

President Lincoln's slaying 150 years ago recalled at Ford's Theatre

By Debbie Abrams
Kaplan

"Don't know the manners of good society, eh?" Asa Trenchard said to Mrs. Mountchessington. "Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal; you sockdologizing old man-trap!"

As actor Harry Hawk delivered those lines, the crowd roared with laughter, including Abraham Lincoln, who was seated with his wife in the presidential box for this performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre.

But Lincoln suddenly slumped forward, then fell backward. The laughter had muffled the gunshot that would kill the 16th president of the United States.

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John Wilkes Booth dropped the .44-caliber derringer and jumped down to the stage, breaking his leg. A stagehand had his horse waiting outside the theater for the Confederate sympathizer's escape.

In the presidential box, Dr. Charles Leale, a 23-year-old who had recently graduated from medical school, surveyed the wound and ordered Lincoln moved. They carried him outside, where a man across the street waved them into the Petersen boarding house. Lincoln was taken to a first-floor back bedroom, his 6-foot-4-inch body laid diagonally across a small bed.

He died at 7:22 in the morning of April 15, 1865.

Ford's Theatre and the Petersen boarding house were thus immortalized as America lost what Secretary of State Edwin M. Stanton called "the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen."

Although owner John Ford tried to reopen his theater, public sentiment turned against him. Not long after, it became government offices and then closed, reopening in 1968 after extensive renovations as a national historic site and theater.

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Ford's Theatre today looks very much as it did during Lincoln's time, thanks to photographs Matthew Brady took within days of the assassination. You'll see the forsythia yellow doors, red carpeting and intimate box seats with ornate fabric draping.

The plain-brick, three-story Petersen House also looks much the same and is operated as a museum. The parlors and bedroom where Lincoln died have been re-created with 1865-period furnishings, none original to the house.

For this 150th commemoration, the exhibit "Silent Witnesses" in the Ford Theatre's Center for Education and Leadership next door to the Petersen House, brings together artifacts — including Booth's derringer — from that



fateful April night. (The exhibit runs through May 25.)

Illinois will relive Lincoln's assassination and funeral

The most recognizable on view is Lincoln's top hat, which usually is at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. His chapeau sports a black mourning band in honor of his son Willie, who had died in 1862.



Lincoln's greatcoat is back behind glass after a recent restoration. The Brooks Brothers garment, customized for his second inauguration, is said to be made of wool so fine it resembled cashmere. The lining is stitched with an eagle and the phrase, "One Country, One Destiny."

The contents of Lincoln's pockets are included: two pairs of spectacles, lens cleaner, a pocket knife, watch fob, wallet with a \$5 Confederate note and a handkerchief.

Visitors also will see Mary Todd Lincoln's black velvet cloak and pieces of the dresses she and Clara Harris wore that night, as well as the bloodstained gloves worn by Maj. Henry Rathbone. (Harris and Rathbone, who were engaged, were guests of the Lincolns. The two married in 1867 but Rathbone, who suffered mental illness, killed Clara in 1883. He died in 1911 in an asylum in Germany.)

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In the museum beneath Ford's Theatre, visitors can see Booth's diary, which details his run from the law and his surprise that the assassination was met with universal condemnation rather than heroic praise. You can also see one of the spurs he wore that night, and the knife used in his escape, engraved with the words "Liberty" and "America." The boot Booth wore on his broken leg, which had been cut off by Dr. Samuel Mudd before treatment, can be seen too.

Ford's Theatre, Petersen House mark 150th anniversary of Lincoln's death

Ford's Theatre is hosting a comprehensive series of Lincoln memorials, which it calls Ford's 150: Remembering the Lincoln Assassination.



In 1861 John T. Ford leased out the abandoned First Baptist Church on Tenth Street to create Ford's Theatre, a popular stage for theatrical and musical productions. On April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth during a performance of "Our American Cousin." The Lincoln Presidential box is upper left in the restored theater.

(Maxwell MacKenzie)

The commemorations on Tuesday and Wednesday in Washington, D.C., will include ranger talks, performances and panel discussions. Or you can stand outside the theater while 150 costumed actors give accounts about the end of the Civil War, what it was like inside Ford's Theatre at the time of the assassination and Lincoln's impact on the nation.

The public can obtain advance tickets to visit the Ford's Theatre complex (which includes the theater, museum, Petersen House and the Center for Education and Leadership) throughout the day and night of April 14 and 15, including when Lincoln would have been watching "Our American Cousin" at the theater and the overnight vigil at the Petersen House, the home across the street to which Lincoln was carried and in which he died. At press time, there were still tickets available, mostly for the middle of the night.

On Wednesday morning, a wreath-laying ceremony will take place at 7:22, the time of Lincoln's death, at the Petersen House. At 8 a.m. church bells will toll throughout the capital.

There are several opportunities to see Lincoln-related theater at Ford's. A 9 p.m. Tuesday performance of "Now He Belongs to the Ages: A Lincoln Commemoration" will feature readings from his speeches, excerpts from his favorite theater and opera performances, and Civil War-era music.

