

# The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

While searching for articles to use in the next issue of the *Courier*, I stumbled across a newspaper clipping in the April 1996 issue of *The Surratt Courier* that I had to share with everyone. As per usual, I wanted to find the original source and went to [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)—I love that website. I found not only the article I was looking for in the December 3, 1892, *The Democratic Advocate* on page 3, but I also found a much longer article on the same topic in the December 9, 1892, *Maryland Independent* on page 2. It was even more interesting. Here is the longer article.

### ***The Surratt House for Chicago***

*The Marlboro correspondent of The Baltimore Sun says: "The relic hunters have visited Southern Maryland, and last week they found the old homestead of the late Mrs. Surratt and offered \$15,000 for the building and the large farm attached. It is their intention to have the edifice torn down and carried to Chicago where it will be re-erected. This large frame building fronts on the public road leading from Brandywine to Washington, and about ten miles from the latter city.*

*"An extensive porch runs the whole length of the house, some sixty-five feet, and its two story and attic rooms, together with large halls, gives it an imposing appearance. It was at Surratt's Hotel that John Surratt, Sr., and his wife, Mrs. Lizzie Surratt, nee Jenkins, began life, and here the two boys and one daughter, Annie, were*

*born. After the death of Mrs. Surratt, the place was untenanted and for many years no signs of life were seen in this once hospitable home. It was purchased some years ago by Mr. Robert Hunter and recently came into the possession of Mr. Wheatly [sic], of Charles County. Last spring extensive repairs were added to the house and during the past summer many Washington people spent the heated term there.*

*"It is not known what success the visitors had, but it is believed they bought the place.*

*"In this connection, the Marlboro Gazette says: We may also add that it is rumored that Mr. A.O. Brummell has exchanged his farm in Surratts district containing 300 acres, for the gallows on which John Brown was hung. It is said he has been offered a big figure for the curiosity to be put up in Chicago during the World's Fair."*

Needless to say, the sale either didn't go through or never actually happened. I did search for additional articles, but couldn't find anything further on the subject.

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Now to correct the various pieces of wrong information stated in the first article.

First of all, when John Surratt, Sr., bought the 287 acres from Charles B. Calvert in 1852, his family was still living on their Washington County farm in Washington, D.C. By this time the children were 10, 7, and 6; so the Surratts, who were married in 1840, did not “begin life” nor were the children born on the Surrattsville property. By the way, Mrs. Surratt was known by some family members as “Lizzie.”

We know that by the time the Surratt children cleared their parents’ debts, only 157 acres of the original 287 acres remained. Robert Hunter bought the Surrattsville property for \$3,500 in 1869, and he in turn sold it to Martha E. Addison for \$3,000 in 1877. Evidently, few or no repairs had been made on the property during Hunter’s ownership. The dwelling and numerous outbuildings had fallen into disrepair or even ruin, which would account for the lower selling price. Over the years, Addison would sell off pieces of the property until only 117 acres remained. This lot was on the east side of New Cut Road (now known as Brandywine Road) and included the former tavern.

It was in October of 1890 that John William Wheatley of Charles County, Maryland, bought the remaining 117 acres from Martha Addison. This included the former tavern and any outbuildings that were still standing. For nearly 25 years, Mr. Wheatley would farm the land, make improvements to the property (which included the brick dairy house that is still standing today), and buying additional land.

Over the years, there would be several other owners of the tavern property. They were William E. Penn of Chesapeake City, Maryland, in 1909 (125 acres), the Seaboard Small Loan Corporation in February of 1938 (122 acres), and Blossie

K. [better known as B.K.] Miller in June of 1938 (2.43 acres). In 1965, the Millers donated the house and former tavern to Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The plans were to move the entire structure to another Park and Planning property. However, in 1968, Park and Planning finally decided to buy one acre of land surrounding old tavern, and you could say that the rest is history.

By the way, while trying to verify one of the Surratt property’s sale dates, I did find one more article regarding the Surratt house in the November 19, 1939, *The Evening Star*. Over the years, I have heard a variety of stories about this house and its residents. This is the first time I’ve heard of this story.

#### ***Aged Man Rescued.***

*In another Clinton (Md.) fire last night an 80-year-old man was rescued and several other persons were forced to flee when fire broke out in the old Surratt home. Seven persons were injured fighting the fire. It was finally brought under control after it had destroyed a disused kitchen, where the fire was said to have broken out, and a wing of the house containing three bedrooms.*

*Vincent Miller, 80-year-old father of B.K. Miller, Clinton merchant and owner of the house, was trapped in his bedroom. Advised to jump, he refused and firemen rescued him with a ladder. Mrs. Ella Curtin and other residents in the historic home were forced to flee.*

Normally, my messages aren’t this long. All I can say is, I never know where my “fact checking” will lead me. One time I started researching the origins of the term “Old Glory” and it lead me to the mutiny on the *Bounty*. Hard to believe, but there really is a direct connection between the two.

Stay well.

Louise Oertly, President

# The Guerrilla Boyle

by James O. Hall

Reprinted from the *Surratt Society News*, April and May 1985

## Part I

It is said that truth is the daughter of time. Perhaps this means that history sorts slowly though the known and the unknown in the tangled affairs of mankind to arrive at what will ultimately be accepted as so. With respect to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the sorting process is not complete. History has yet to digest the sometimes conflicting testimony at two sensational trials and a mountain of uncorrelated documents in our National Archives, in the Library of Congress, in historical societies, in public and private collections, and held as family heirlooms. The press of that day was filled with speculative and inaccurate reporting. Books have been written by the hundreds, many advancing incredible theories. The number of “I remember” and “I was there” articles is staggering. Worse, the myth makers and forgers have been busy. The fabric of the Lincoln assassination is almost endless. This article traces one little known thread.

