

JOHN WILKES BOOTH IN THE PENNSYLVANIA OIL REGION

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OF ALL THE literature that has come into print since John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre on the evening of April 14, 1865, only an occasional paragraph refers to Booth's efforts to become a successful oil producer in northwestern Pennsylvania. The fact that he spent much of the year 1864 at Franklin, Pennsylvania, then an oil "boom-town," has passed nearly unnoticed.

In 1941 this writer commenced an investigation into Booth's oil activity and the search for facts that could be verified soon led to Mr. Louis J. Mackey. Editor E. T. Stevenson of the *Titusville* (Pa.) *Herald* suggested that Mackey had information relative to the actor that had never been made public. After locating Mackey in Pittsburgh, my first interview with him gave me the background.

In 1864 Mackey's grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Webber, was postmistress at Franklin, and Booth roomed at her home, as did his agent, Joseph H. Simonds. Years later, Mackey lived with his grandmother and occupied the same room Booth had used. Becoming interested in the actor's residency in the oil regions, he determined to interview all the people he could still find who had known or had had business dealings with Booth.

These interviews took place in 1894, when Mackey was twenty-three years old. At the time he was manager of the Franklin office of

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the Postal Telegraph-Cable Company and to augment his income he also served as the regional correspondent for several newspapers. As a combined telegrapher-reporter, it is of little surprise to find that a few words in the interview notes taken down by Mackey appear to be in the "Phillips code," a shorthand method of writing designed for court reporters by Walter P. Phillips.

Mackey interviewed thirty-five people, and intended to write something based on his notes. Like so many people, he filed them away and forgot about them. He spent busy years as a telegraph supervisor and newspaper editor and retired at Pittsburgh in 1941; three years later he returned to his boyhood town of Franklin.

During three lengthy interviews in 1942 and 1943, he gave me his notes to transcribe and also permission to publish them. He supplied much supplementary information that tends to make the notes more illuminating. These notes on Booth provide considerable light on his behaviorism during a trying period of his life; his throat was troubling him and he had had to give up stage appearances for a while, and at the same time he was seeking a means by which he could maintain his income. Booth had expensive tastes and had no desire to lower his standard of living; his efforts toward producing crude oil represented an attempt to replace his theatrical income.

Mackey's notes, given here in full for the first time, should prove of interest to those engrossed in Lincoln lore, the assassination, or the life of John Wilkes Booth. The notes are arranged as nearly chronologically as possible, but it is recognized that because of the lack of actual dates, this arrangement cannot be perfect. Moreover, as one might expect, there is considerable repetition in these interviews, but all together they throw new light on Booth's activities in the oil regions. Mackey's original notes have lately been presented by Mrs. Mackey to the Drake Well Memorial Park Museum near Titusville, Pennsylvania.

Before reading the notes, it is interesting to learn that Booth first came to Franklin in January, 1864, and that he was accompanied by two friends: John Ellsler, manager of the Cleveland Academy of Music, and Thomas Y. Mears. Within a short time, this group had invested in a small piece of land along the Allegheny River and south of the village. A test well

came in yielding twenty-five barrels of oil per day, but because this amount was insufficient for economy in operating, the well was "shot" with a heavy charge of explosives to increase the production. Instead, the hole was ruined and the well never produced another drop. During June, Booth brought his friend, Joseph H. Simonds, to the oil country to act as his manager. Simonds managed the property along the Allegheny River and also some land along Pithole Creek in which the actor had invested with some Boston men.

MACKEY NOTES

FRANK I. MEARS (son of Thomas Y. Mears, one of Booth's partners):²

John A. Ellsler, George Paunell, Thomas Y. Mears, and John Wilkes Booth formed what was called the Dramatic Oil Company and operated on the "Turk" property just below the Allegheny Valley depot.³ They drilled two wells. The first well was called "The Wilhemina" after the wife of Mears, and the second well was no good. "The Wilhemina" showed for 25 barrels per day when first drilled in, but that was not considered enough so the well was "blowed" or shot, and the shot utterly destroyed its production. It never pumped any more oil and was finally abandoned. It was drilled to a depth of 1900' but failed to better its condition. The company easily spent \$10,000 on this property as it is known that Mears put \$5,000 in the oil country around Franklin and Booth squandered a like amount.⁴

John A. Ellsler at that time was a Cleveland theatrical man and owned the Academy of Music on Bank Street. He was reported quite wealthy in those days. At present Mr. Ellsler is on the stage with his daughter Effie E. Ellsler (Mrs. Frank Weston) in Shakespearian roles. Paunell was a Cleveland capitalist.

Thomas Y. Mears was a Southerner by birth, born in Louisiana, but his sympathy was with the North. He could not see that the South were in the right although a Southerner born. His father owned a large

² Identifications of those interviewed by Mackey were made by him to the writer in an interview held at Franklin, Pa., during March, 1944.

³ There is no record of any Dramatic Oil Company in the prothonotary's office, Venango County Court house, Franklin, Pa. However, in 1868 and 1869, the lease was assessed in the name of the Dramatic Oil Company.

