

Sumter to Appomattox



American Civil War Round Table of Australia (New South Wales Chapter)

www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr

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President's Message

In the last two months we have had two outstanding meetings, both reported in the following pages.

At the first, by Zoom, we were treated to presentations by John Morrison and Peter Zacharatos on the two subjects Mexico Before the American Civil War and Mexico After the American Civil War (respectively). Members commented how much of what they heard was new to them.

Then – only the next week – restrictions lifted, we were able to hold a live meeting “In conversation with Dr Gordon Jones”. Gordon was visiting his long-term friend – our Life Member – Len Traynor. It was good to see some long term members join us that evening. Gordon was very pleased to be asked to elaborate on his experience as the Historian and Archivist at the Atlanta History Center.

Our next meeting (see notice) also comes out of Gordon's visit with his friend Len. It should be a great evening.

I will be unable to attend the next meeting as I'm in rehab, following a stroke – being well looked after. Thank you to everyone for your good wishes. I am grateful for all your support.

Ian McIntyre

This publication is the official newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia (NSW Chapter). All inquiries regarding the newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary of the Chapter by phone on 0411 745 704 or e-mail: secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Our Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be

Monday, 11th April LIVE at the Roseville Club

6.00pm for a bistro meal, and 7.00 start

Topic:

Honoring Len Traynor - in conversation with his great friend Dr Gordon Jones.

Len tells Gordon about his life as a “Civil Warrior” - recorded in his famous Library last month.



*Len and Ira (centre)
with Brendan, Anita and Bruce in 2018*

On our **Website** you will always find the date of our next meeting. Our Facebook page is also www.americancivilwar.asn.au

Vale Brendan O'Connell, OAM



Our Honorary Life Member Brendan O'Connell passed away on Saturday, 12th March, aged 92. Brendan was much loved by our members over more than twenty years. He was closely involved in the formation of the Round Table, its incorporation as a registered association, and became the first Secretary-Treasurer. He was Treasurer for most of the life of the Round Table. Over many years Brendan was the go-to person to book the venue for meetings and make them happen.

Members will relate to a recent comment from one of us that "he was a perfect gentleman". At meetings he was also an ideal dinner companion and always enjoyable company.

In 2016 Brendan was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for service to the community through a range of organisations. As recently as late last year Brendan joined us from his home in one of our Zoom meetings during the pandemic.

Our Last Meetings - Presentations

We were privileged to have two speakers presenting via zoom, discussing Mexico's connection to the Civil War, both in its lead-up and in its aftermath.

Origins of the Civil War – Western Expansion and the Mexican War

John Morrison

John began his presentation by pointing out that the Mexican War, fought 1846-48, was fascinating because it set the scene for the Civil War only a few years later. As well as influencing it politically and culturally, it served as a training ground for the later War because many veterans of the Mexican War also served in the Civil War and became important leaders.

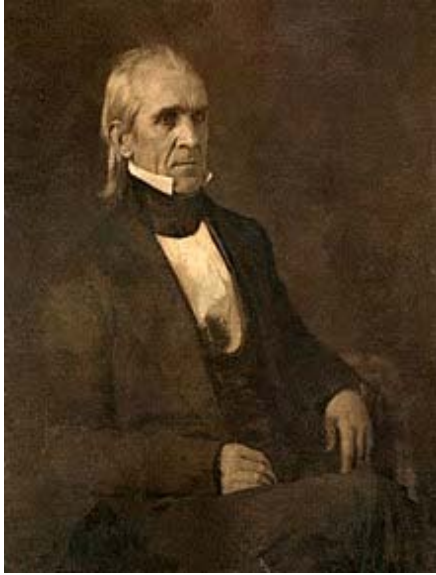


The Mexican War cannot be seen in isolation because of the belief in Manifest Destiny by Americans at the time. This was the belief that it was the divinely ordained right of the United States to expand its borders to the Pacific Ocean and beyond. Three key themes related to this continue to be influential today through the belief in "American Exceptionalism":

- The virtue of the American people and their institutions
- The mission to spread these institutions, thus redeeming and remaking the world in the image of the United States
- The destiny under God to do this work.