Like many researchers, the author keeps what he calls “throw files.” These are labeled: an event, a place, a name. The idea is to “throw” odd notes and stray documents into such a file, to be looked into later depending on what turns up. The “Guerrilla Boyle” file was started years ago with this note: *Who was “the Guerrilla Boyle” and why were Dr. Samuel A. Mudd’s witnesses so scared of him?*

Additional information was added a bit later on the bottom of this note: *Boyle is said to have killed a Capt. Watkins in Maryland. What was this all about?*

As the years went by, more references to “Boyle” and “Capt. Watkins” were found and added to the file or scribbled on its jacket. No real search was made. Almost forgotten, the file nestled among dozens of others until the imperative of culling out what could not be used in a general manuscript forced a decision—forget the Boyle story or run it down. It seemed too tantalizing to drop completely. After more research, it became clear that the account could not be fully told in the [Lincoln assassination] manuscript, already lengthy. But the story does deserve a telling.

John H. Boyle, Jr., was born in 1843 at Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the second son of Dr. John H. Boyle and Ellen Slemaker Boyle. Shortly after his birth, the Boyles moved to Upper Marlborough, Prince George’s County. The family was ardently secessionist and John H. Boyle, Jr., just 18, enlisted in the Confederate Army at Manassas, Virginia, on June 1, 1861. His service record is sketchy, ending when he was marked present on November 13, 1861, the date his unit, Co. F 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Infantry, became Co. C 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Artillery. From other evidence, he must have been detailed in 1862 as aide-de-camp to Brig. Gen. George H. Steuart, a Marylander, who then commanded a mixed bag of Maryland and Virginia units.

Boyle first came to the unfavorable attention of the Federals on January 20, 1863. An informant sent word that Capt. J.H. Boyle was at his home in Upper Marlborough, wearing his Confederate uniform. This information reached Lt. Col. William E. Doster, Provost Marshal of Washington. Col. Doster instructed Maj. G.A. Richardson, Scott’s 900 Cavalry [a regiment of the New York 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry], to go after Boyle. Col. Doster put it this way: *“It being desirable to increase the collection of Confederate officers in the Old Capitol..., you are directed to send a force sufficient to capture him and bring him to these headquarters.”*

Maj. Richardson ordered out a cavalry detail under a Lt. French and sent them off at 10 p.m. for Upper Marlborough, some 15 miles distant. On the way, they fell in behind six of Lafayette C. Baker's detectives, going on the same mission. Lt. French was whip-sawed by the sleepy citizens of the town, who sent him first one way and then another. Finally, the detail took shelter in a barn. After daylight, Lt. French located the right house only to find that Baker's detectives were there with Boyle their prisoner. The detectives asked the disgruntled French to escort them back to Washington, as they were afraid that "...*some demonstration might be made by the people of the town.*" Lt. French complied. Boyle was taken to Washington and duly added to the "collection" of Confederate officers in the Old Capitol Prison. One record shows him as having a "Genl<sup>s</sup> Comm.", apparently to indicate that he was an aide-de-camp.

The Confederates sought to get Boyle exchanged for a comparable Union prisoner and made urgent representations to Lt. Col. W.H. Ludlow, Agent for the Exchange of Prisoners, Ft. Monroe, Virginia. Col. Ludlow sent the request along to Col. William Hoffman, Commissary-General of Prisoners, Washington. On March 14, 1863, Col. Hoffman wrote to Col. Ludlow in reply: "*I will make inquiries into the case of John H. Boyle, held as a spy, and will inform you when the facts are ascertained.*"

Maj. Levi C. Turner, Associate Judge-Advocate, made an effort to obtain proof on the spy charges, but found no real support. On May 13, 1863, he advised Col. William P. Wood, Superintendent of the Old Capitol Prison, that Boyle had been placed on a list for exchange. Accordingly, Boyle was sent to City Point, Virginia, where he was exchanged on May 19, 1863. After his exchange, Boyle again took up his duties with Brig. Gen. George H. Steuart. In his report of September 2, 1863, concerning the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863, Gen. Steuart particularly commended Mr. John H. Boyle as a "volunteer aide." This designation may have been euphemistic; most likely Boyle was a civilian scout or spy and had been for some time.

No record has been found concerning Boyle's activities during the remainder of 1863 and until September 13, 1864. On that date he was involved in a dramatic confrontation with Union Capt. Thomas H. Watkins and his younger brother, Benjamin Watkins, Jr. This took place in front of J.T. Hardesty's country store in Collington, Prince George's County, Maryland. This confrontation later cost Capt. Watkins his life.

Thomas H. Watkins was born near Davidsonville, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, on October 18, 1838, the eldest son of Dr. Benjamin Watkins and Mary Hodge Watkins. Dr. Watkins was a slave-owning Union man, a rarity. He had extensive land holdings in the county and devoted most of his time to farming. Thomas H. Watkins was mustered in the Union Army on December 18, 1861, and placed in command of Co. B, Burnell Legion, Maryland Cavalry. For a time he served as Provost Marshal, Annapolis Military District, and was greatly respected for the non-sense way he carried out his duties. On January 19, 1864, he was married to Miss Julia Sellman at the All Hallows Protestant Episcopal Church near his home. He was wounded in a cavalry fight at Petersburg, Virginia, on August 18, 1864, and was sent to a hospital in Philadelphia. When sufficiently recovered, he obtained leave and returned to the family home, *The Locusts*. His wife was there, expecting a child in November.