⁴ There is no definite record of a second well having been drilled.

plantation in Louisiana and had a large number of slaves. On the death of the father, Mears succeeded to all these possessions. He liberated all the slaves and came North. Two of the slaves came with him and remained with him for a long time.⁵

Mears and Booth had the greatest friendship for one another and often held long conversations on the subject of Booth's sympathy for the South. Mears used every possible argument to win Booth over to the North but in vain. Mears tells the story as follows: "After Booth left Franklin in the fall of '64' he went to the South. He went to Washington ostensibly to play theatrical engagements after he had been away for some time. Tom Mears received a letter from him advising him that Booth had joined the 'Knights of the Golden Circle' at Memphis. Mears immediately wrote Booth in an endeavor to show him the folly of joining this organization, but the letter evidently had no effect on Booth's course."⁶

GABE SMITH (oil producer):

Tom Mears was a partner of Booth's in the well below the Valley Depot. Mears was a gambler, prize-fighter, and all around sport. Rather a "goodfellow" however. Thinks Booth gambled with him during leisure moments. Photo is an exact likeness (of Mears).⁷ Sunk considerable money in the well and got very little oil. Mears was converted by Rev. Osborne and burned all his gambling paraphernalia and to all appearances led a better life.

Mears came here from Cleveland and used to give boxing exhibitions in front of his boarding house and was in some prize-fights while here.

HENRY SIRES (oil well driller):

Worked for Booth and Mears on their well below the Valley Depot. Introduced to Booth by Mears. Apologized for his hands being covered with oil and grease but Booth said, "Never mind, that's what we are after." Well cost Booth and his associates a great deal of money and

⁵ If Thomas Y. Mears held the beliefs attributed to him by his son, he was indeed a strange companion for John Wilkes Booth.

⁶ This is incorrect. Booth went from Franklin to New York City, then to Montreal, Canada. He did spend considerable time on short visits to the South early in 1865 while living in Washington, D. C.

⁷ Mackey here showed Mr. Smith a photograph of Thomas Y. Mears.

they got almost no oil. Mears was a gambler from Cleveland and Mr. Sires says Booth and other men furnished the money. Apparently Mears took good care of Mears. Says photo of Simonds is an exact likeness.⁸ Photo of Booth the same. Booth was very uncommunicative as far as Sires knew him.

J. H. LEE (oilman):

Knew Booth as a very handsome man. Says Booth's well was between the bank and river and that the place of location has been washed away.

Says Booth's well lost at least \$10,000 when abandoned. Wells at that time cost three and four thousand dollars to drill. Booth and partners were engaged on this well a year and a half.⁹ One summer, 1864, they put in "monkeying"; the well was always in trouble, casing had to be pulled or something was wrong. They got some oil but probably not more than enough to pay the cost of pumping. Oil was barreled and shipped from there. They always had a great deal of trouble from one cause and another.

W. C. RHEEM (attorney):

Recollects Simonds telling him Booth and Mears had an altercation and that Booth was cut about the body with a knife. Mears was a man who seemed to fluctuate between the very low and the gentleman; sort of a medium tough. Could have been better but his passions got the better of him.

SAMUEL M. REID (retired):

Remembers Tom Y. Mears as a very large man, prize fighter and gambler. Does not recollect Booth. Jo Simonds was taken to Washington under guard. Must have been driven to Pittsburgh as the railroad did not come to Franklin until two years later.¹⁰

⁸ Mackey's photograph of Joseph H. Simonds is reproduced in the writer's volume entitled *John Wilkes Booth—Oilman* (New York, 1947).

⁹ The well could not have been started before some time in January, 1864, but it was abandoned about the time Booth left Franklin for the last time, September 28, 1864.

¹⁰ Simonds was taken from Franklin to Meadville, Pa., and boarded the train there for his trip to Washington after the assassination.

ELISHA W. SMITH (book store owner, and later, postmaster):

Delivered papers to Jo Simonds, Booth and Coleman. Simonds was very methodical and put down in a memo all purchases no matter how small. Booth was alleged to have written his name on a window of the Valley Depot and on the downstairs window of Mrs. Webber's residence with his diamond ring.¹¹

H. STEARNS SMILEY (printer):

Delivered messages to Booth. The latter always had a very penetrating gaze. Smiley became, after awhile, afraid to enter the office where Booth was on account of the look he always gave him. It made one feel as though a creeping sensation had secured control of one's brain. Could fairly feel something gradually making its way through his (Booth's) mind; a kind of foreign sensitiveness that one could feel belonged to someone else yet had not the power to stay it. It must have been similar to present day hypnotism, a power of stronger mind over the weaker one. Also had a twinkle in his eye that seemed to say, "If I could only think of a good joke to play on you I should be supremely happy."

GEORGE RIDGWAY (carpenter):

Booth used to visit his shop frequently. Always came in and sat down in an attitude of deep thought. Talked to Ridgway sometimes, but was a man of taciturn disposition. Always had the appearance of being in a brown study.

A. P. RIDDLE (later lieutenant governor of Kansas):¹²

Booth used to read a great deal in the evenings. He read a variety of topics, anything that was being discussed by [balance of note missing.]