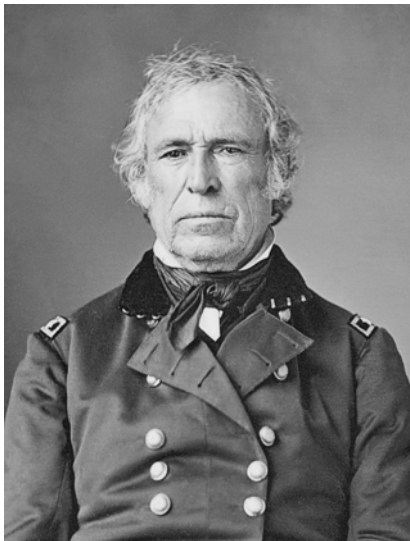
The Mexican War was a war of conquest, despite modern views to the contrary. The background of the War goes back to 1836, when Texas gained independence from Mexico. However, the US initially declined to incorporate it. At the same time the Mexican government was encouraging border raids even though it was warned that any attempts at annexation would lead to war. In 1844, President James Polk, who had expansionist tendencies, campaigned that Texas should be "reannexed" and Oregon Territory "reoccupied". As a result, annexation was initiated. However, the offer to

purchase was rejected and Polk then instigated a fight, moving troops into a disputed zone previously recognised by both sides as being part of Mexico.



President James Polk

The Mexican-American War began April 25 1846, when Mexican cavalry attacked US soldiers under the control of General Zachary Taylor in the disputed zone. They then laid siege to an American fort on the Rio Grande. However, they were defeated at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. On May 13, US Congress declared war although no declaration of war came from Mexico.



General Zachary Taylor

U.S. forces under Col. Stephen W. Kearny and Commodore Robert F. Stockton conquered the area north of the Rio Grande (home to only 75,000 Mexican citizens) and, in September, General Taylor advanced and captured Monterrey.

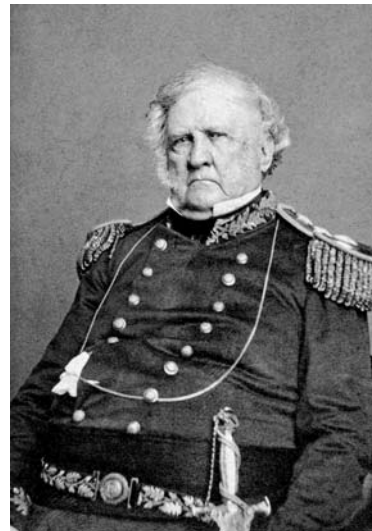
Mexico responded by turning to General Antonio López de Santa Anna, then living in

exile in Cuba. He convinced Polk that, if allowed to return, he would ensure the war ended with favourable terms for the US. Instead, he double-crossed Polk, took control of the Mexican army and led it in the Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847. However, his army suffered heavy casualties, so he was forced to withdraw. Despite this, he assumed the Mexican presidency in March.



General Antonio López de Santa Anna

At the same time, U.S. troops, led by General Winfield Scott, landed in Veracruz and took over the city.



General Winfield Scott

On their march to Mexico City, Mexicans resisted at Cerro Gordo and other places but were defeated each time. In September 1847, Scott successfully laid siege to Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle.



With the United States in control of Mexico City and with the country divided, Mexico agreed to peace and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. In it, Mexico agreed to the border of Texas being the Rio Grande and also to sell a large area of land to the U.S. for \$15m. From this came the American states of California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona as well as parts of Wyoming, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Colorado.



In 1848, the New York state Democratic convention refused to endorse the proposed Wilmot Proviso banning slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico during the war. From this emerged:

- The "Barnburners" – a faction of the New York Democrats who objected to slavery in the territories.
- This faction joined anti-slavery Democrats to form the Free Soil Party.
- In 1848 the Free Soil Convention nominated former President Martin van Buren and Charles Adams sr. However, Van Buren won only 10.1% of the popular vote.
- The Free Soil Party opposed expansion of slavery in the Western territories and worked to remove existing discriminatory laws against free African Americans in some states.
- With the Compromise of 1850, tensions around slavery were reduced.
- The passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 revitalised the anti-slavery

movement, and the Free Soil Party was absorbed in the Republican Party.

- Their most important legacy was therefore a route for anti-slavery Democrats to join the new Republican coalition.

The Mexican War enabled a generation of combat-experienced leaders to take charge in the Civil War. What effect did this have on the Civil War? Could it have evolved as it did on the Battlefield without this experience?