On the morning of September 13, 1864, Capt. Watkins sent a servant to the stables for a particular horse, the property of his brother, Benjamin. The horse was gone, along with a saddle and bridle. There had been Confederate guerrillas in the area recently, and it was suspected that one of them had stolen the horse. Capt. Watkins and his brother armed themselves, saddled up, and followed the tracks of the stolen horse in a westerly direction across Governor's Bridge, which

spans the Patuxent River and into Prince George's County. At Hardesty's store, they found the horse in possession of John H. Boyle.

There was a heated argument over the ownership of the horse. Boyle drew a pistol and fired at Capt. Watkins. The ball struck the saddle on the stolen horse, and slightly wounded the animal. A free-for-all followed. One account, passed down in a local family, is that the Watkins brothers "...worked Boyle over pretty good." Whatever happened, Boyle was disarmed and his hands were tied. For some reason, it was decided to deliver him to the Baltimore headquarters of Brig. Gen. Erastus B. Tyler. On the way, the fiery Boyle cursed Capt. Watkins and promised to kill him at the first opportunity. A rest stop was made at a store in Crownsville. Here Boyle managed to untie his hands. He secured a heavy balancing weight from the store scales and struck the unsuspecting Capt. Watkins a sharp blow on the temple. In the confusion, he escaped—one account has it that he got away on the horse he had stolen earlier in the day.

A local physician was called, and he found Capt. Watkins unconscious and bleeding from a deep laceration. At first it was thought that the wound would be fatal. After a time, the physician decided that there was a severe concussion, but no fracture. That evening Capt. Watkins was removed to his father's home. A few days later, he applied for additional leave on account of his injury.

After his escape, Boyle fled to St. Mary's County, Maryland, and disappeared in the extensive Confederate underground apparatus.

At the time of the general election, November 8, 1864, Boyle was in Charles County. The day after the election, he came to the home of Leonard D. Roby, near Bryantown, with some fifteen men. Roby later testified that he did not know Boyle, except by reputation, and was uneasy when he learned that Boyle was among his war-like visitors. Boyle was breathing fire at those suspected of supporting Lincoln and the Union. He sent word to Dr. George D. Mudd, a respected Bryantown citizen and a Lincoln man, that he would kill him and steal his horses.

After his injury at the hands of Boyle, Capt. Watkins recuperated at *The Locusts* until his leave was up. He was then given light duties in the Annapolis Military District pending expiration of his term of service. On October 31, 1864, he was mustered out. He went home to help his father and brother manage the family farming interests. There was much to be done and little help; the enslaved were gone, free in Maryland as of November 1, 1864.

A daughter, Margaret, was born at *The Locusts* on November 11. With new family responsibilities, Capt. Watkins turned to what he knew best—farming. He arranged to take over *Vel Meade*, a farm owned by his family. This place was located some three miles southwest of his father's home and near the Prince George's County line. He took possession on December 30, 1864.

Mrs. Watkins set about putting the old house in order and Capt. Watkins began buying farm animals and equipment. The unmarried Watkins girls spent much time at *Vel Meade*. Margaret was the baby of the family and received concentrated attention from her adoring aunts. Things seemed to be looking up. But there it was—a little cloud out in the sea. Boyle sent word by the grapevine that he had not forgotten the indignity of his arrest as a horse thief; and that he would come to kill Capt. Watkins, as promised, when he could get around to it.

At dusk on March 25, 1865, three men on foot stopped at Dorsey's store near Governor's Bridge—about a mile north of *Vel Meade*—and purchased liquor. A clerk named Nicholson recognized one of the men as John H. Boyle. He did not know the other two. Boyle asked the way to Capt. Watkins' home; he was told that they had come right by it down the road. Boyle then made a threat against Capt. Watkins' life.

After supper that same day, Capt. Watkins sat down in his front room to read the paper. The servants were busy clearing away the dishes. Mrs. Watkins and Mary Watkins, her sister-in-law, had retired with the baby to an upstairs bedroom. The child was feverish that day, and Dr. Thomas Welsh, a family friend, had been asked to drop by that evening to take a look at her. It was just after 8 p.m. and he was expected momentarily. One of the servants heard the back door open, followed by the sound of footsteps across the room, but supposed that it was some member of the household. Then she heard an angry shout from the front room; "*Your frolic is over!*" This was followed by two pistol shots. One ball took effect in Capt. Watkins' lung. The other struck a door. He managed to climb the stairs, but fell on the landing at the top.

Mrs. Watkins and Mary were at first stunned by the shots, the screams of the servant girls, and the sound of Capt. Watkins falling near the bedroom door. Realizing what must have happened, Mrs. Watkins secured her husband's pistol from a drawer and started to go to his aid. Her sister-in-law prevailed on her to lock the door and stay to protect the baby. When Mrs. Watkins went to the window to look out, a shot was fired in her direction from the front yard.

The assassins were still on the premises when Dr. Welsh rode up a few minutes later. He tied his horse at the hitching rail and walked up to the door. He said later that a strange voice spoke to him and that he was immediately fired upon. By the pistol flashes, he could make out two male figures. He turned and ran across a field to the Igleharts' farm. Thomas and James Iglehart were there and returned with him to see what had happened. Armed with shotguns, they approached the house cautiously—too late. Capt. Watkins was beyond help, crumpled dead where he had fallen.