C. W. GILFILLAN (cashier, Lamberton Bank, Franklin, Pa.):

Booth did his writing in the office of Coleman and Simonds, real-estate agents in the Bailey Block.¹³ He was a very pleasant conversationalist

¹¹ No pane of glass carrying any inscription relating to Lincoln, Booth, or the assassination was ever found at the depot or at Mrs. Webber's house. Mr. Smith probably had in mind a confused recollection of the glass pane found at the McHenry House in Meadville.

¹² Mr. Riddle also roomed at Mrs. Webber's.

¹³ This was impossible because Simonds was not engaged in the real-estate business until after Booth had left Franklin. Simonds was first known as a real-estate man on September 28, 1864. It was at a still later date that he took in Moses Colman (or Coleman) as a partner.

and had a very keen mind. He was at Pithole a great deal looking after either his own or his sisters interests there.¹⁴ He was here last in the fall or early winter.

MRS. J. T. P. WATSON (wife of Mr. Watson whose harness shop was on Liberty Street, Franklin, Pa.):

Remembers Booth as a most polished gentleman. They lived where "Shorty" Elliott now resides and in going from his rooms at Grandmother Webber's to his meals at the U. S. Hotel, he always stopped and spoke to "Joie" Watson whom Mrs. Watson placed in the window to keep him amused and out of mischief. Booth always seemed very fond of children and so far as Mrs. Watson could observe, was a most affectionate man. He never passed their house that he did not stop and play with "Joie" who was a little fellow two years old, and a most winsome child with red cheeks.

Booth became so well known to the child that the baby got to know his time for passing by. He also had a habit of whistling to let the baby know he was coming. "Joie" sat in a window that opened on the sidewalk and at Booth's whistle would stretch his little neck out the window while his eyes and face would show his pleasure at the anticipated fondling which Booth always gave him.

One day Mrs. Watson happened to be sitting at the window and when Booth came up and saw the mother, he remarked, "What a pretty and healthy looking baby you have, madam. What is his name?" Mrs. Watson replied that his name was Joseph. Booth said, "That is a pretty name. I suppose you call him 'Joie'?" He received an affirmative answer. He often assured Mrs. Watson that he was a great lover of children and would often leave his knife and other pocket articles for the baby to play with.

RALPH M. BRIGHAM:

Says J. W. Booth was in Franklin two or three weeks before the assassination.¹⁵ Thinks it was more likely between one and two weeks

¹⁴ Booth could not have been at Pithole at the time indicated. According to the *Oil City Register* of June 14, 1865, the town only came into being early in June of 1865. The first well there was not struck until January, 1865, after Booth had left the oil country.

¹⁵ The statement that Booth visited Franklin just prior to the assassination is often found, but not one iota of proof has ever been offered to back it up. None of Booth's closest friends made such a claim; and his agent, Simonds, stated that Booth never returned after leaving the region in 1864.

before. Mears & Co. always rented their horses and carriages from R. M. Brigham. Booth always rode horseback and all memorandums in account books specified horse and saddle for Booth. On May 30, 1864, Booth rented a horse and saddle to ride over to look at some oil property.

Booth and several cronies had a room over an old bar-room where they congregated in the evenings to enjoy themselves. All were jolly whole-souled men, each well-to-do, who had come to Franklin to have a tussle with this new way of making fortunes. The genial spirits who met in this room with Booth were men of education and much means. Besides Booth, there were many other Shakespearian scholars, notably Frank Bailey, an oil operator from Pittsburgh. Among the membership were two or three first rate comedians, and between Shakespeare readings, recitations by Booth and Bailey, and comedy work by a Mr. Barton and John Garmiley of Pittsburgh, and Fatty Patterson, some very interesting evenings were spent in the old room. This crowd repaired to this room in the evenings only, after having covered a good deal of territory during the day looking for promising leases or merely standing around the town or loitering in the numerous real-estate offices, where the avaricious farmer was constantly repairing to lease his farm.

The fun grew fast and furious at these meetings of "the Club" and the entertainment was sometimes as interesting as the most fastidious taste could wish. Booth always took an active part in whatever was going on. Comedy or tragedy, it was all the same to him.

One peculiarity of Booth's was the fact that he never indulged in a hearty laugh. Nothing more than a smile could be brought to his face by the most amusing of actions or utterances on the part of his fellow members of the impromptu club. Booth never laughed; he merely smiled.

E. W. SMILEY (chief clerk, Pennsylvania State Senate for twenty-five years; owner and editor of the *Citizen Press*, Franklin, Pa.):

Remembers Booth and Jo Simonds were regular attendants at the Sunday School Bible Class in the old M. E. church. They were always there when Booth was in Franklin. Booth took no part in the discussions but was only a spectator.

JOHN A. WILSON:

Only recollection of Booth is seeing him one night in front of the old

Bailey corner. Booth was as drunk as he could possibly get and was covering the whole sidewalk in a rendition of Richard III. He carried a broom-stick in his hand which he wielded as the rendering of the part demanded, and the exhibition was very strong and made more than one bystander overlook Booth's condition in their admiration for his acting of the part.

