



We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts

Timothy S. Good

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On the evening of April 14, 1865, when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's Theatre, an entire audience was witness to the tragedy. From diaries, letters, depositions, affidavits, and periodicals, here is a collection of accounts from a variety of theatergoers who by chance saw one of the truly pivotal events in U.S. history. Providing minute first-hand details recorded over a span of ninety years, *We Saw Lincoln Shot* explores an event that will forever be the subject of debate and controversy.

"I was present at the theater and saw it all," said Samuel Koontz. "In fact, I was only about fifteen feet from the President when he was shot, although he was in a private box in the theater."

In a letter to his parent, Jason S. Knox wrote, "Dear Father, it is with sad feeling that I take up my pen and address you. Last Friday night at ten o'clock, I witnessed the saddest tragedy ever enacted in this country. Notwithstanding my promise to you not to visit the theater, I could not resist the temptation to see General Grant and the President, and when the curtain at Ford's rose on the play of *Our American Cousin*, my roommate and I were seated on the second row of orchestra seats, just beneath the President's box."

Although there have been many studies of the Lincoln assassination, few have been devoted to the actual event. Overwhelmingly, historians have been attracted to the conspiracy that preceded Lincoln's death or to the aftermath. Too few have relied sufficiently upon eyewitness accounts, and some, without considering how the human mind fails to preserve minute details in long-term memory, have trusted recollections transcribed many years after Lincoln died. With a sharp focus upon the circumstances reported by one hundred actual witnesses, *We Saw Lincoln Shot* provides vivid documentation of a momentous evening and exposes errors that have been perpetuated as the assassination has been rendered into written histories.



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