## Part II

The murder of Capt. Watkins caused intense excitement in the community, and Maryland Governor A.W. Bradford immediately authorized a \$500 reward for Boyle's capture. Military authorities in Annapolis, Baltimore, and Washington were notified and an investigation was started. Col. F.D. Sewall, Commander, Annapolis Military District, reported his findings and conclusions on March 27. He gave an account of the murder and a summary of Boyle's background. In part, Col. Sewall wrote: "*No doubt seems to exist but that Boyle is the guilty party. He had been known to be lurking in the vicinity for two or three weeks previous and had expressed a determination to kill Watkins. Three men were seen that evening coming from Charles County in the direction of Watkins', and one of these men answers the description of Boyle. They were not mounted.*"

The immediate search by cavalry was fruitless. No trace of the killers could be found and it was assumed—correctly—that they had made it back to the relative safety of Southern Maryland. On March 27, Capt. Watkins was buried with full military honors in the little cemetery at All Hallows Chapel. His father, Dr. Benjamin Watkins, included this note in his journal entry for that day: "*I pray God that the villains may be caught...I am distressed beyond description....*"

But the villains were not caught. A full-dress military search of lower Maryland was ordered. Early on Sunday morning, April 2, Capt. George D. Curry, Provost Marshal, Annapolis Military District, set out with a strong force from the 1<sup>st</sup> Delaware Cavalry. The object was to bring Boyle in, dead or alive. Benjamin Watkins, Jr., went along to identify Boyle and the horses. After a search through parts of Anne Arundel County and Calvert County, the command took a transport steamer down the Patuxent River to Benedict in Charles County. They received no help from the citizens, although some of them must have known Boyle and harbored him in the past.

Fear of retaliation by Boyle was very real; a person could end up dead. This was to have repercussions during the hunt for John Wilkes Booth—which overlapped the hunt for Boyle—and helped to put Dr. Samuel A. Mudd in the shadow of the gallows.

About 10:15 on the night of April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln in Ford's Theatre. Almost at the same time, Lewis Thornton Powell entered the home of Secretary of State William H. Seward and nearly butchered the bedridden Seward and several members of his household. Booth was quickly identified by the Washington Metropolitan Police as the man who shot the President. It was not known who committed the savage attack at the Seward home, but city detectives shortly had a name to consider—John H. Surratt, Jr. They raided Mrs. Surratt's boarding house about 2 a.m. looking for him. Surratt was not there.

By 2:30 a.m., General C.C. Augur learned that two horsemen had been permitted by a provost sergeant to cross the Navy Yard Bridge at around 10:45 p.m., and that one of them was a man named David Herold. This he got from John Fletcher, an employee of Naylor's livery. Acting on Fletcher's information, Gen. Augur ordered a portion of the 13<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry to the Navy Yard Bridge. A bit later, a telegraphic order came from the headquarters of Brig. Gen. Martin D. Hardin, Hardin's Division, 22<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps, to Maj. George S. Worcester, Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, at Fort Baker, to turn the detachment over to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. David D. Dana and send him into Maryland "as soon as possible" to search for the bridge-crossers. One of the duties of Lt. Dana, as Provost Marshal, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, was to maintain sentries day and night at the Navy Yard Bridge. It was his man, Sgt. Silas T. Cobb, who had allowed the two horsemen to cross—this contrary to a written order that prohibited any crossing after 9 p.m. without a pass and with the countersign.

As with armies throughout history, somebody forgot to "pass the word." Lt. Dana was not told that Herold was one of the men who had crossed the bridge. Nor is it clear from the record that the other man gave Sgt. Cobb the name "Booth" at the time he crossed. But he was informed that John Wilkes Booth had shot the President and that John H. Surratt was a suspect in the Seward carnage. And he was given a description of sorts. About dawn that morning, April 15, he and his command rode into Prince George's County looking for the bridge-crossers, be they Booth and Surratt or whoever. They came within a hair of success that day.

So far as is known, the name Boyle had not been mentioned to Lt. Dana as a possible suspect in the attack at the Swards. Lt. Dana brought it in through a side door. Just how he got the notion is a mystery, but he quickly developed a "thing" about Boyle. He became convinced that Boyle had murdered Secretary Seward and his son. None of those wounded at the Seward home died, but Lt. Dana did not know that until later.

Early that morning, Lt. Dana reached the tiny village of Piscataway in Prince George's County, some 12 miles south of the Navy Yard Bridge. From there he sent a messenger back to Capt. Robert Chandler, Assistant Adjutant-General, Hardin's Division, with a report. On the envelope of this report, he wrote a further message:

*I have reliable information that the person who murdered Secretary Seward is Boyce or Boyd, the man who killed Capt. Watkins in Maryland. I think it without doubt true.*

*D.D. Dana*

The reference to the murder of Capt. Watkins rang a bell with Capt. Chandler. He sent a message along to Lt. Col. A.B. King with the note that Capt. Theodore McGowan, of Gen. Augur's staff. "...knows all about this Boyce or Boyd, and can tell you more than I can in regard to him. Lt. Dana is still on the search with cavalry, and is instructed to keep on until he finds somebody."

Obviously, a finger must have been pointed at Boyle while Lt. Dana was at Piscataway. Beyond this, the village revealed nothing of interest. As Lt. Dana wrote later, he found no indication that the fugitives had been there so he reasoned that “...*they must have taken the Surrattsville road in the direction of Bryantown.*” This was dead on target. At that very moment, John Wilkes Booth and David Herold were at the farm house of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, about three miles north of Bryantown.

