

**0. Conspirator - Mary Surratt - Story Preface**

1. MARY SURRATT
2. EVENTS at the SURRATT BOARDINGHOUSE
3. JOHN WILKES BOOTH and HIS PLANS
4. CAPTURE and DEATH of JOHN WILKES BOOTH
5. CONSPIRATORS and the MILITARY COMMISSION
6. FREDERICK AIKEN and the TRIAL of MARY SURRATT
7. EXECUTION of MARY SURRATT
8. AFTER THE CONSPIRACY TRIAL

Like other newspapers, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* covered events surrounding President Lincoln's assassination and the "Conspiracy Trial" which followed soon after. In this sketch, from *Frank Leslie's*, we see an artist's depiction of "Mrs. Surratt in Her Cell, Attended by Her Spiritual Advisors." Online via the Library of Congress.

*His irrevocable decision weighed heavily on him.*

Comments about Joseph Holt Judge  
Advocate General of the Army  
Recorder/Chief Prosecutor - Lincoln Conspiracy Trial

It might have been a rush to judgment, but on the 30th of June, 1865, [Joseph Holt](#) thought he had the facts. A former police officer, John Lloyd, had testified he knew something about the people who'd planned to kill President Lincoln.

He especially knew something - or so he said - about his landlady ([Mary Surratt](#)) and her son (John). Lloyd testified Mary had alerted him that carbines - hidden at the Surratt farm where Lloyd was a tenant - had to be readied for pick-up. Those guns, he claimed, were ear-marked for [John Wilkes Booth](#) (a famous actor) who came by [the Surratt farm](#) around midnight on April 14, 1865.

Although witnesses said Lloyd was more drunk than usual, when the alleged conversation with Mrs. Surratt took place, a nine-man military commission trying and judging eight conspirator-defendants must have thought him credible. On June 30, they convicted Mary Surratt and sentenced her to death by hanging.

After the scaffolding was erected, and the noose tightened, Mrs. Surratt died in front of a gathered crowd. It was only then - after it was too late to save her - that Joseph Holt began to second-guess himself.

Perhaps, among other things, he regretted the dual roles he'd had during the proceedings. How could anyone serve as chief prosecutor (trying to convict the defendants) and legal advisor to the commission (trying to impartially advise the judges) at the same time, in the same trial?

That obvious conflict wasn't the only issue which troubled many trial observers. From the inception of the process, people asked:

*Why is a civilian defendant being tried in a court martial instead of in a court of law?*

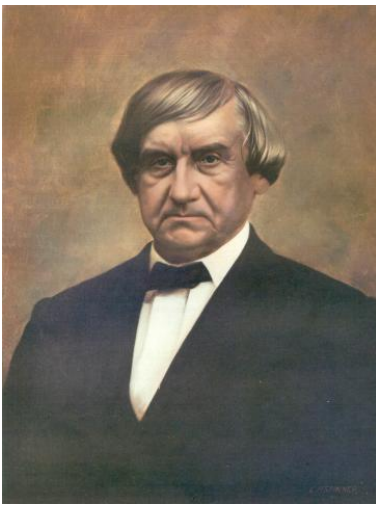
**Visual Vocabulary Builder for this Story**

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Conspirator-Mary-Surratt>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Conspirator-Mary-Surratt>



### Joseph Holt - Chief Prosecutor of Mary Surratt

Image from *Secretaries of War and Secretaries of the Army - Portraits & Biographical Sketches* - by William Gardner Bell.

Online, courtesy Center of Military History, United States Army.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Joseph-Holt-Chief-Prosecutor-of-Mary-Surratt>



### Mary Surratt - At Her Trial

Image of Mary Surratt, at her trial, online courtesy Surratt House Museum.

Excerpted passages from *History of the United States Secret Service*, by La Fayette Curry Baker, published (in Philadelphia) in 1867.

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### John Wilkes Booth

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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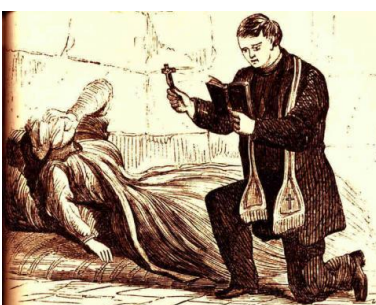


### Surratt Tavern - Surrattsville

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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### Trailer - The Conspirator

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