



0. MARY SURRETT - Story Preface

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This photographic image of Mary Surratt is maintained by the Surratt House Museum in Washington, D.C. What had caused Mary Surratt - an upstanding woman by all accounts - to be charged as a conspirator in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln? What did a 42-year-old widow have to do with the death of the President?

Mary Jenkins Surratt was a Southerner, born on a Maryland plantation in 1823. Although her parents weren't wealthy, they were financially secure.

When Mary Elizabeth was twelve, she began attending a Catholic boarding school in Alexandria, Virginia. When the school - called the Academy for Young Ladies - closed in 1839, sixteen-year-old Mary returned to her family's plantation. By that time, she had converted to the Catholic faith.

Soon after she returned home, Mary met John Harrison Surratt. The following year - when Mary was seventeen - she married John (who was ten years older than she). The couple had a small plantation, including slaves, and three children (Isaac, Anna and John, Jr.).

John, Sr. was a drinker who reportedly abused his wife, both physically and emotionally. Although the couple were well-off financially, their fortunes dramatically changed when their farm home at "Pasture and Gleanings" burned to the ground in 1851.

Starting over, Surratt worked in Virginia until he had enough money to buy about 287 acres of land located twelve miles south of Washington City (as America's capital was then known). Called Surratsville at the time (and Clinton, Maryland now), the place (with its home, tavern and inn) provided the family with enough money to live well. They also owned a townhouse in the City.

Mary and her husband worked the land (producing tobacco and raising pigs), ran the inn (with its tavern), built and operated a stable (including a blacksmith shop) and bought slaves (at least six of them). John was also the local postmaster, running a U.S. post office out of his tavern.

As he became more financially successful, John indulged his bad habits. With a tavern located inside his house, he had easy access to liquor. He drank more and gambled so much that his debts piled-up. Then he died - presumably of a stroke or heart attack - during the summer of 1862. Mary was saddled with his debts, forcing her to sell-off assets.

Believing her four-story home on H Street was sufficiently large to turn into a boarding house, Mary and her daughter, Anna, moved to Washington City. By this time, Isaac was serving in the Confederate Army and John Jr., her youngest child, remained in Surratsville where he worked as the local postmaster.

From time to time, John would stay with his mother and sister at their home on H Street. Back in Surratsville, however, he had taken on more than formal postmaster duties. He was also providing courier services for the Confederacy.

When local authorities learned that John was running messages back and forth between Richmond and other places, they declared him "disloyal" to the Union. Losing his postmaster position, as a result, Surratt permanently moved into the H Street townhouse.

Beginning in January of 1865, Johnny began to invite a new friend - a celebrity of sorts - to the townhouse. The friend's name was John Wilkes Booth.

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

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

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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

Media Stream



Mary Surratt - Widow of John H. Surratt

Photo of Mary Surratt, online courtesy Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mary-Surratt-Widow-of-John-H.-Surratt>



Isaac Surrat - Oldest Son of Mary Surratt

Image online, courtesy Paul Sarrett, Jr., at Ancestry.com.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Isaac-Surrat-Oldest-Son-of-Mary-Surratt>

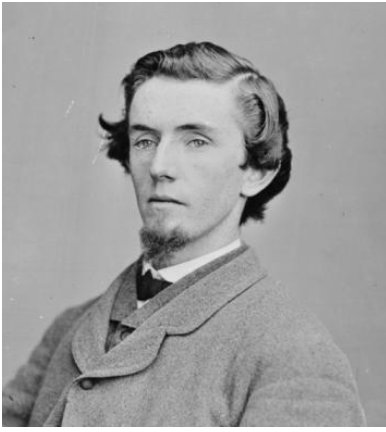


Anna Surratt - Daughter of Mary Surratt

Image of Anna Surratt, online courtesy the Surratt House Museum.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Anna-Surratt-Daughter-of-Mary-Surratt>



John Surratt - Son of Mary Surratt

Image of John H. Surratt, Jr., in 1864, online courtesy Surratt House Museum.

View this asset at:

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Home of Mary Surratt - Surrattsville

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Home-of-Mary-Surratt-Surrattsville>

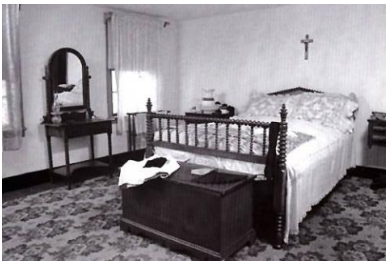


Surratt Tavern - Surrattsville

Surratt's Tavern, Surrattsville, Maryland. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Master Bedroom - Surratt House

Image online, courtesy Surratt House Museum.

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Post Office at the Surratt Home

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Mary Surratt's Boardinghouse on H Street

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Washington City During the Civil War

Construction of the U.S. Capitol building, in 1860. Imagine online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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