Mary Elizabeth Jenkins Surratt Biography

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Biography

Mary Surratt was the first woman executed by the United States of America. She was linked with the co-conspirators of John Wilkes Booth in a plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. Yet she went to her death pleading her innocence.

Surratt was born in Waterloo, Maryland in May 1823. She married John Harrison Surratt in 1840, and he purchased 287 acres of land at a crossroads he named Surrattsville. He quickly constructed a building that became a tavern, a polling place, post office, and home to Mary and their three children.

After John's death in 1862, Mary was left with many debts. She rented the property to John M. Lloyd and moved to a home she owned in Washington, D.C. During the Civil War, her two sons were involved in the Confederacy; Booth stayed at Surratt's boardinghouse. It is unknown if Mary knew or understood the Confederate connection.

On April 14, 1865, the night of Lincoln's assassination, Booth stopped at Surratt's tavern during his escape. On April 17, police officers searched Surratt's Washington, D.C. home and found a hidden photograph of Booth. She was arrested and charged with conspiring to assassinate a president. She was tried before a military commission on May 10, 1875. Lloyd, also charged as a conspirator, testified that Surratt "told me to have those shooting-irons ready that night." Despite testimony that Surratt was not disloyal to the Union, Surratt was found guilty of being involved in the conspiracy to murder Lincoln.