As noted in his message to Capt. Chandler, Lt. Dana sent one of his troopers south to Chapel Point on the Potomac River below Port Tobacco. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. William K. Lavery was to report to Lt. Dana later that day at Bryantown with those of his command, who could be spared from other duties.

Shortly after noon, Lt. Dana reached Bryantown, some 18 miles east-southeast of Piscataway. He located his command post at the old tavern and placed sentries on the road leading into the village. Saturday was a market day for farmers, a day for shopping at Edward Bean’s store, for leaving work to be done at Peter Trotter’s blacksmith shop, for getting and sending mail. Somebody put Lt. Dana straight on names. The man of his interest was not “Boyce or Boyd,” but John H. Boyle, well-known in the countryside as a desperado and Confederate guerrilla. Lt. Dana gave out that John Wilkes Booth has assassinated the President and that John H. Boyle had assassinated Secretary Seward and his son. This got around quickly, often garbled in being repeated.

On Saturday afternoon, April 15, Dr. Samuel A. Mudd rode into Bryantown. He was not a conspicuous man and few could remember seeing him there. He did not stay long. When he rode out about 4 p.m., he had a heavy burden.

It is not the purpose here to review Dr. Mudd’s controversial conviction as being a party to Booth’s conspiracy to murder President Lincoln. As it relates to John H. Boyle, Dr. Mudd’s state of mind on Saturday afternoon is important. Booth and Herold had come to the Mudd home early that morning and Dr. Mudd had set Booth’s leg. There is no doubt that Dr. Mudd recognized Booth at the time, but until he rode into Bryantown that afternoon, it is apparent from his demeanor and his actions that he had no idea the President had been assassinated or that Booth and Herold were fugitives. Then the roof fell in.

Some years after his pardon by President Johnson, Dr. Mudd told his friend Samuel Cox, Jr., that he had come to Bryantown that Saturday to mail a batch of contraband letters he had recently received from Virginia. On the outskirts of the village, he was stopped by one of Lt. Dana’s sentries and learned from him that Booth had assassinated the President. He told Cox that he was horrified. Booth and Herold were at his home. He went into the village, mailed the letters, bought some items at Edward Bean’s store, and picked up the gossip going around. Booth had killed President Lincoln and John Boyle had killed Secretary of State Seward and his son. As Cox recalled it, Dr. Mudd said to him that his “*first impulse was to surrender Booth,*” but that, on reflection, he determined to “*go back and upbraid him for his treachery*” in concealing the circumstances of his request for assistance and medical aid.

It was a deeply troubled Dr. Samuel A. Mudd who went to Mass at St. Peter’s Catholic Church near Beantown the next morning. After church he rode along, as far as his home, with Dr. George D. Mudd. After some preliminary talk, he got down to his worry. He told his cousin that two suspicious parties had been at his home the day before, and that one of them had a broken leg, which he had bandaged, and that the two had gone off in the direction of “*Parson Wilmer’s.*” Dr. George D. Mudd’s testimony about this conversation is revealing:

*“When I left him, and was starting from him, I told him that I would mention the matter to the authorities and see what could be made of it. He told me he would be glad if I would; but, if I could make the arrangement, he would prefer to be sent for, and that he would give every information in his power relative to it; that, if it became a matter of publicity, he feared for his life on account of guerrillas that might be infesting the neighborhood.”*

That the fear of Boyle was one factor in Dr. Mudd’s disclosure equation is supported by Mrs. Sarah Mudd’s sworn statement of July 6, 1865. In this statement, Mrs. Mudd said that her husband had decided to go back to Bryantown on Saturday night and tell the authorities—that is, Lt. Dana—about his visitors that day. According to Mrs. Mudd, he actually had sent for a horse and was preparing to leave. She begged him not to go: *“I told him that if he went himself that Boyle who was reported to be one of the assassins and who had killed Capt. Watkins...might have him assassinated for it....”* Thus that matter was put off until the next day, when Dr. Mudd could talk with his cousin after church. This was too late; by then Booth and Herold were miles away. It was also too late for Dr. Samuel A. Mudd.

Had Dr. Mudd but known, he had nothing to fear from Boyle. The dragnet put out for John Wilkes Booth and his accomplices scooped up Boyle at Frederick, Maryland, far away from Charles County, on April 15—the same day Booth and Herold showed up at Dr. Mudd’s home. Boyle’s capture was blanketed by black headlines reporting the assassination. *The Baltimore Sun* reported his capture on April 19 and the *Alexandria Gazette* (Virginia) on April 20. Here is the *Gazette* story:

#### ***ARREST OF MURDERER OF CAPTAIN WATKINS, NEAR ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND***

*It will be remembered that some weeks since Capt. Thomas B. Watkins,...was brutally assassinated at his residence on South River, by a man at the time supposed to be John Boyle, aged about thirty years. On Saturday last, information was received that the murderer had been arrested in Frederick City, the party having confessed the deed, but refused to disclose his name, whereupon a military guard was dispatched to the latter city, and last night they returned with John Boyle in charge. He is now in jail in Annapolis.*

At Annapolis, Boyle was in a real fix. His mother was dead—buried at Mt. Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Washington, April 7, 1865. His father, Dr. John H. Boyle, was a prisoner of war. His brother-in-law, William Pearson, was an undercover Baker detective in Philadelphia and in no position to help. The burden fell on his three uncles: Edwin Boyle, Llewelyn Boyle, and James Boyle, Jr., all Annapolis attorneys. They arranged to get the services of three top trial lawyers in Annapolis: John T. Mason, Thomas S. Alexander, and Oliver Miller.