SQUIRE JOSEPH McCLELLAND (justice of the peace):

One night during a row in the old Kinnear House, Booth and the Squire stood out on the sidewalk watching the fight. Suddenly Booth expanded his chest, threw back his shoulders and exclaimed with much ardor, "My god I would like to be in a fight!"

He remembers another occasion when Booth and a man named Black were crossing the Allegheny River in a ferryboat; they had some argument, possibly on politics, and nearly came to blows; Booth was very ready to fight.¹⁶

MR. McAMIRCH:

Ran the ferry at the river. Remembers Booth as a most polished gentleman. Always treated him with the greatest respect and was most liberal with his money. Always paid well for being ferried across the river. Always treated the ferrymen with great kindness and he thought a great deal of him. Often talked politics with Booth, but never argued; Booth susceptible to political arguments. He was hot-headed, quick-tempered, and the more conservative people knew that and never let the arguments that were indulged in become warm or exciting. Booth was well posted on political facts and figures and very few people could get the better of him in discussing the topic that was in everybody's mind at that time. Booth had the shrewdest and keenest intellect of any man he ever met.

Had a most striking personality, so much so, that if one saw him once they would know him again wherever or whenever they saw him. Was a most pleasing talker—when any other subject than politics was the topic of conversation.

One time crossing the river, Booth and Titus Ridgway engaged in

¹⁶ It is most likely that Squire McClelland was referring to the trouble between Booth and Titus Ridgway rather than to anyone named Black. See interviews with McAmirch, Campbell, and Steele, below.

argument on politics. Ridgway was an illiterate uneducated man but a man capable of using a great many vile names when he thought occasion demanded. Was also a hot Republican. Booth believed the North was in the wrong and should cease their war against the South and recognize them as a separate government. He was a democrat and a Southern sympathizer to the core. He was thoroughly posted on the situation from a Southerner's point of view; quick thinker, a ready talker, and possessed a voice that was so smooth and yet so strong and forceful in its utterances that many were silenced in the early part of these arguments.¹⁷ He was always ready, in fact very willing, to argue on his favorite subject but a great many people, knowing how irritable he was on the question, let him have his own way and would not argue with him. However, he was a man who would not willingly offend or injure a living soul. He was a thorough gentleman, but withal a man who, when forced to, could defend himself with much valor. In this particular argument with Ridgway, it seems Ridgway started the discussion with some offensive remark about the Southerners and Booth retorted with some sarcasm about Lincoln. Ridgway grabbed a hand spike with a remark to the effect that he would knock Booth down, and also added a few vile names to the expression, calling him a liar. Booth put his hand into the inside breast pocket of his coat with the remark that he would "shoot any man that called me a liar!" McAmirch grabbed Ridgway and forced the hand spike out of his hand and persuaded him to quiet down, and Booth, who could not shoot through McAmirch, slowly put his revolver back in his pocket.

Both men were quick tempered; Booth always got the better of the arguments with Ridgway, his sarcasm and sharp wit always greatly angering the latter. His great earnestness and the force with which he hissed the words clearly showed that he would have shot Ridgway in another moment.

D. R. CAMPBELL (carpenter):

He ran the ferry from Valley to the city side. He remembers an altercation between Booth and Titus Ridgway. Booth had made some disparaging remark about Lincoln and Ridgway characterized them as

¹⁷ Booth's voice may have been loud but it was not strong nor well trained. See Stanley Kimmel, *The Mad Booths of Maryland*, 181 (Indianapolis, 1940).

a "damn lie." Booth said, "I will never allow a man to call me a liar!" and pulled a revolver. Ridgway grabbed a pushing pole with a spike on one end and swore he would run it through Booth. Bystanders immediately jumped between the two and finally succeeded in calming both belligerents.

OLIVER B. STEELE (of the Relief Oil Works, Franklin, Pa.):

Remembers Booth and used to ferry him across the river at the Valley Bridge. On several occasions Booth and Titus Ridgway engaged in heated political discussions. Ridgway was the hottest kind of Republican while Booth was a copperhead Democrat. Booth generally a very quiet man, very little to say, but always willing to engage in political debates. Seemed to think the South was being imposed upon and always upheld them. Was very bitter against the North. Never attacked Lincoln personally other than in these political discussions. Would then occasionally rail at Lincoln for being a Republican and a Northern man.

Booth's personality was very striking. He had the keenest look imaginable and made one feel that he was looking right through one when he looked at a person. Was a very neat dresser; always wore the best of clothes. Impressed one that he was a smart man and keen.

B. E. SWAN (oilman):

A lady now living below his house has in her possession a photo showing a group of four—two ladies and two men. One of the men is Booth. The story goes in this vein; one day this lady and another lady friend and a gentleman escort in Franklin went to have their photos taken. In the gallery on their arrival was a stranger. During the preliminary preparations for the photos, a heavy rain storm came up and this kept the quartette in the gallery for some time. The two ladies were unaware of Booth's name. Booth suggested that as they were all stormbound together they have a group photo taken. After some hesitation on the part of the ladies, this suggestion was accepted and the photo taken.

