



HARPERS FERRY

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO BOX 1079, HARPERS FERRY, WV 25425

Vol. 29 April 2010 No. 08

- DATE:** Wednesday, April 14th, 2010
- TIME:** Dinner 7:00 PM; Program 8:00
- PLACE:** Camp Hill Methodist Church, Harpers Ferry, WV
- SPEAKER:** Dr. Terry Alford
- SUBJECT:** With Friends Like These: The Pleasures and Perils of Knowing John Wilkes Booth

The Speaker:

Terry Alford is a Professor of History at Northern Virginia Community College where he has taught since 1972. He received a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in history from Mississippi State University and subsequently studied family history at the University of California at Davis.

Dr. Alford teaches survey courses in United States history at NOVA. He helped found the college's Honors Program and continues to teach Honors students in 19th Century American history each semester. He won the NOVA Educational Foundation Award for Excellence in Teaching and was one of first winners of the NOVA Presidential Sabbatical Award. Dr. Alford chaired the feasibility study that established the Northern Virginia Review and is a member of its editorial board. Dr. Alford is the long-time chair of the college Lyceum and of the Mills Memorial Lecture Endowment.

Dr. Alford's interest in the history of Southern race relations led to his writing Prince Among Slaves (1978). This book tells the story of Abdul Rahman, an 18th-century

Muslim from modern-day Guinea who was a slave in the Old South. The award-winning book was recently re-issued in a thirtieth anniversary edition by Oxford University Press. Prince Among Slaves was made into a documentary shown on PBS in 2008. The program was seen by a national audience of over three million viewers.

Dr. Alford is a founding board member of the Abraham Lincoln Institute of Washington, D.C., and a nationally recognized authority on John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln assassination. Dr. Alford appeared on “20/20,” ABC News, the History Channel, the Discovery Network, and PBS. Fortune’s Fool, Dr. Alford’s biography of Booth, is scheduled to be published by Oxford University Press in 2011. His research endeavors have been supported by four grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Subject

Dr. Alford will be examining several key friendships in Booth’s life at the time of his assassinating President Lincoln. He will discuss Booth's relationships with controversial journalist Augustus Cazaraun, editor John Coyle, and actor John Mathews. Booth saw and spoke to each of them at the time of Lincoln's murder. Their impressions of Booth and reactions to that fateful period provide interesting insights into the assassination.

The Meal

A family-style meal will be served at 7:00 PM prior to the program. The cost of the meal is \$15.00 per person. **April’s menu is Meat Loaf, Mashed Potatoes, Gravy, Green beans or Corn, Iced Tea, Rolls, Butter & Dessert.** Reservations for the meal **must be phoned in no later than Sunday, April 11th**, to Allison Alsdorf, at 304-535-2101 or you can email her at alsdorf@comcast.net

On This Day, Friday, April 14th, 1865

The event of Good Friday, April 14, 1865 will remain vivid as long as the history of the United States is known. Shortly after 10:00 P.M. in the presidential box at Ford’s Theatre, President Abraham Lincoln was shot by actor John Wilkes Booth. It had been a full day for Lincoln, with many callers and a Cabinet meeting, with General Grant in attendance, during which the President told of his recurring dream of a ship “moving with great rapidity toward a dark and indefinite shore.” The Cabinet discussed problems of reconstruction, including treatment of Confederate leaders. Callers continued in the afternoon and up to 8:30 P.M., the time Lincoln left for the theater to see a trifling comedy, *Our American Cousin*. General Grant had turned down an invitation to attend, pleading he had to visit his children. It was known that there was some chilliness between Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant.

At the theater, the crowd’s cheering stopped the play as the President and his party, including Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Clara Harris, and Major H. R. Rathbone, entered the box over the stage. The crowd settled down and the play resumed. One lady reported, “It was while every one’s attention was fastened upon the stage that a pistol shot was heard, causing every one to jump and look up at the President’s box merely because that was the

direction of the sound and supposing it to be part of the performance, we all looked again upon the stage – when a man suddenly vaulted over the railing of the box – turned back and then leaped to the stage – striking on his heels and falling backward but recovered himself in an instant and started across the stage to behind the scene.” John Wilkes Booth brandished a knife and shouted what was said to be “Sic semper tyrannis” as he hobbled across the stage and out into the night, his right leg injured when he leaped to the stage.

Bedlam reigned at the theater as men carried the unconscious President across the street to the modest home of William Peterson. There he was put in a rear bedroom. A bullet had gone into the back of the head and lodged near the right eye. Soon the building and streets were full. Medical men, Cabinet members, and congressmen hastened to the Peterson House. Rumors were rife: it was a Confederate raid – murders were rushing about the streets – many prominent politicians were also assassinated. Truth soon came out that Secretary of State William H. Seward had been stabbed in his bed where he was recovering from a carriage accident. Only the plaster cast and the courageous action of his son and a male nurse saved the Secretary. It was learned that Lewis Payne (or Paine), a hulking accomplice of Booth, had carried out the Seward stabbing. At the Kirkwood House, Vice-President Andrew Johnson was notified of the attacks. The streets of Washington, still wearing a jubilant air from the recent surrender of Appomattox, now suffered the sudden shock of tragedy. Stunned citizens and troops thronged the avenues. Secretary of War Stanton took charge of the pursuit of Booth and his accomplices as the telegraph wires hummed the awesome news to the nation. Grant was at Baltimore when informed of the tragedy, and he immediately returned Washington. At the Peterson House, doctors pronounced no hope for the dying President. Mrs. Lincoln came into the room once and was led away in irrepressible grief. At 7:22 A.M., April 15th, President Lincoln died. (Excerpted from *The Civil War Day by Day*, E. B. Long, published by Doubleday)

Major General Dan Sickles Debacle of July 2, 1863

Why did Sickles move his Union Third Corps so far forward and was this movement at odds with Meade's orders?

In the years following the battle, Daniel Edgar Sickles spent a large amount of time and effort to cloud the facts surrounding his forward movement. And today, the historic record provides no clear explanation for his actions on July 2nd. There are far too many historians that place credence in the value of his forward movement. Let historians be clear. His movement was absolutely against orders, and it totally disrupted the plans of the Union Army commander that day. Sickles supporters often argue that his forward movement forced Meade into creating a defense in depth, which ultimately slowed the Confederate attack and led to the Northern victory at Gettysburg. But, in fact, Sickles movement left Little Round Top unoccupied, and created a dangerous gap between the Union 2nd and 3rd Army Corps. In the end, it was not Sickles' movement that slowed the Southerners. His men were routed and driven back at every point. It was the 20,000 reinforcements that General George Gordon Meade pumped into the area that forced the issue and ultimately defeated Longstreet's attack.

In the years after the war, Sickles used his skills to help protect and create Gettysburg National Military Park. (Excerpted from Civil War Preservation Trust)