Mexican War Veterans - Civil War

Union		Confederacy	
Winfield Scott	Ulysses S. Grant	Confederate President Jefferson Davis.	Robert E. Lee,
George B. McClellan	William T. Sherman	Albert Sidney Johnston	Stonewall Jackson
George Meade	Ambrose Burnside	James Longstreet	Joseph E. Johnston
George Thomas	Irvin McDowell	Braxton Bragg	P. G. T. Beauregard
Edwin Sumner	John Sedgwick	George Pickett	John Pemberton
John Reynolds	Alfred Pleasonton	Kirby Smith	Jubal Early
Philip St. George Cooke		Sterling Price	

A final comment on the Mexican War:

"Generally, the officers of the army were indifferent whether the annexation was consummated or not; but not so all of them. For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory."

The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican war. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times."

Ulysses S Grant

Mexican Dixie – Confederate Colonies in Mexico

Peter Zacharatos

It is interesting today that most Americans think that the United States has an issue today with Hispanics crossing the border and bringing unwanted customs but, according to Peter, the opposite occurred at the end of the Civil War in 1865. Thousands of white Confederates crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico in pursuit of their old plantation way of life. In fact, a number of Confederate colonies were established with the support of Emperor Maximilian I, a liberal who had been offered the throne as puppet ruler by Mexican monarchists with French support.

Following the Mexican-American War (1846-48), Mexico descended into a civil war fought between conservatives, supported by the Catholic Church, who believed in strong central government, and liberals advocating democracy and equality. Following the 1857 election, conservatives rose in rebellion but were defeated in 1861 by the liberals, led by Benito Juarez, who became President.



Benito Juarez

During this time, both sides borrowed heavily from Spain, France and Great Britain. However, upon assuming power, Juarez disputed this debt and, as a result, the European powers made plans to invade.

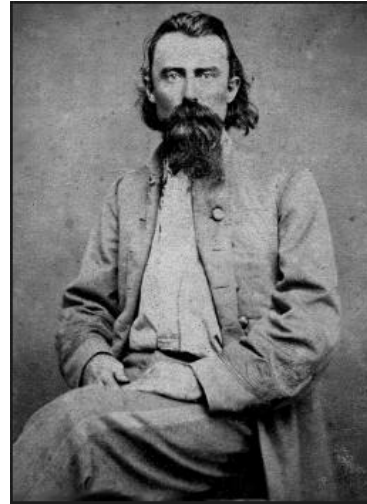
The three European powers landed in Veracruz in 1861 with 6000 men and overwhelmed the disorganized Mexican army. However, Napoleon III of France had other plans, wanting to take over all of Mexico, and then install Maximilian I of the House of Habsburg as puppet. France landed a second army of 20,000 at Campeche, which signalled their intention to collect the debt and also occupy the whole country. As a result, Spain and Britain withdrew from the conflict.

In 1861-62, France successfully expanded along the Mexican coast but at great economic and military cost. In 1863, its army seized Mexico City and installed Maximilian I as Emperor. As a progressive, he instituted a number of reforms including greater democracy, but, in the next few years, Juarez's army, known as the Juarists waged an unending guerrilla campaign.

Meanwhile, the American Civil War was finally ending and leaders of the Confederate Army were hoping to continue their military careers by serving in Maximilian's army. Full General Kirby Smith, commander of the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department offered to provide 10,000 Confederate veterans to support Maximilian. Efforts were made to obtain support for someone to lead Confederate

troops into Mexico. However, this was not forthcoming so a much smaller force finally marched to Mexico.

On June 1 1865, General Joseph Shelby assembled 300 men at Pittsburg and set course for the Rio-Grande.



Gen. Joseph Shelby

The group moved through Texas, where they picked up further troops as well as Confederate generals, governors and politicians fearing prosecution. The force, now numbering in the thousands, crossed the Rio-Grande at Eagle Pass and was allowed by the Imperial Mexican Army to march south to Mexico City. However, on the march, the army became greatly reduced in size due to the hot and dusty conditions, illness, and lack of supplies. Some were killed by bandits or Juarists.

Shelby's remaining exhausted group finally reached the mining town of San Luis Potosi in mid-August where they encountered the French Commander, General Felix Douay, who was informed by Shelby that his men wished to join the imperial forces. Faced with opposition from the Juarists and the possibility of invasion by the United States, Douay passed on the offer to Maximilian, who was reluctant to accept their support, instead offering Shelby and his group the chance to colonise tracts of Mexico.

This plan was termed the 'New Virginia Plan' and was headed by Virginian Matthew Maury, an agent for the Confederate Navy (he was also an internationally famous oceanographer considered by some to be the father of modern oceanography and meteorology). With Mexican government support, Maury set up an English newspaper, *The Mexican Times*, and also employed agents to encourage American immigrants to settle in Mexico.