Afterwards, the storm still raging, Booth undertook to amuse the other three prisoners with a few impersonations from the parts he played and was familiar with as an actor. One character he portrayed was

that of an Irish cook preparing an evening meal, was especially enjoyed and his portrayal is very vividly remembered by this lady at the present day. He gave a number of selections all of an amusing nature, and highly entertaining to the audience of three. Booth departed with the ending of the storm.

The young man who accompanied the ladies explained to them that the gentleman with whom they had been photographed was John Wilkes Booth, the actor. This occurred in the month of March.¹⁸ A few days afterward each of the ladies received one of the photos from Booth postmarked Baltimore. The photo in the group bears a strong resemblance to one of the photos accompanying this article. (?) He wears the same slouch hat, a Prince Albert coat, and the mustache is the same as that in the photo presented herewith showing Booth in a standing attitude and wearing a low-crowned soft hat. The hat appeared to have been recently subjected to much hard usage. He carried an overcoat that he laid on a chair. This coat was fur trimmed. From second-hand description given the writer, this coat was similar to the one in "The Century Magazine" for April 1896.

(Mackey apparently tried to get to the bottom of this story. He adds this paragraph of his own observations.) This story does not hang together well. The lady absolutely refuses to be interviewed and will not divulge her name. It seems her female companion on this occasion was her sister who now lives in Rockland. Mother (meaning Louis Mackey's mother) says positively Booth was not here after he left in the Fall of 1864. A. W. Smiley says the same thing. Mrs. Dodd and Ralph Brigham insist that he was here.¹⁹

THOMAS MINER (colored, employed at the Lake Shore depot, Franklin, Pa.):

One day in November '64 just after the election of Lincoln the second time, my sister and myself were walking down Liberty Street. My sister was looking for J. W. Booth who owed her a wash bill and which she very much wanted to collect. We met Booth on the street and as he was talking to a gentleman at the time, we passed on without saying

¹⁸ Swan probably referred to March, 1864.

¹⁹ A. W. Smiley was perhaps Booth's closest friend during his stay in the oil regions and presumably would have known if Booth was in Franklin just before the assassination.

anything to him.²⁰ As we passed we heard Booth say, "Lincoln ought to be killed!" He appeared very much excited and from what we heard in passing, it was evident he and his companions were very much worked up over the recent political election which they were discussing.

Booth was a man of grand appearance and attracted a person towards him without any apparent effort.

COLONEL J. H. CAIN (International Bank, Franklin, Pa.):

Arrived in Franklin the 16th of April 1865 coming from Pittsburgh. He came to take charge of the cashiership in Bleakley's bank. Shortly after his arrival, he was in the Post Office when he was arrested by the local authorities on account of his resemblance to Booth. Colonel Bleakley happening along soon afterwards, explained matters and secured Colonel Cain's release.²¹

MRS. SARAH DODD (resided on the same street as Mrs. Webber did, in Franklin, Pa.):

Booth was here six weeks before he killed the President. When he was leaving here some of his acquaintances asked him where he was going, to which Booth replied, "I am going to hell." This was his last visit here and shows clearly that he had plotted for doing away with the President at that time.

L. T. CHAPMAN (jeweler):

Laura Keene played at Franklin after the assassination.²² She played in the old concert hall opposite Mrs. Webber's. He thinks Booth had no interest at Pithole. Laura Keene went from Franklin to Tidioute where she got stranded.²³ Chapman sold tickets for her performance

²⁰ Miner either was confused as to the date when he and his sister saw Booth, or else they saw someone who resembled the actor.

²¹ Reference to a picture of Col. Cain will show that he looked a great deal like Booth. See John J. McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil*, 84 (Harrisburg, 1896).

²² The writer has been unable to find any proof of the statement that Laura Keene ever played at Franklin.

²³ The statement that Laura Keene "went broke" while at Tidioute, Warren County, Pa., has been encountered several times in different places. Historians in that region have no knowledge of such an engagement nor is her presence there mentioned in any county histories. Early Tidioute newspapers do not carry any notices of her presence.

and they had on exhibition the blood-stained dress she wore the night Lincoln was shot.

H. M. IRWIN (editor, the *Evening News*, Franklin, Pa.):

Irwin offered Mackey the following advice in writing about Booth:

"The ambitious youth who burned the Ephesian dome, gained more fame than the pious fool who built it." Mention Booth's extremely fascinating manners in the presence of ladies. He was very popular with women here at that time. He was a man who, although he drank some, was capable of assuming a dignified and commanding bearing with remarkable quickness. He read "the sermon on the mount" with the feeling almost equal to that thrown in the same reading by his father. Junius Brutus Booth could bring his audience to that reading the same selection from the Bible. The most hardened drunkard would weep copiously on hearing John Booth's rendering of "the sermon on the mount."

Mention that Booth was not a hard drinker while here. He drank, but moderately or what seemed to be moderately, although his ability to withstand the bad effects of much strong drink were very great.

He was a cynic of the most pronounced type. Was inclined to sneer at a great many things an average man would do. He sneered at religion and at the religious professions of his friend Mears. His cynicism was an all prominent feature, but it was never offensive.

Booth often called on ladies here and in Oil City. He called at the McCalmont's and on a young woman in Oil City, now Mrs. Gaskill.