Tickets are sold out, but the performance will be streamed online at fords.org (6 p.m. Pacific time) and shown on big-screen TVs in the courtyard of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

Ongoing performances of "Freedom's Song" and "One Destiny" run through mid-May.

"Freedom's Song" is a musical using Lincoln's words as well as vignettes inspired by letters from those who lived through the Civil War.

"One Destiny" is a 35-minute play featuring two actors wondering whether John Wilkes Booth could have been stopped.

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Washington, D.C. travel info

If you go:

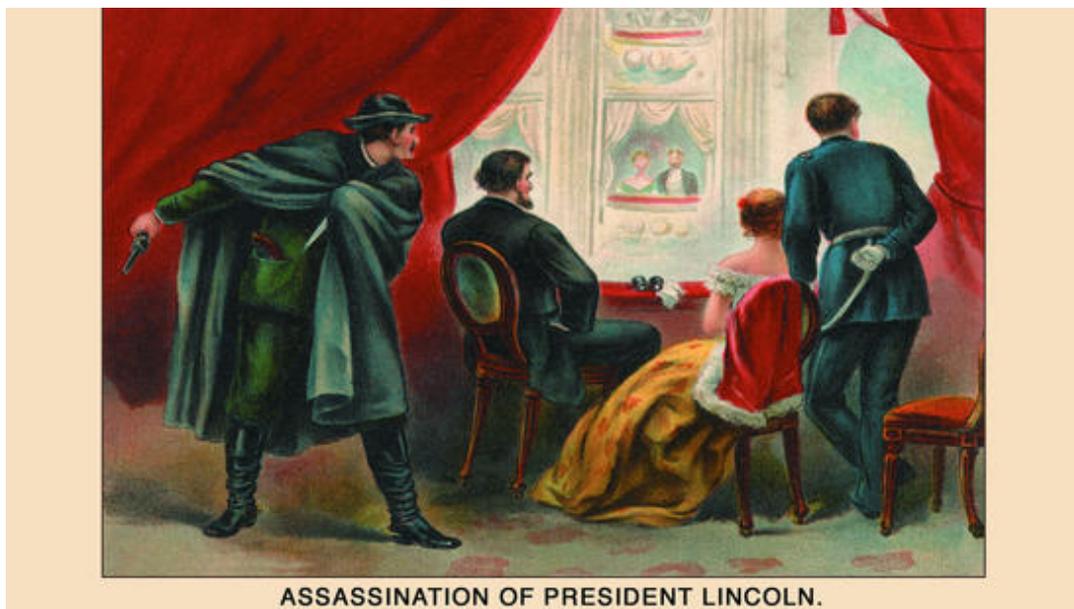
THE BEST WAY TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

From LAX, United, American and Virgin America offer nonstop service to Washington, D.C., and Delta, US Airways, American, United and Virgin America offer connecting service (change of planes). Restricted round-trip fares from \$398, including taxes and fees.

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, 511 10th St. NW; (202) 347-4833, <http://www.nps.gov/foth/index.htm>, <http://www.fordstheatre.org> (for programming and events). Admission is free by timed ticket. Reserved tickets (a good idea in high season and necessary this Tuesday and Wednesday) are \$2.50. Ticket is good for the theater, museum, Petersen House and the Center for Education and Leadership.

WHERE TO STAY

All hotels are within five blocks of Ford's Theater.



A circa 1900 postcard depicting the 1865 assassination of President Lincoln.

(Buyenlarge / Getty Images)

Courtyard Washington Convention Center, 900 F St. NW; (202) 638-4600, <http://www.lat.ms/1llozPN>. This former bank building still has a giant vault door inside. Doubles from \$359.

Embassy Suites Washington D.C.-Convention Center, 900 10th St. NW; (202) 739-2001, <http://www.lat.ms/1CNdFNQ>. Great for families, all rooms are suites and include free cooked breakfast and evening reception.

Hotel Monaco, 700 F St. NW; (800) 649-1202, <http://www.monaco-dc.com>. This Kimpton hotel offers an evening

wine reception and free morning coffee in the lobby. While staying there, you can borrow the hotel's bikes and bring your pets too.

WHERE TO EAT

Capitol City Brewing Co.; 1100 New York Ave. NW; (202) 628-2222, <http://www.capcitybrew.com>. While eating your free soft pretzels and sauce, you'll find a full menu for kids through seniors, and beers brewed on site.

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Shake Shack, 800 F St. NW; (202) 800-9930, <http://www.shakeshack.com>. This popular burger joint serves killer concretes (thicker than a milkshake) and cheese fries.

Nopa Kitchen & Bar, 800 F St. NW; (202) 347-4667, <http://www.nopadc.com>. American brasserie (and great brunch spot) next to the Shake Shack. Try the gorgeous deviled eggs and the apple cider doughnuts with butterscotch pudding.

TO LEARN MORE

Destination D.C., <http://www.washington.org>

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