Q. Did you see the Secretary of War count the leaves at the time you and [Lt. Col Everton] Conger were together at his house?

A. No, I think not.

Q. Did you count the absent leaves or stubs?

A. No sir; I never saw any stubs until I saw them here.

Q. Do you mean to say that at the time you gave the book to the Secretary of War there were no leaves gone?

A. I do.

Q. That is still your opinion?

A. That is still my opinion.

Conger also testified at Johnson's trial, but he remembered the diary's prior condition somewhat differently:

Q. To whom did you deliver them [articles taken from Booth's body at the Garrett farm]?

A. To Mr. Stanton.

Q. Did he retain possession of the diary?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you know who has it now?

A. Judge Holt [Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt].

Q. Do you know when he received it?

A. I do not.

Q. Who was present when you delivered the diary to Mr. Stanton?

A. Colonel L.C. Baker.

Q. Have you seen that diary since?

A. Yes, sir; I saw it today.

Q. State whether it is in the same condition as when you delivered it to Mr. Stanton.

A. I think it is.

Q. Have you examined it closely?

A. I have.

Q. Are there any leaves cut or torn out?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Were they torn out when you first had possession of it?

A. There were some out and I think the same. (See [Chapter 12](#) of *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations*, by Edward Steers.)

In the 1970s, Booth's diary was examined by the FBI's forensic laboratory. Researchers found that 43 sheets (totaling 86 pages) were missing.

Click on the image for a very detailed view.

Credits:

Photo of Booth's diary, online courtesy Library of Congress. The artifact is maintained, by the National Park Service, at Ford's Theatre.

Excerpted passage from *History of the United States Secret Service*, by La Fayette C. Baker (1867), [page 508](#).

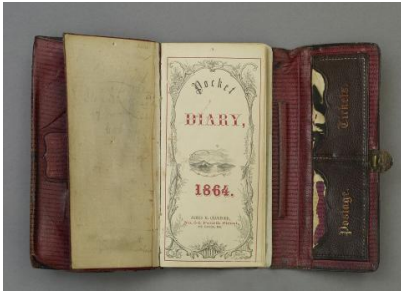
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