Makayla Caso

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Dramatic Literature

Wiki Article

**Ford’s Theatre; The Home of Many Comedies and Tragedies**

**Introduction to Ford’s Theatre**

Ford’s Theatre is located in the heart of Washington D.C. and was originally constructed in 1833 and used as a meeting spot for the Baptist Church. In 1860, the building was bought by John Thomson Ford and converted into a theatre. In 1862, just two years after being open, the theatre was destroyed by a fire. In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in the theatre. The building was shut down for public use and became used as a site for the U.S. war department to keep their records as well the Surgeon General’s library between 1866-1887. In 1893 the building collapsed causing 22 deaths and leading to over 60 people injured. In 1928, the building became a National Historic Site and the first floor became a museum dedicated to Abraham Lincoln. The building was renovated into a theatre and reopened in 1968. The theatre attracts over 800,000 visitors a year and sits roughly 665 people for each performance.

**The First Baptist Church**

In 1833, 511 10th Street, Washington D.C became the site of The First Baptist Church of Washington D.C. The First Baptist Church was initially led by Thomas Jefferson in 1801. He helped expand the church and gathered a larger following (First Baptist Church). The building remained being used as The First Baptist Church until 1861 when it was bought and converted into a theater.

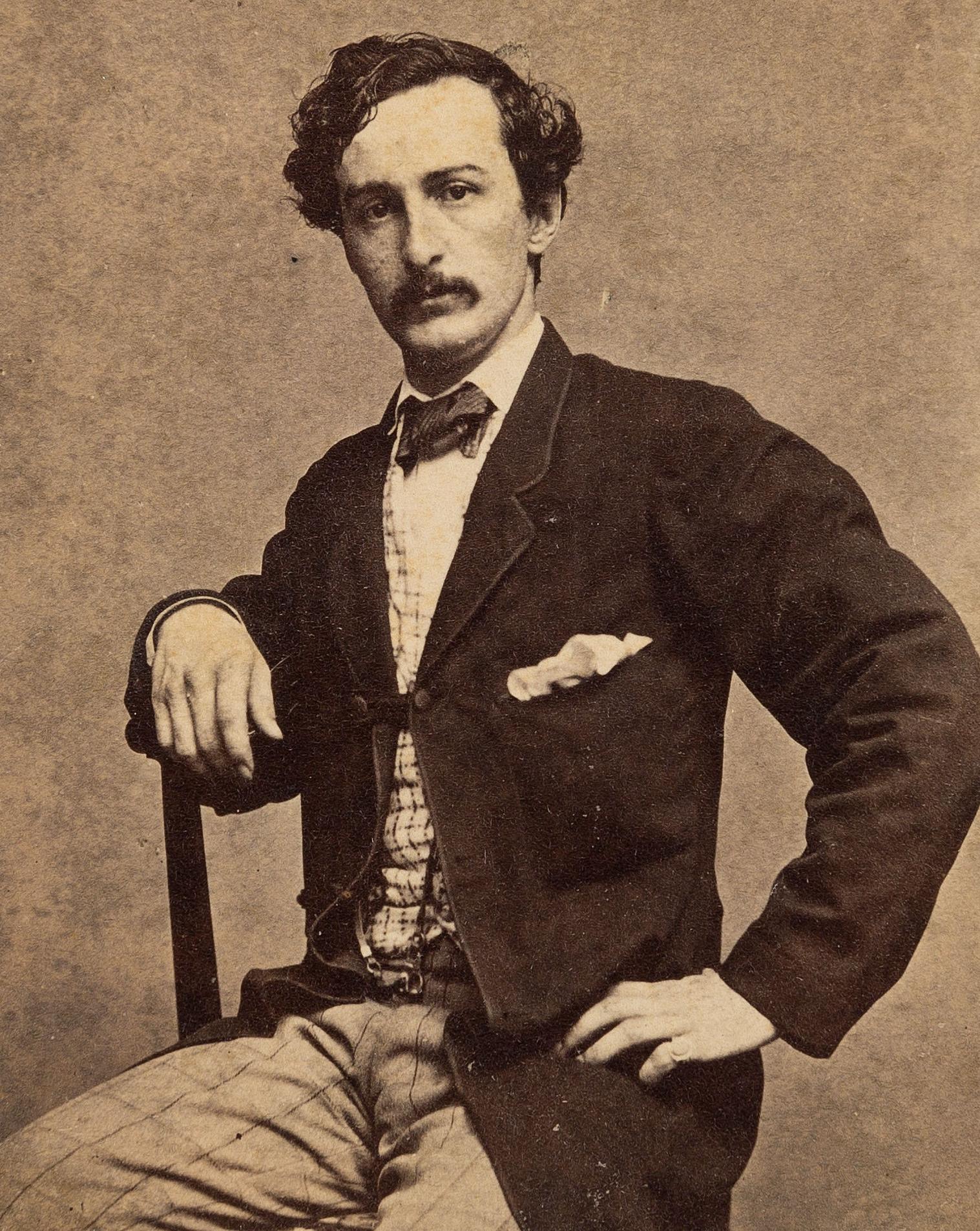
**Ford’s Theater**

In 1861, the building was bought by John Thomson Ford (John Thomson Ford), who had explored many different career fields such as a tobacco plantation worker and a book salesman before he invested in opening a theatre. He had made other attempts at opening theaters in other parts of the country but failed. After many attempts, he finally achieved success in this theatre, he later went on to open two other theaters that are also housed in DC. The theatre was named Ford’s Athenaeum. Ford’s goal was to make this an attraction for the wealthy. The shows usually performed were traditional Shakespeare plays. (History of Ford’s Theater)