Matthew F. Maury

With immigration agents in place, Shelby was tasked with finding a suitable location close to Veracruz. He envisaged a number of agricultural colonies along the rail line, a model used in the United States. Shelby began a publicity tour which greatly exaggerated the virtues of the area. As a result of his propaganda, hundreds and then thousands of mostly Southern Americans arrived in Mexico.

The first and most substantial Confederate colonies was Carlota, approximately 500,000 acres of land near Veracruz. Land was offered to ex-Confederate soldiers at \$1 an acre with five years credit (because many soldiers had blown their capital already in Mexico City). Married men could purchase 250 acres and single men 125. Other confederate colonies such as Omealco followed this pattern.



Terrain at Veracruz

However, although promoted as 'vegetable kingdoms' by Maury, the work in these colonies was more arduous than expected. The Carlota area was inland from the Caribbean and was hot and mostly jungle. The earth turned to thick mud during rain. Coffee could be grown but needed three years for harvesting. Pineapples, oranges and other crops grew well and rum could be made from sugar cane.

These ex-Confederate colonies tended to be very unpopular with locals, who supported

Juarez rather than the Emperor Maximilian, who believed they would defend the planned railway between Veracruz and Mexico City

Relations between the Mexicans and Confederates was not helped by the employment of Mexicans on the farms. The Confederates had requested African slaves but this was refused by the progressive Maximilian. The attitude of Confederates towards their employees and language barriers meant that relations between the two led to problems.

The idyllic plantation life that Maury envisaged never eventuated. The colonies consisted mainly of tents and resembled army camps rather than townships, a far cry from antebellum plantations. A visiting journalist described the settlements as 'a few tents scattered here and there and a cluster of unfinished houses'. The Carlota governor lived in a bamboo house and other settlements were inadequate.



Carlota – Governor's Mansion

At the same time, the land became expensive due to speculation and became more expensive than comparable land in the United States. It was also difficult to travel to these colonies overland, so most migrants arrived by boat, which was expensive.

Despite these difficulties, the land was fertile and the colonies might have survived without the deteriorating political situation. By 1866, the U.S. government actively enforced the Monroe Doctrine by supplying arms to the Juarists and posting a further 50,000 men on the Rio Grande as a threat to Maximilian. The U.S. Navy also blockaded Mexico to prevent more French reinforcement from arriving. As a result, Napoleon III, fearing a conflict with the U.S. and issues with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in Europe, decided to withdraw his men in May 1866, which doomed Maximilian's government.

The Juarists, emboldened by these events, regained control of most of Mexico, sacked the smaller colony of Omealco and deported captured Southerners. Many of the inhabitants of Carlota and other settlements drifted back to the U.S. and other parts of Latin America. By the time Maximilian was executed in June

1867, only two confederate families remained in Mexico.

Shelby returned to Missouri and resumed farming, as well as becoming a U.S. marshal. Maury became a respected Physics professor after returning home to Virginia and helped launch the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Juarez today is regarded as Mexico's greatest national hero.

Other Confederate colonies were also established in South America including failed ones in Belize. Successful ones, however, were created in Brazil, which hoped to emulate the success of the North American cotton industry, which was encouraged by Emperor Don Pedro II. Brazil was one of the last bastions of slavery and it was not abolished until 1888.

Former Confederates, known as *Confederatos*, established the thriving colonies of Americana and Santa Bárbara in Brazil. It is estimated that 20,000 – 40,000 Americans arrived in Brazil in the decade after the Civil War and developed farms which grew and processed cotton, sugar cane and coffee utilizing slave labour. As a result, plantation life was partly recaptured.



Americana – Brazil 1882

Even after slavery was abolished, these cities continued to thrive. The blood lines of descendants of the original settlers became diluted and the children learnt Portuguese.



Steagall Confederate family in Americana

Today the inhabitants of Americana and Santa Bárbara, known as 'Americanese' and continue to be aware of and proud of their Confederate history. English is spoken with a Southern accent, the Confederate battle flag is flown in the streets and 'Dixie' can often be heard.

These cities celebrate an annual festival known as *Festa Confederata* where inhabitants of all racial backgrounds dress up as ante-bellum southerners and Confederate soldiers. The names of Lee, Jackson and Davis are common. Almost 260,000 people in Brazil today claim Confederate heritage.