ROBERT BRIGHAM (postmaster of Franklin, Pa. in 1866):

Used to take long walks with Booth in the hills. A young man here from New York, an amateur actor and friend of Booth's, reluctantly accompanied them on these rambles. Booth was a good fast pedestrian and a great lover of nature and pure air and freedom of the country and hills. Used to talk on all sorts of subjects on these walks; poetry, theatrical profession, literature, and in fact anything that crossed their minds was talked on freely. Nothing was said on politics.

In religion Booth was what is called a "free thinker." He tied himself down to no one dogma or creed. He believed in an all powerful head and master of all the universe but reserved for himself the right

to think out and live according to the teaching of the Bible and of nature, as he himself understood it, and to draw his own conclusions as to the meaning and intent of the Almighty.

JERRY ALLEN (colored, awning maker, and handy man):

Says disposition of Booth's body was according to Booth's wishes as expressed to certain men, that, in the event of his doing certain things, he wished to have his body disposed of according to this statement. Booth was a Mason and killed a Mason.²⁴

Booth came in Jim Lawson's barber shop and Jim Marshall was upholding the Union cause vigorously. He said something offensive to Booth and the latter said, "You must stop talking that way. I am a Southern man and will allow no man to talk that way in my presence." Booth at the same time drew a revolver and but for the immediate intervention surely would have shot Marshall.

JAMES LAWSON (colored, barber):

Booth's barber during his stay here. One day Booth was in the barber shop standing with his back to the wall. Mears was sitting on a chair near him. News had just been received that the Union Army had won a glorious victory at some point in the South. A colored man named Cale Marshall entered the barber shop and began to rejoice in a loud manner over the latest success of the Federal arms. Booth, after a few moments of this, pointed his finger at the negro and said sternly, "Is that the way you come among gentlemen, and with your hat on too?" To this the negro, a hot-headed fellow, replied, "When I go into a parlor among ladies, I take my hat off. But when I go into a barroom or a barber shop or any other public place, I keep my hat on." He had scarcely finished when Booth, his face white as a sheet, shoved his hand into his hip pocket. Mears saw the movement and jumping from his chair pinioned Booth's arms against his side and with the assistance of another man in the room, succeeded in getting Booth outside and marched him off down the street. Booth was very much excited and eye-witnesses of the affair say he would undoubtedly have killed the negro but for the prompt action of Mears.

²⁴ For a picture of Booth in Masonic regalia, see Izola Forrester, *This One Mad Act* (Boston, 1937).

When getting shaved, Booth would frequently entertain the barber with a tirade against Lincoln. At such times he seemed very bitter towards Lincoln, more so than against the North. He would sit in the chair and call Lincoln all the vile names he could think of, "a rail splitting this, that, and the other thing." His enmity towards Lincoln was intense, and whenever the subject of this hatred was mentioned, as it so frequently was in a public place like a barber shop, Booth always became very excited and let his tongue have full rein.

Mr. Lawson noticed that during the latter part of Booth's stay he seemed to have something on his mind. He was morose and nervous. Something was evidently weighing heavily on his mind. Towards the end of his stay here, this preoccupation was more noticeable. He would often fall into a deep study or reverie, during which he would pay no attention to what was going on around him. One day he suddenly decided to leave the oil country and turned all his interest in the oil well over to his sister.²⁵ He suddenly seemed in a great hurry to get away giving as his reason that he found it necessary to be in Washington to fill an engagement with some theatrical company at once. This was in the latter part of September or early in October.

Says Booth was also here a short time before the assassination of the President. In view of his previous nervousness and evident preoccupation, it seems likely schemes against the life of the President were in his mind at this time.

A. P. WHITAKER (editor, the *Venango Spectator*, Franklin, Pa.):

Booth was a thorough gentleman and I was never more surprised than on learning of his deed. I met him here, being introduced by Tom Mears. Walking past where Mears and Booth were sitting I was hailed by Mears and introduced to Booth. Mears inquired where to find the full quotation beginning, "He who has no music in his soul . . ." I replied that in the first place the quotation was not correct and after giving him the full text related how it originated in connection with an organ grinder and a monkey playing in front of Shylock's residence. Mears, being an ignorant man, as far as letters were concerned, swallowed the story

²⁵ This is incorrect according to Booth's agent who testified after the assassination. See Benn Pitman, ed., *The Assassination of President Lincoln and Trial of the Conspirators*, 45 (Cincinnati, 1865).

without changing countenance but Booth laughed heartily.

Booth was a fine looking man and seemed to have thorough good manners and training. He always dressed well.

S. P. McCALMONT:

Remembers Booth and Mears as men who did no drinking while here. He (Booth) gave Mears the lease near the Valley Depot.²⁶ Owned the whole of that ground at that time. Mears joined the church and professed a reformation but it was not sincere. Booth seemed a strong character, and of unusually strong intellect. However, he was a man of strong hates and capable of nursing a desire for revenge of either real or imagined wrong.