There were three indictments: one for larceny, one for attempted murder, and one for Watkins’ murder. Other indictments were pending.

The murder indictment was set down to be tried during the Anne Arundel Circuit Court session beginning May 1, 1865. On May 19, Boyle pleaded “not guilty” to this charge. His attorneys sought and obtained a change of venue to the Howard County Circuit Court for trial in September. The prosecution then went to trial on the other indictments. These cases were heard without a jury by Circuit Judge William Tuck. On June 8, Judge Tuck found Boyle guilty on both counts and, on June 22, sentenced him to four years for larceny of a horse and to five years for the attempted murder of Capt. Watkins with a weight scale. He was taken to the Maryland Penitentiary in Baltimore the next day.

The murder trial in Ellicott's Mills began on September 25 before Circuit Court Judge John E. Smith. It promised to be explosive. The witnesses were all on hand; Boyle had been brought from Baltimore and delivered to the County Sheriff. Attorney Mason then played his trump card. He called attention to the fact that Boyle was a convict serving a sentence totaling nine years and pleaded a Maryland statute under which a convict must serve out his time before being tried on another charge. This was a habeas corpus argument: Could the warden legally deliver the body of the convict Boyle? Judge Smith considered this argument and ruled that Boyle would have to serve the nine years before he could be tried in his court. Boyle was returned to the custody of the warden.

Dr. Benjamin Watkins, a deeply religious and very temperate man, wrote in his journal for September 25: "*Boyle...gains a continuance for 9 years. What a mockery! Great goodness!!*" On September 27 he wrote: "*Who shall be living at the end of 9 years the Lord only knows. Maybe court, attorneys [sic], and witnesses all dead and the most daring assassin gone free. The Lord preserve us!*"

The records of the Maryland Penitentiary show that Boyle was pardoned on March 1, 1872, by Gov. W.P. Whyte. What happened to him after that was never learned. There is a story in the Watkins family that Boyle went to Virginia and was hunted down and shot to death by a former trooper in Capt. Watkin's command. Perhaps so, perhaps not.

Mrs. Julia Watkins never remarried and wore black the rest of her life. A grandson of Benjamin Watkins, Jr., remembers that she often sat in an upstairs bedroom window. "*See,*" she would say, "*there come those men across the field. They will kill us all!*" There were no men.

The voice of the turtle was heard in our land; some heard it but faintly.

[2021 Editor's Note: Many interesting details were cut from this story because of lack of space. Mr. Hall's complete manuscript (23 pages) is available at the James O. Hall Research Center.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hall was never able to find out what happened to Boyle. Fortunately, someone else recently did with the help of modern technology. Read on for the rest of the story.]

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## **"Guerrilla Boyle" Updated**

by Robert L. Worden, Ph.D.  
Annapolis, Maryland

I first encountered John Henry Boyle while researching my forthcoming book on the Catholic congregation in Annapolis during the Civil War. Boyle's grandfather was already well known to me from an earlier book, published in 2003, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the establishment of St. Mary's as a permanent parish in Annapolis. Colonel James Boyle (1784–1854) was a member of the Maryland House of Delegates (1808–10 and 1819–20), Mayor of Annapolis (1823–25), State's Attorney for Anne Arundel County (1848–51), and a member of the Board of Visitors and Governors of St. John's College for many years. He served on the building committee for St. Mary's Church, which was constructed on land owned by Charles Carroll of Carrollton, in 1821–22. At some point thereafter, he converted to Catholicism and, in 1851, was appointed trustee of St. Mary's. In 1853, Colonel Boyle oversaw the transfer of the formerly Jesuit-run mission church to the Redemptorists, a Catholic congregation of priests and brothers

who also had been given Carroll's adjoining house and grounds to use as a seminary.

Boyle and his wife Susan Maccubbin Boyle (1795–1864) owned a substantial amount of property in and around Annapolis and were owners of enslaved people. Their four sons and three daughters were born and raised in Annapolis. The second son was Dr. John Henry Boyle, Sr., (1815–66). He married Ellen Slemaker, daughter of another prominent Annapolis property-owning family. John and Ellen had four children, who were born in Annapolis, and their youngest child, Edwin, was baptized at St. Mary's in 1851. The other three children also were probably baptized there, but the church records for the 1840s are not extant. John Henry, Jr.,—infamously known later on as “Guerrilla Boyle”—was born in Annapolis in 1843. As part of my Civil War research, I came across young Boyle's name as a Confederate agent and accused killer of Union Army Captain Thomas Hodges Watkins in 1864. I first found a series of articles by Annapolis historian Jack Kelbaugh entitled “A Case of Murder: The Melancholy Tale of Captain Thomas Watkins of the Union Cavalry”. It was published in three parts in *Anne Arundel County History Notes* in 1997. Kelbaugh wrote about the wartime situation in Anne Arundel County and the context of Watkins' death. In Part III of the series, he quoted extensively from James O. Hall's 23-page typescript, *The Guerrilla Boyle*, located at the Surratt House Museum's James O. Hall Research Center. My obvious next stop was a visit to the museum to peruse Hall's manuscript and other files on Boyle and several families with Annapolis associations. Besides Hall's typescript, there are clippings from the *Maryland Independent* (La Plata) in which Hall published a two-part series on Boyle in 1975. He uncovered an incredible amount of information on the Lincoln assassination and anyone even remotely involved in it before, during, and after. Because of Boyle's anti-Union depredations, the Watkins murder, and threats he had made against Dr. Samuel Mudd's cousin, it was initially suspected that he was one of the assassination plotters.