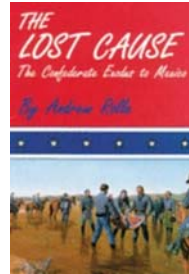


Festa Confederata, Americana, Brazil - 2016

Peter concluded by noting that it is fascinating that Confederates attempted to continue their planter life. Their attempts might have been successful if the political situation had not deteriorated. The efforts of Maury and Shelby are commemorated in the post-war Confederate anthem "The Unreconstructed Rebel":

*I won't be reconstructed, I'm better now than then.
And for a Carpetbagger I do not give a damn.
So it's forward to the frontier, soon as I can go.
I'll fix me up a weapon and start for Mexico.*

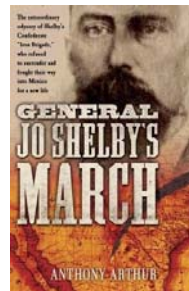
A book list is provided for those who wish to read further on this fascinating period:



The Lost Cause: The Confederate Exodus to Mexico by Andrew F. Rolle



Ghost Colonies: Failed Utopias, Forgotten Exiles and Utopian Visions by Ed Wright



General Jo Shelby's March by Anthony Arthur



The Confederatos: Old South Immigrants in Brazil
Edited by Cyrus B. Dawsey & James M. Dawsey

An Evening with Dr. Gordon Jones



Our members, including a number who have been unable to attend for some time, were privileged to spend an evening with Dr. Gordon Jones, Senior Curator and Historian at the Atlanta History Center (for 31 years). Gordon was visiting Sydney and staying with his friend, Honorary Life Member Len Traynor, who brought him to the meeting.

This was an opportunity to discuss topics of interest with Gordon in a convivial and expansive way. Members were able to share experiences as well as interact with Gordon's slide presentation.

This evening represents what the Roundtable is all about - a wonderful opportunity in a convivial, informal atmosphere to expand on many topics in an informal Q & A session.



Gordon spoke at length about the importance and value of artifacts held by the Atlanta History Center and the importance of their being handed down. The Center has approximately 12,000 artefacts, many donated.

The Cyclorama painting, its history and acquisition by the Atlanta History Centre, was of great interest to everyone. Gordon included information about details not generally known, such as the addition of Clark Gable to the panorama in the 1930s.

Other topics covered included the locomotive 'Texas', which won the Great Locomotive Chase and which Gordon believes is a symbol of Atlanta because that city has been an important railway hub as it has no rivers.

Also discussed was the use of wagons and their importance for transporting supplies and

wounded soldiers. Gordon expressed appreciating for Len Traynor's excellent 1/6th scale model of a wagon, which the museum had commissioned. He also described how Len had transported it to Atlanta.

The most expensive single artefact in the museum is the Regimental Colors of Philadelphia's 127th Colored Infantry, purchased in 2019 for \$200,000. Gordon stressed how unique, valuable and important this item is because of what it represents.



Thank you to Gordon for a special and much-appreciated evening.

Len Traynor's Coles Quiz Questions

In his response to the announcement of The Leonard Traynor "Contribution to the Newsletter Award" at our previous meeting, Len spoke of winning a prize in the Coles Quiz in 1966 as a result of answering four questions. This prize was a plane ticket to Las Vegas, which enabled him to travel and visit battlefield sites for six months.

Len would like members to have a go at answering these questions. They were purposely made difficult because Len had scored 100% in the audition. Answers will be given next newsletter.

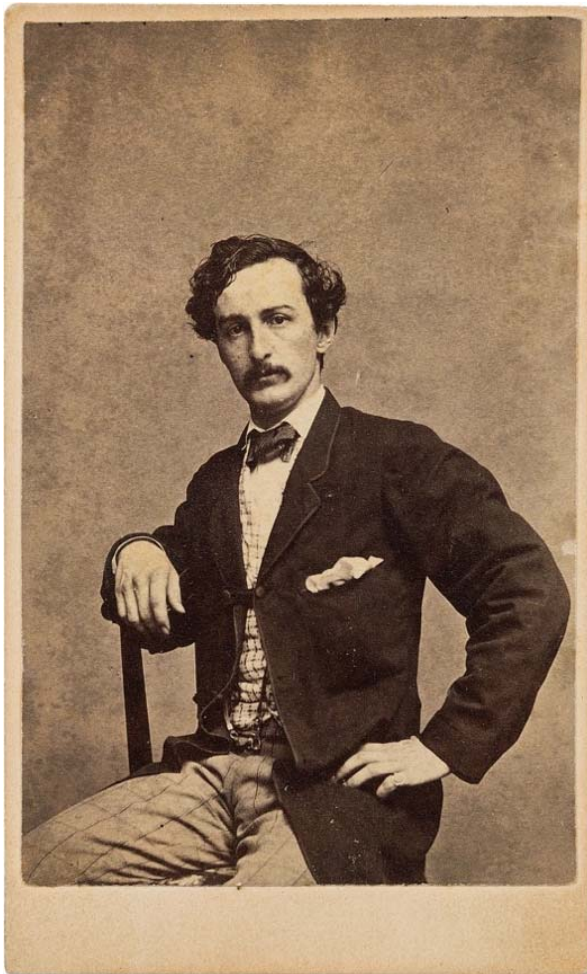
NOTE ALSO: In the studio with live audience and bright lights, Len was given only 15 seconds to respond to each question.