**The Fire of 1862**

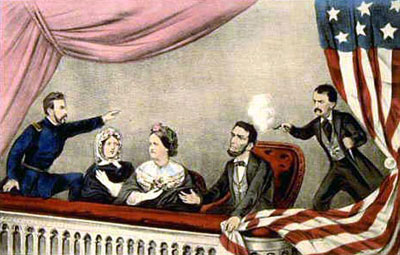
In 1862, a fire tore through the building demolishing the theatre. Ford had no choice but to rebuild the location due to the amount of damage that had been done to the theatre (History of Ford’s Theatre). He built a bigger theater and renamed it Ford’s New Theater. During this time, people began attending shows that were performed by actors that they liked. Ford began hiring a number of popular actors to continue attracting a large crowd.

**John Wilkes Boothe**

John Wilkes Boothe was hired by John Ford to be one of the actors in the production company. Boothe had become extremely popular and he attracted a large support from theater enthusiasts. He had performed in many shows at Ford’s Theatre including *The Marble Heart*, which was a show that President Lincoln had also attended on November 9th, 1863 (History.com). Boothe supported the confederacy and believed that whites were superior over African Americans.

**The Night of Lincoln’s Assassination**

On April 14th, 1865 (Good Friday of that year) President Abraham Lincoln attended Ford’s Theatre to see their production of *Our American Cousin.* Lincoln attended the show with his wife and two of his close friends and sat in a VIP box. President Lincoln had recently achieved a victory over the confederacy and granted African Americans the ability to live on their own and receive a certain amount of freedom. This victory infuriated Boothe and lead him to devise a plan to kill Lincoln.

It was approximately 10:15pm when Booth lurked outside of Lincoln’s VIP box. After a scene of comedy and laughter Boothe raised a gun to Lincoln’s head and shot him in front of the entire theater. Boothe screamed the words “Sic semper tyrannis”. These words will remain frozen in American history. Lincoln died early on the morning of April 15th 1865 surrounded by his closest friends. Boothe, however escaped and remained free for 12 days before being caught and killed by Boston Corbett, a soldier. There are many conspiracy theories attached to Lincoln’s assassination which include Boothe being helped by fellow performers from the theatre. 

**Use After the Assassination**

After Lincoln’s assassination, it was hard to go back to using this space as a happy place for theater. The government banned the use of this space for any theater purpose; instead from the time period of 1866 to 1887 it was used by the government. The building became the home for the war department as well as the surgeon general’s office and a military medical museum. It remained this way throughout the time period until 1887 when it became only used by the clerk office for the department of war. Unfortunately, another tragedy struck in 1893 when a portion of the building collapsed; there were 22 lives lost and over 60 people injured during the disaster. (Ford’s Theatre)

**The National Park Service**

On February 12th 1932 the buildings ownership was handed over to The National Park Services. (Ford’s Theatre) This was done to help preserve the history and authenticity of the building. The first floor was used as a museum specifically dedicated to Abraham Lincoln and his assassination in 1865. This attraction failed to interest most of the population, therefore, it was considered unsuccessful. Due to the fact that this is considered a national historic site, all decisions in regards to construction and renovation must be passed by congress.(U.S National Park Services)

**1965 to Present Uses**

In 1964, after being approved by congress, the theatre began the rebuilding process and began to restore Ford’s Theatre. In 1968, the theatre opened it’s doors once again to hold productions at the theatre. The interior was restored to be the same as it was the night Lincoln was assassinated. Lincoln’s box however was completely closed off from public use. There were many social gatherings that took place at the theatre such as Gala’s which attracted large crowds of well known socialites and politicians such as former presidents and first ladies. Today, the space has undergone more renovations to make the area more spacious and to add new pieces to the museum. The theatre space itself was renovated, new lights, sound systems and HVAC systems were added to improve the theatre. The site itself attracts over 800,000 people annually. The theatre still holds productions and seats 665 people in the theatre space. There are many popular shows that are performed here, some of the shows consist of *Our Town, The Laramie Project, A Christmas Carol, Hello Dolly!* and many more. All of the shows must be approved by congress before they can be performed. There have been many famous people that have attended shows here including President Barack Obama. The Theatre is open daily, prices to tour the site are under $10 and tickets to see performances go for a maximum price of $65. 

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