This article presents information on Boyle, which may not have been readily accessible to James Hall at the time of his research. But his findings were essential for my research into the intersecting connections between Annapolis and the “Guerrilla Boyle.” By 1850, Dr. Boyle had moved his family to Upper Marlborough, where he practiced medicine. Boyle Jr. attended Georgetown College for one year in 1858, but in 1859 and 1860 problems arose concerning nonpayment of his tuition. In 1860 he got into a fight with a free Black man in Upper Marlborough and suffered stab wounds, but recovered. When the war began, Dr. Boyle moved his medical practice to Richmond.

John Jr. joined the Confederate army, serving briefly as a private with the First Virginia Infantry, which soon became the First Virginia Artillery. But then he became an aide-de-camp, with the rank of captain—or some reports say a civilian aide (with the title of “Mr.”) or spy—for Brigadier General George Hume Steuart, commander of the First Maryland Infantry Regiment, CSA. Steuart was an Anne Arundel County native known as “Maryland Steuart” to differentiate him from Major General James Ewell Brown (J.E.B.) Stuart, the flamboyant Confederate cavalry commander from Virginia. Boyle was arrested by Federal agents in January 1863 at his family's home in Upper Marlborough, where he supposedly had a hundred or more letters addressed to Jefferson Davis and other southerners. He was incarcerated at the Old Capitol Prison in Washington to await trial as a spy, usually a capital offense. Although news reports referred to him as a captain on either Steuart's or Stuart's staff, the official prison record listed his rank as “gentleman,” indicating civilian status. Despite the serious charge against him, after four months he was paroled and exchanged for a Union army captain. These developments were well covered by James Hall, although online searching now produces more newspaper reports not readily available to him in the 1970s and 1980s.

Steuart singled out Boyle and three other staff officers to whom he was “*greatly indebted for valuable assistance rendered, and of whose gallant bearing I cannot too highly make mention*” for their actions at Gettysburg in July 1863. Steuart appreciated young Boyle for his knowledge of southern Maryland and found him more valuable as a civilian agent than a uniformed soldier. Father James Sheeran, a Redemptorist who had studied for the priesthood in Annapolis and Cumberland, was chaplain of the Fourteenth Louisiana Infantry, CSA, and met Boyle twice while ministering to Steuart’s regiment. In his diary, Sheeran mentioned meeting Boyle just after the Battle of Gettysburg, and again in October 1863 in Culpeper County, Virginia. He referred to Boyle as “*a high-toned gentleman and truly a devout Catholic.*”

As an interesting sidelight to the Boyle family was the discovery of Confederate paraphernalia in an Annapolis building owned by Boyle’s maternal uncle John H. Slemaker, at the foot of Main Street near the wharf. Boyle’s parents owned a three-story apartment building next door known as *Noah’s Ark*. When it caught fire in mid-February 1864, numerous men rushed to help put out the conflagration. But it spread to the uncle’s building and three Confederate flags were found among the rescued items. This discovery caused fury among loyal Unionists and, it was supposed in the February 18, 1864, *Annapolis Gazette* that the flags were “*intended to wave conspicuously, when Jeff Davis moves his headquarters from Richmond to Annapolis.*”

By 1864 Boyle was conducting subversive activities against pro-Union citizens in Southern Maryland. According to an account from Annapolis in 1865, these included “*many lawless acts, especially in horse stealing.*” Captain Thomas Watkins, the former Union Provost Marshal of Annapolis, arrested Boyle in September 1864 for stealing a horse from his own father’s farm, *The Locusts*, in Davidsonville, eleven miles from Annapolis. On the way to Fort McHenry, however, Boyle broke loose, severely wounded Watkins, and escaped with threats to kill him the next time they met. On the night of March 25, 1865, Boyle, accompanied by two accomplices, arrived on foot at *Vel Meade*, the farm where Thomas Watkins lived with his wife and infant daughter Margaret near Davidsonville. After shooting Watkins to death, the trio stole three horses and escaped. Governor Augustus W. Bradford offered a \$1,000 reward for Boyle’s apprehension and, despite a search by Federal cavalry in southern Maryland, the miscreants were not apprehended. [Editor’s Note: Mr. Hall’s article mentioned a \$500 reward.]

Calvary troopers were still searching for Boyle when President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865. Rumors were immediately afloat that Boyle was involved in John Wilkes Booth’s plot. Boyle was found near Woodsboro in Frederick County, Maryland, on April 15, arrested, and locked up in the county jail in Annapolis on charges of horse theft, attempted murder, and murder.

A bench trial was held in Annapolis on May 23, 1865, for the September 1864 charges. Boyle’s legal defense was arranged by his three uncles: James, Edwin, and Llewelyn Boyle. They hired three attorneys, one of whom was John Thomson Mason, Jr., a former judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals. The prosecutor was Anne Arundel County State’s Attorney James Revell. He was assisted by Alexander Randall, Maryland’s new Attorney General, who worked on obtaining pre-trial testimony against Boyle. Coincidentally or not, the three uncles, Mason, and Revell were all associated with St. Mary’s Parish in Annapolis. Also, Randall’s brother John was a Catholic convert at St. Mary’s and had once lived in the old Carroll House. Boyle was found guilty and sentenced to four years for horse stealing and an additional five years for the attempted murder of Watkins. He was incarcerated the same day at the Maryland Penitentiary in Baltimore.