1. Who did General Lee relieve as General-in-Chief of the Confederate Party?
2. What was the name of the Union ironclad instrumental in the capture of Island No. 10?
3. Where and when did the Confederate Peace Commissioners meet, and who were they?
4. General Sherman met President Lincoln only once in the course of the war. What was the date, the place and the name of the ship on which they met?

(Please note that Qs. 3 & 4 involve multiple parts, which is not fair for a question awarded only one point).

Civil War Profile

John Wilkes Booth (1838 – 1865)



Booth's 'Carte de Visite'

The name of John Wilkes Booth is instantly recognisable to any student of modern history as the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln. At one level, that act is what defines Booth's life and legacy, and few of us have ever looked beyond this. Yet Booth's life is a fascinating study, a kind of metaphor symbolising, in its emotional intensity and volatility, the immensity of the upheaval in American life that was wrought by the Civil War.

At the time of the assassination, Booth was one of America's leading actors from a family of famous actors which included his father Junius and brothers Edwin and Junius Jr. He was well known for his energetic and skilful portrayals in many leading roles, including Shakespearean characters such as Richard III, Romeo and the role of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, this last being, interestingly, his favourite role. Indeed, Booth's father's full name was Junius Brutus Booth and

it was Marcus Junius Brutus who was the leader and most famous of the assassins of Julius Caesar – an assassination that also followed a civil war (between Pompey and Caesar) and the end of the Republic with the concentration of power in Caesar's hands as Emperor. Booth's middle name 'Wilkes' was a family name introduced by Booth's great grandmother (who was a Wilkes) a relative of John Wilkes (1725 – 1797), a famous radical Mayor of London and parliamentarian, who had supported parliamentary reform as well as the American Revolution. According to Terry Alford, the author of *Fortune's Fool*, a biography of Booth, "he had grown up in a home where the self-sacrificing heroes of antiquity were honoured. Subsequently, his study of plays like *Julius Caesar* confirmed that Brutus and Cassius were men of high principle, not common cutthroats. These convictions, held by an individual as unsettled as Booth, spelled tragedy."

John Wilkes, Edwin and Junius Booth Jr were cast respectively as Mark Antony, Brutus and Cassius in one of the most celebrated theatrical events of their generation – the performance of *Julius Caesar* at the Winter Garden in New York in August, 1864 - a charity performance celebrating Shakespeare's 300th birthday, which raised funds for the statute of Shakespeare that still stands in Central Park.

John Wilkes Booth was one of 10 children that his father had with his wife Mary Ann. The couple had lived in London but later came to live in the United States where the children were born. Booth's father raised his family between two homes – one a farm known as 'Tudor Hall' in rural Maryland and the other a city house in Baltimore. John's mother was devoted to him and he was much loved as a boy. However, the family had some serious problems. The father had major difficulties with alcoholism and was emotionally very unstable under its influence.

By the time John Wilkes was born, his father had stabbed another actor, shot a man in the face, assaulted others, attempted suicide three times and had been jailed in four states. In 1835 he wrote to President Andrew Jackson threatening to cut Jackson's throat. He wandered naked in a snowstorm once and tried to sell his son Edwin for five dollars.

Although he had been sent to good schools by his father, John Wilkes never excelled academically and always had some difficulty writing. However, he was a lively and energetic and popular youth, and became a fine horseman, and a good fencer and marksman. He had very firm and unbending opinions about things. A very disturbing feature of his youth – and one which psychologists would say could signify a deeply troubled personality - was that in his early teens Booth had a mania for killing cats; indeed, one of his boyhood friends recalled Booth having tied two cats together so that neither could move without inflicting pain on the other, and enjoying watching their discomfort. Paradoxically, Booth was very fond of horses and chastened others who mistreated them.