A. W. SMILEY (oil and pipeline operator; first interview):

Booth came to Franklin the month of June 1864. He was here two months. The town was full of people at that time so Booth and Jo Simonds, who came here with him, occupied Smiley's room in the old U. S. Hotel.²⁷ Smiley, Phillips, and Stevens had the same room. Booth and Simonds had the same room. After a week, Booth slept with Smiley and put Simonds in with Phillips who was an immensely large man. This was a result of a scheme of Booth's and Smiley's with that object. After a short time, Booth, Smiley, and Jo went to Mrs. Webber's where all got lodgings and took their meals at the U. S. Hotel.

Booth took quite a fancy to Smiley who was only 21 years old at the time. Smiley worked at the Atlantic & Great Western R. R. depot. Booth had plenty of money and was very free in spending it. Would not let Smiley pay for anything, saying, "I have plenty of money and you are only working for a salary. I enjoy your company and I am going to pay for all our fun together." Smiley accompanied Booth on all his little sprees around town. Went to dances together and drank together. Smiley, Booth, and a man named Wells were all thrown out of a dance hall at a boarding house at the city end of the Valley Bridge, after a hard fight. Booth and his partner had bloody noses but there

²⁶ According to deeds registered at the Venango County Courthouse, Franklin, Pa., Booth gave two-thirds of his river property to his brother Junius and the other third to Simonds. See J. Wilkes Booth et al. to M. J. Colman, and J. Wilkes Booth et al. to Junius B. Booth, in Deed Book CC, pp. 365-366.

²⁷ The U. S. Hotel still stands in Franklin.

were many bloody noses inside the hall. Booth was a hard drinker of the strongest brandy. Sometimes he drank rum.

Booth told Smiley he had a personal hatred of Lincoln. A rebel spy named Beall was captured along Lake Erie and sentenced to be hanged. Beall was a very intimate friend of Booth's and he went personally to plead for his friend's life with Lincoln. Lincoln promised Booth that Beall was pardoned but failed to keep this promise. Never said anything to lead Smiley to think he had secession sympathies. He simply hated Lincoln for personal reasons given above. Booth was a man of very strong hates and just as strong in his friendships. Booth was not interested in Pithole.²⁸ This is the popular idea but is an error as Pithole was not "discovered" until the following spring. Smiley always knew Booth as a perfect gentleman. In the presence of ladies his manners were the most refined.

A. W. SMILEY (second interview):

Booth's remark regarding Lincoln was, "I would rather have my right arm cut off at the shoulder than see Lincoln made President again." This was during Lincoln's candidacy for the second time and was brought out during a talk on the politics of the day between Booth and some acquaintances on the ferryboat.

After the assassination, Jo Simonds told Smiley that Booth had given him the cause of his hatred of Lincoln as follows, "A rebel spy who had been sent by the Confederates to do duty in Canada, and along the lakes, was captured by the Unionists somewhere along Lake Erie. This spy's name was Beale. He was tried in the usual manner and sentenced to die. Beale was a most intimate friend of Booth and Booth, as soon as he learned of Beale's capture, hastened to President Lincoln and pleaded strongly for the life of his friend. It is alleged that Lincoln gave Booth his personal promise to secure the revocation of this sentence and the freedom of Beale. This promise was never fulfilled and naturally Booth retained an all enduring enmity against the President."²⁹

²⁸ But Booth did invest one thousand dollars in the Homestead well on the Hyner farm at Pithole. The well was not finished until after his death, being struck on June 3, 1865.

²⁹ This spy's correct name was John Y. Beall, and although several Northerners appealed to Lincoln to save Beall, Lincoln would have nothing to do with the matter. Booth never knew Beall. For a complete story of this legend, see George S. Bryan, *The Great American Myth*, 373, 389 (New York, 1940).

Booth was a man of very strong likes and just as strong hates. He was a thorough gentleman in all his dealings with people in Franklin, and his polished manners were beyond reproach. He had an especial fondness for children and even when riding horse back through the streets would frequently stop to gently greet some child or perhaps drop them a piece of script, so much in use those days. In walking along the sidewalks, this fondness for children was even more noticeable; his stops being more frequent and his greetings and caresses always of the heartiest nature.

Stories of the magnetism and fascination in the man's face are strictly true no matter how strongly drawn. To Smiley, he never said anything on the subject of the armed controversy between the North and South. His sympathy was never expressed as being with the South but Smiley always knew from his utterances that he had a very strong hatred of Abe Lincoln.

He came to Franklin about June 1, 1864 and left the oil country in September or October of the same year. If he returned in March 1865 he never let one of his most intimate friends, Smiley, know that he was here. Smiley thinks it extremely unlikely that he was here after his departure in the fall. Booth spent a great bit of time riding horse back. He was a most graceful rider; suit composed of soft hat, tight fitting coat, and high top cavalry boots. In this outfit he made a handsome appearance.

The attitude observed in Mrs. Webber's photograph (here Mackey apparently showed Smiley a picture of Booth) seems to have been a characteristic position of Booth's when sitting down. It was the attitude he assumed whenever he dropped in for a chat, at the hotel, his room, or any of the numerous loafing places that knew him as a visitor.

Booth always carried a cane of some kind, usually a gold-headed cane with a figure of a horse—accompanied him on his walks or rides, but when no stick of human design was convenient, he would cut a switch from the first bush or tree he passed.