Mason successfully argued for a change of venue for the murder of Watkins and the second horse theft. However, when proceedings began in September 1865 in Ellicott’s Mills, Howard

County, Boyle's lawyers cited a Maryland statute that someone already in prison had to serve the full sentence before he could be tried for another crime. The court agreed but Alexander Randall, representing the state, appealed the decision to the Maryland Court of Appeals in November. When the case was heard in April 1866, the higher court upheld the Howard County judge's decision and, in effect, gave Boyle a nine-year continuance until he had to face the murder and second horse theft charges.

Neither Boyle nor his legal team remained idle. While awaiting the results of the appeal in mid-February 1866, Boyle and another man escaped from the Baltimore penitentiary. They were captured in Fauquier County, Virginia, three weeks later and returned to prison. Boyle then served six more years of his sentence, when Mason, Maryland's newly appointed Secretary of State, and other supporters launched a pardon campaign. To create sympathy, they obtained seven medical certificates, some of which claimed Boyle had a terminal case of consumption. One certificate was submitted by Dr. Richard Sprigg Steuart, younger brother of General George Hume Steuart. There were even claims that Watkins had not been murdered, but killed in the course of his military duties. Mason obtained eighteen letters supporting a pardon and circulated six petitions in Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and Montgomery counties and Baltimore City, gathering 318 signatures in support of a pardon. Watkins' relatives and their supporters met with Governor William Pinkney Whyte to protest the pardon requests and 48 men, including some of the jurors from the May 1865 trial, signed an anti-pardon petition. Nevertheless, on April 30, 1872, Governor Whyte officially pardoned Boyle for the crimes of horse theft and attempted murder. He also directed that a *nolle prosequi* be entered with the Howard County Circuit Court, formally abandoning the Watkins murder indictment. Boyle was released from prison and ordered to stay out of Anne Arundel County for two years from the date of his release.

James Hall can be forgiven for not uncovering the Boyle pardon papers. Most pardon-related documents are filed at the Maryland State Archives with Maryland Secretary of State Pardon Papers, 1872 (S1031-25). But Boyle's papers could not be found there. Instead they are filed with Maryland Governor Miscellaneous Papers, 1867-72 (S1274-145). The 74 pages of pardon documents are located in an unlabeled file within a group of folders tied together with a faded red ribbon and include a card reading "1872 Applications, Qualifications & other papers, State House, 37 folders."

After his banishment from Anne Arundel County, Boyle sought new venues in the South. He moved to Mississippi, where he lived in Liberty Grove in the town of Tougaloo, Hinds County, north of Jackson. He worked as a railroad detective, gained media attention for tracking down two murderers in Louisiana, and, in October 1879, was arrested in Vicksburg for passing counterfeit money. He went on trial in United States District Court in Jackson, Mississippi, but the case ended in a mistrial in December. News of his activities brought Boyle fateful newspaper publicity. On June 20, 1880, after a Sunday evening walk with his wife Susan and infant son John Llewellyn, Boyle sat in his back yard enjoying an evening cigar. His wife and son sat on a nearby porch. According to Susan's first-hand account, "*some cruel coward crept up within 30 feet of him, and shot him in the back.*" He suffered two blasts of buckshot to the head and shoulder and died on Wednesday, having never regained consciousness. Susan Boyle hoped the governor would offer a reward for solving the crime, but the Hinds County sheriff told the local press that there were "*reasons why an active investigation was not gone into.*" No further details were provided, but it appears that Boyle was disliked in the area and his murder was not worth investigating. Some believe Boyle's violent end was an act of revenge carried out by one of Watkins' old cavalry troopers. "*Truly,*" reads a report of John Henry Boyle Jr.'s death, in the *Port Tobacco Times* (as

quoted in *The Baltimore Sun*, on July 3, 1880), “*the mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small.*”

Rumors persist to the present day that it was not Boyle, who killed Watkins, but another local man whom Watkins arrested during the war. Watkins lies buried in a well-tended grave in All Hallows Cemetery in Davidsonville, not far from where he met his end. The Kelbaugh article hinted that Boyle was not really the killer, or at least was not solely responsible. Watkins himself was not well liked in his largely pro-South home territory. It was because of his knowledge of local people and county roads that Watkins’ Union cavalry company was assigned in 1862 to assist the Annapolis provost marshal. He and his troops were charged with enforcing the draft, guarding polling places, and apprehending Confederate spies and soldiers on home leave. These duties did not sit well with pro-South county residents. One of the Confederate soldiers apprehended by Watkins and accused of spying was Daniel Martin Kent (1841–1919), a private in Company B, Thirty-Ninth Battalion, Virginia Cavalry. Kent, a near neighbor of the Watkins family, was home on furlough in Davidsonville in April 1863, when Watkins arrested him. After a brief confinement at Fort McHenry, Kent was exchanged and returned South in May. Coincidentally, the mission of Kent’s battalion was to provide scouts, guides, and couriers, not unlike some of John Boyle’s duties. It is not known for certain that Kent was one of the trio involved in killing of Thomas Watkins, and neither of Boyle’s comrades the night of the Watkins murder were identified, apprehended, nor tried. But Kelbaugh—without actually naming Kent—strongly hints it was he who fired the fatal shot.

Coinciding with my research on John Henry Boyle, Jr., my friend Catherine Randall of Baltimore was building a robust blog on her ancestor Alexander Randall (<https://cathyrandall.tumblr.com/>). In the course of preparing excerpts of Randall’s vast correspondence, diaries, and other materials, she came across John H. Boyle, Jr., and began writing her own story about him. We have now joined forces and hope to collaborate on a future publication.