At age 17, Booth decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become an actor, having done much play-acting of an amateur kind during his childhood. He developed an ability to memorise a script, and displayed remarkable talent. As his career blossomed, he received many rave reviews, most notably for his portrayal of Richard III, some critics purporting to recognise a genius in his acting, yet he often received reviews from critics that had some reservations about his abilities. One impressed critic described Booth as having "a musically full and rich voice of rare compass and modulation". He was immensely popular with the public and his earnings at his peak were enormous for the times – in excess of \$20,000 per year (equivalent to about \$600,000 today). Booth was a matinee idol to adoring female theatre goers, and he received a large amount of fan mail from infatuated women.

Although engaged, Booth never married and it appears that he behaved in a chivalrous, gentlemanly way toward the women in his life. Like his father, John was a womaniser and had a number of affairs including with actresses. When he was captured and killed, Booth was found to have in his possession photographs of five women – Fanny Brown (regarded as the most beautiful woman on the stage and once rumoured to be engaged to Booth); Alice Gray (an actress), Effie Germon (another actress); Lucy Lambert Hale (his fiancée and a U.S. Senator's daughter – who had at one time been seriously courted by Oliver Wendell Holmes!); and Helen Western (an actress).



This photo shows the belongings found on Booth's body when he was killed, April 26, 1865

Booth was also known to have visited prostitutes and was especially close to one in Alabama named Louise Wooster, who became famous for tending to victims of a severe cholera epidemic there. Ernest Abel PhD, a professor at Wayne State University and author of *John Wilkes Booth and the Women who Loved him*, makes a case based on Booth's history of ailments and symptoms, and contemporary accounts of those who knew him regarding changes in his behaviour and personality, that Booth had syphilis which, in its later stages can lead to neurosyphilis. He writes:

"With all the women in his life, including the many prostitutes he had affairs with, it was inevitable that he contracted syphilis. It's my explanation for his dramatic personality changes and what finally put him over the edge."



Fanny Brown



Booth's fiancée Lucy Lamber Hale

Although this theory has not been embraced by other historians, it is certainly a possible one.

One of Booth's ailments was a hoarseness in his throat that seems to have developed in 1864, and which led him to regard his acting career as over. Nevertheless, his years of financial success enabled him to invest in Boston real estate and an oil well in Pennsylvania. It also enabled him to finance pro-Confederate projects such as smuggling much needed quinine supplies to the South.

When the Civil War came, Booth, like many Marylanders, was a Southern Sympathiser. Yet he was as bitterly opposed to disunion, as he was opposed to the abolitionist movement, believing that America's founding fathers had established the constitution for white citizens and that the negro race was inferior and destined to servitude or to be resettled to Africa. He believed that emancipation would lead in time to a tearing apart of the country. He once wrote in a letter to Louise Wooster that 'Men have no right to entertain opinions which endanger the safety of the country. So deep is my hatred for such men that I could wish I had them in my grasp and I had the power to crush. I'd grind them to dust!' On another occasion Booth told Louise "If I could I would kill every damned abolitionist in the North and every damned secessionist in the South, then there would be no war. This is too grand a country to be plunged into civil war by such fanatics!"

After John Brown conducted his doomed raid on Harper's Ferry, he was imprisoned in Charlestown, Virginia. Brown and his raid, aimed at starting a slave uprising for emancipation, caused an enormous amount of fear and controversy throughout the country; to some abolitionists he was a visionary, to many

in the South he was a dangerous, treasonous murderer threatening their very lives.

Governor Wise of Virginia was so concerned that civil disorder would break out that he sent militia troops, including the Richmond Grays, to Charlestown to maintain order. John Wilkes Booth at the time had an engagement performing at the Marshall Theatre in Richmond, but, caught up in the turbulent emotion of these dramatic events, he spontaneously cut this short, borrowed a uniform of the Richmond Gray's (of which he was not a member) and travelled with them to Charlestown where he remained with the regiment until after Brown was hanged.

Whilst in prison, Brown had received many visitors, and the day before the hanging Booth obtained the sheriff's permission to visit Brown although there is no record of what transpired between Booth and John Brown, whom he regarded as heroic although he despised his cause. Booth was present at Brown's hanging, and procured, as a souvenir, a piece of wood from the wooden box that had contained Brown's coffin, upon which Brown had sat on the way to his execution.



