

Booth, *John Wilkes Booth: A Sister's Memoir*, (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 1996 edition), pp. 44-45.

Moreover, in the 1850s, John Wilkes Booth was an active member of the American Party, an organization better known as the "Know-Nothing Party". This was a strongly anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant political party. See, Rhodehamel, John and Taper, Louise, eds., *Right or Wrong, God Judge Me: The Writings of John Wilkes Booth*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1997), pp. 38-39; see also, Clarke, *Id.*, p. 75.

On the night before their executions, the prisoners were visited by clergy: Payne spent the night and morning in company of Rev. Dr. Gillette, a Baptist minister; Harold was visited by an Episcopal minister, and Atzerodt was attended by two Protestant ministers.

The only Catholic convicted and executed in the assassination plot was Mary Surratt, who, by all indications, was a devout Catholic. The fact that she met weekly with her confessor, Rev. Bernardin F. Wiget, S.J. added fuel to the conspiratorial fire.

During the night Mrs. Surratt spoke freely with Catholic priests on the crime for which she was convicted, claiming all the time that she was innocent of any complicity in the assassination of the President.

Surratt turned to Father Jacob A. Walter, for guidance and spiritual comfort following her arrest/conviction for her involvement in Lincoln's assassination. Father Walker was a staunch defender of Surratt's innocence and he walked with her to the gallows on July 7, 1865.

According to Roger Norton, "The primary helper in John Surratt's escape from Canada was Confederate General Edwin Gray Lee stationed in Montreal. Lee was a cousin of Robert E. Lee. Lee was also one of the heads of Confederate covert operations in Canada. Once Surratt was in Canada he stayed at St. Lawrence Hall which was

headquarters for the Confederate Secret Service in that city. Once it was announced Surratt had a \$25,000 reward for his capture, Lee felt Surratt was no longer safe and had him transferred to the private home of Confederate agent John Porterfield. Then, from Porterfield's, Lee helped Surratt make his way to the home of Father Charles Boucher where Surratt was introduced as Charles Armstrong, a southerner who came to Canada for his health. Eventually Boucher came to know Surratt's true identity, but he chose to let him stay anyway. Later, when Surratt felt unsafe in Canada, it was Lee who arranged passage on a steamer first to Quebec and then on to England. Finally landing in Rome, Surratt enlisted in the Papal Zouaves (Army) under the name of John Watson. Once recognized, he was arrested, but escaped to Alexandria, Egypt, where he was found and arrested again. He was extradited to the United States in 1867 and put on trial. A verdict could not be reached and he was eventually set free.

"The fact that Father Charles Boucher and possibly other Catholic priests may have helped hide Surratt (and even facilitate his escape) DOES NOT MEAN they were part of any sort of conspiracy to murder Abraham Lincoln. Men of God hiding a man from certain death should not be viewed as either that unusual or as part of any sort of alleged grand Catholic conspiracy."
(<http://members.aol.com/RVSNorton/Lincoln.html>).

Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists

14818 Ranchero Road
Hesperia, California, USA
Telephone: 760-488-2919
FAX: 760-948-7620
E-mail: pjpiisoe@earthlink.net
www.pjpiisoe.org

Pamphlet 412

Was Abraham Lincoln's Assassination a Jesuit Plot?

Victor R. Claveau, MJ

"History is not history unless it is the truth."
— Abraham Lincoln

Unfortunately, it is extremely rare to ever see truthful history written by any of the various anti-Catholic authors who have claimed that the murder of Abraham Lincoln was the result of a conspiracy by the Catholic Church. The writings of excommunicated priest Charles Chiniquy, disgruntled ex-Catholic Burke McCarty, and ex-priest Emmett McLoughlin, are prime examples of slander and poor scholarship.

In 1886, Charles Chiniquy, wrote the notorious best-seller, *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, in which he claimed that the Catholic Church was behind the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

In 1924, Burke McCarty, referencing Chiniquy's book, wrote, *The Suppressed Truth about the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. It was McCarty's view that the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was a Jesuit plot. She also claimed that the Jesuits killed Presidents Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor and attempted to assassinate President James Buchanan, all by arsenic poisoning. McCarty further claimed that the orders for these actions came directly from the Pope of Rome.

McLoughlin is the author of the book, *An Inquiry Into the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1963). His basic thesis is that the Catholic Church was a "silent partner" in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, and he strongly implies that Pope Pius IX was a tacit co-conspirator or perhaps even the actual instigator of the plot.