W. R. CRAWFORD (sheriff, state senator):

Jo Simonds was associated with Booth in drilling a well at the Valley Depot. Ten thousand dollars is a liberal estimate of the cost of putting down this well, and they had very little show of oil. Jo Simonds at one time was very well fixed. Simond's and Mose Coleman, made \$65,000

each in the oil business here. Simonds father and Coleman's father were very great friends and also intimate friends of Horace Greeley, Simonds being a banker and the elder Coleman owning a street railway. When the boys made their "pile" Horace Greeley advised them to go to New York and start a flour and feed store as he considered there was a fine opening there for men in that business. They did so, Greeley giving them \$9,000 worth of advertising free in the "New York Tribune," but with all this influence, they failed after a short business career. None of their creditors lost a cent but it took every cent the boys owned to square up. Competition was too strong for them and men with much more money, having set out to "run them out of business," fully accomplished their object.

After this failure, Coleman and Simonds came back to Franklin. Coleman again went into the real-estate business and Simonds became a bookkeeper for Prentice, Crawford & Co., oil producers. He was with this company when they organized the Relief Pipe Line and was also with them in their operations in Butler County.³⁰

J. H. OSMER (lawyer and former Congressman):

Was intimate with Jo H. Simonds. Simonds first came here and entered the firm of Stevens, Simonds & Co., afterwards Jo H. Simonds Co. real-estate.³¹ Booth came here with Simonds.³² They were speculators in oil property options, and from them, Booth, Simonds, Stevens, and Ellsler, the last two of Cleveland, were interested in a well near the Valley Depot. The name of the firm was the Dramatic Oil Company but it was not incorporated. They never got any oil. Booth assigned all his interests here to his sister sometime previous to the assassination. He had no interests at Pithole,

In 1868 or thereabouts, while the owners of the Valley Depot property were suing the Valley Railroad for damages caused by the railroad running through said property, Osmer was the attorney for Booth's sister. Trunkey was Judge at this time and a Democrat. The

³⁰ Mackey was unable to verify these facts. Simonds went from Franklin to Bradford, Pa., where he was employed by Whitney & Wheeler, bankers and oil producers.

³¹ Simonds was first Booth's agent in the oil regions, and then started his own real-estate business when Booth deserted the oil country. There is no record of a firm by the name of Stevens, Simonds & Co.

³² Rather, Booth brought Simonds to Franklin in June of 1864.

law read that in the appointment of viewers to assess damages of this nature, the viewers must be chosen from the adjoining county. Trunkey selected three men from Mercer County and naturally they were Democrats, regular "copperhead" Democrats. In summing up before the court and viewers, Mr. Osmer said and laid emphasis on the fact that one of the suitors for damages was a sister of a man who, a few years before, had killed the President of the U. S. This property was probably all this man had to leave to this woman. He thought that "copperheads" would seize this opportunity to build a monument over Booth's memory and it seems he figured with his host. The viewers awarded the claimants \$1,400 for a piece of ground that is not worth \$140.³³

Jo Simonds and Booth had a private cipher code and this led to the arrest of Simonds. Authorities in Washington found in Booth's trunk letters and telegrams from Simonds in which this code was used. And the technicalities of the oil region language were also too much for the authorities. They did not know such words and phrases as "jars stuck in hole," "struck good first sand," "casing broke loose," "lost bailer in hole," and "struck a crevice," and kindred expressions familiar only to men acquainted with the oil producing business.

MRS. MACKEY (mother of Louis J. Mackey):

Joseph Booth came to Franklin in June 1865. He resided here as "Joseph Woods of California." He came after the death of John Wilkes Booth and occupied the same room as John Wilkes. Mrs. Mackey, going to the room one morning, found Joseph's nightshirt which had been accidentally left out of his satchel and on which was the name "Joseph Booth." Simonds said Joseph traveled under an assumed name to avoid the curiosity of the residents of Franklin.

Laura Keene went to Tidioute after the assassination to play and after the play took sick. Her things were levied on for expenses. Jo H. Simonds bought her things in for Laura Keene. She was taken from Tidioute to Boston where she died. She had two daughters, one married well and the other daughter stayed with her married sister. Simonds was rather a handsome man. Jo Simonds gave a photo of J. W. Booth to Mrs. Webber.

(Mr. Mackey added to this interview by writing, "According to my

³³ Mackay told the writer that he placed little faith in this interview.

knowledge Laura Keene never played in Franklin and was never in Franklin.")

S. A. McALEVY (constable):

Took Jo Simonds to Washington to testify at Booth's trial. Knew Booth and would say he was what is called a "surface man"; seemed to be flashy intellectually. Never heard him say anything about politics.

McAlevy arrested him (Simonds) at his office and took him to Meadville. Captain Derrickson (Provost Marshall 20th District), ordered him to Harrisburg and Provost Marshall Hunter (Harrisburg) sent him on to Washington under McAlevy. Also had a young man from Cherry Tree named Fleming who proved to be a mere bundle of wind. On McAlevy's recommendation, Simonds was granted the freedom of Washington.