This photograph of Richmond Grays at Charlestown is thought to include Booth

Booth was a regular and well-known performer at Ford's Theatre whom Lincoln had seen perform in November 1863 in the play *The Marble Heart* and whose acting Lincoln had admired. Lincoln's ten-year-old son Tadd had on another occasion enjoyed that play so much that he asked to be taken back-stage to meet Booth in his dressing room, where he was introduced as the President's son. Booth

treated Tad and his companion very politely, and gave them each a rose.

Booth attended Lincoln's second inauguration on March 4 as the guest of his secret fiancée Lucy Hale. Later, Booth remarked about his "excellent chance...to kill the President, if I had wished."



This photo of Lincoln's second inaugural shows Booth (circled) close by in the gallery of the Capitol during Lincoln's address

On April 11, Booth attended Lincoln's last speech, given from a window at night time to a large throng in front of the White House in which Lincoln promoted voting rights for emancipated slaves. Booth said to his companion "That means nigger citizenship. ... That is the last speech he will ever give."

The remainder of the story is well known: Booth's growing obsession that Lincoln had become a tyrant who was destroying the country; his plan to kidnap Lincoln and use him as a bargaining tool to negotiate a satisfactory outcome for the South, morphing after Lee's surrender on April 9th 1865 to the assassination conspiracy (with a number of other conspirators) to kill not only Lincoln, but also Vice President Johnson, Secretary of State Seward and General of the Army U.S. Grant. Booth carried out his assassination of Lincoln six days later at Ford's Theatre on the night of 15th April, 1865. After fleeing, Booth was soon hunted down by Federals and shot dead in a Virginia tobacco barn by Sgt Boston Corbett, his last words reportedly being "Tell mother that I died for my country," then.

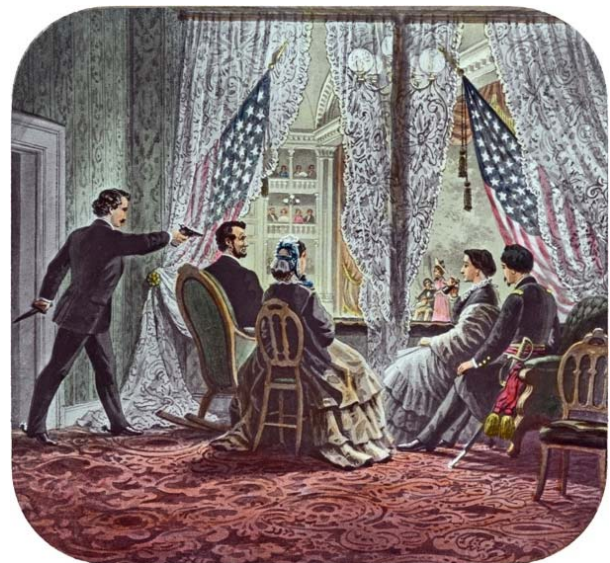
"Useless, useless..." followed by "Did Jett betray me?" (referring to Willie Jett, a Confederate soldier who had harboured Booth during his flight from arrest). In Booth's possession were the items shown in the photograph referred to and shown above. Booth was only twenty six years old when he died.

John Wilkes Booth wrote in his diary that he shouted "Sic semper tyrannis" ("Thus always to tyrants") after shooting Lincoln, in part because of the association with the assassination of

Caesar. The phrase is the state motto of Virginia and was also used in the pro-Confederate Civil War song "*Maryland, My Maryland*", which was popular at the time with Southern sympathizers in Maryland, such as Booth. The song was the official state song of Maryland from 1939 until 2021.

Booth's fascination with John Brown seems to have been close to obsessive; perhaps he was drawn to the whole concept of martyrdom, and wanted to understand this martyr for the cause of abolitionism – a cause that was the polar opposite of the cause Booth believed in. Ironically, Booth was inspired by the calm manner in which John Brown faced his execution, to which Booth had been an eye witness - perhaps this strengthened Booth's determination to martyr himself for the South by murdering the President.

Given Booth's propensity for high emotion, his flair for theatrics, his family history, his extreme opposition to emancipation, his single-mindedness and the possibility that he was suffering from syphilis that may have progressed to the point of affecting his mental stability, John Wilkes Booth became an accident waiting to happen in the maelstrom that was the Civil War era in America. The terrible conflict of ideas over union and slavery, the bloodshed and the complete rending of the fabric of American society during the Civil War provided a perfect storm to trigger the terrible actions and the sad fate of this extraordinarily complex and troubled man.



For Further Reading see Terry Alford, *Fortune's Fool – the life of John Wilkes Booth* (Oxford, 2015); E. Lawrence Abel, *John Wilkes Booth and the Women who Loved Him* (Regnery History, 2018).