Over time, Chiniquy's, McCarty's, and McLoughlin's books have been published and re-published and these accusations have taken on a life bordering on immortality. There are hundreds of Internet sites which quote these books as fact; many posted by factions of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

William Hanchett, professor of history at San Diego State University, in his scholarly work, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 234-241), completely exonerates the Catholic Church of any such conspiracy:

“Since some Americans were in the habit of blaming whatever they did not like on Catholics, it was natural that some of them should have blamed Catholics for Lincoln's assassination. The investigation and trial papers contain warnings from well-meaning citizens about Romish conspiracies against the government and institutions of the United States and about the danger of more assassination. The newspaper man George Alfred Townsend contributed to such fields by reporting early in May 1865 that all the conspirators awaiting trial were Catholics. He was wrong, but the error circulated as a fact; only the Surratts and Mudd were Catholics. Later it was stated that Booth himself had been a ‘Protestant pervert to Catholicism.’

“When it was discovered that after the assassination John H. Surratt had been hidden for several months by Catholic priests in Canada and that at the time of his arrest he was serving the papal guards at the Vatican, many anti-Catholic Americans saw a direct link between Rome and Ford's theater.

“But it was not until 1886, when Charles Chiniquy published his *50 years in the Church of Rome*, that the idea of the assassination as a Catholic grand conspiracy received systematic development. Deeply moved in 1865 by Lincoln's death, Chiniquy prayed for the time and strength to demonstrate to

the world what he said he knew to be the truth, ‘that that horrible crime was the work of Popery.’ Twenty years later, he announced that ‘I come fearlessly, today, before the American people, to say and prove that the President, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by the priests and the Jesuits of Rome.’

“Although Chiniquy's theory of the assassination was the climax of his autobiography all fulmination against the church, he did not devote much space to it. Who lived in and visited the Surratt boardinghouse when the assassination was plotted, he asked. And then he answered his own question: ‘the most devoted Catholics in the city!’ At the conspiracy trial the testimony given by priests themselves demonstrated that they had visited the house frequently and that they used it as kind of a rendezvous. ‘What does the presence of so many priests in that house revealed to the world? No man of common sense, who knows anything about the priests of Rome, can entertain any doubt that, not only did they know all that was going on inside those walls, but that they were the advisers, the counselors, or the very soul of that infernal plot... Every one of those priests was a rabid rebel in heart.

“Equally rabid was Burke McCarty's *The Suppressed Truth About the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (1924). Like all other anti-Catholic writers on the subject, McCarty leans heavily on Chiniquy, but she added some imaginative details of her own: the chapter on the nights of the Golden Circle—a forerunner of the copperhead organization, the Sons of liberty—which Booth was said to have joined in Baltimore in 1860 was located across the street from a Catholic cathedral; its password was ‘Rome. Beware the Negroes.’ Booth was chosen to be Lincoln's assassin while playing in the Roman Catholic city of New Orleans during the winter of 1863-64, and the presentation of the assassination as a simple conspiracy, originating with Booth was conceived in

Rome. McCarty held the church responsible not only for the murder of Lincoln, but for the deaths of President William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor and for the attempted murder by poisoning of James Buchanan as well.

“Emmett McLaughlin's *An Inquiry into the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (1863) is distinguished from other books by the fact that it states the case for a Catholic grand conspiracy without strident and excessive emotion. Like Chiniquy, a former Catholic priest, McLaughlin praises Chiniquy and defends him (and himself) against the widely held supposition that because he had left the church he was necessarily biased and incapable of telling the truth about it. With justification, he points out that in the 1950s, the revelations of communists who left the party were not greeted with a similar skepticism; on the contrary, what they said was generally accepted as truth about communism because ‘they had been there.’

“Of course, there never has been any evidence of the Catholic Church's complicity in the assassination, and none that Lincoln himself feared Catholicism. Professor Joseph George, Jr., has shown that in all probability Chiniquy never talked to Lincoln and the White House, and it is certain that there were no theological discussions. The anti-Catholic sentiments Chiniquy put in Lincoln's mouth were only a propagandist trick. To the editor of the Catholic magazine, Columbia, Robert Todd Lincoln wrote that he knew of no anti-catholic statement or writing of his father and reminded the editor that through the years, his father's name had been ‘a peg on which to hang many things.’”

Note: John Wilkes Booth was *NOT* a Catholic. He was baptized and confirmed as an Episcopalian Protestant. This is documented by the writings of Booth's sister. See, Clarke, Asia