

MARYLAND
BYWAYS



Booth's Escape

14

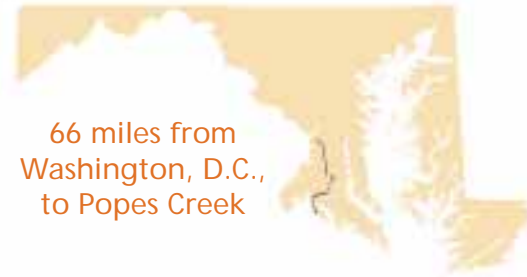
Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had recently surrendered to Union forces, and the mending of America was just getting under way. But, shortly after 10 p.m. on the night of April 14, 1865, thoughts of reconciliation suffered a serious setback. John Wilkes Booth, a 26-year-old actor and staunch Confederate sympathizer, entered Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and shot President Abraham Lincoln in the back of the head. As the president lay dying, Booth fled into Southern Maryland and eluded Federal troops for nearly two weeks before being cornered in a Virginia barn.

This byway follows a route that is one of four Maryland Civil War Trails (another, the Antietam Campaign, appears as a byway on page 39).

Each trail brings you face to face with both familiar and lesser-known Civil War stories, while also placing you among panoramic scenery and presenting convenient recreational opportunities. For a free map guide to Maryland Civil War Trails, call 1-888-248-4597 or go online at www.visitmaryland.org.

Washington, D.C. to Waldorf – Pennsylvania Ave (MD 4), Branch Ave (MD 5), Old Branch Avenue, Brandywine Road, and Mattawoman-Beantown Road (MD 5)

With the Civil War nearing its end, John Wilkes Booth and a band of conspirators plotted to kill President Abraham Lincoln. Booth knew of the president's plans to attend a performance of "Our American Cousin" at

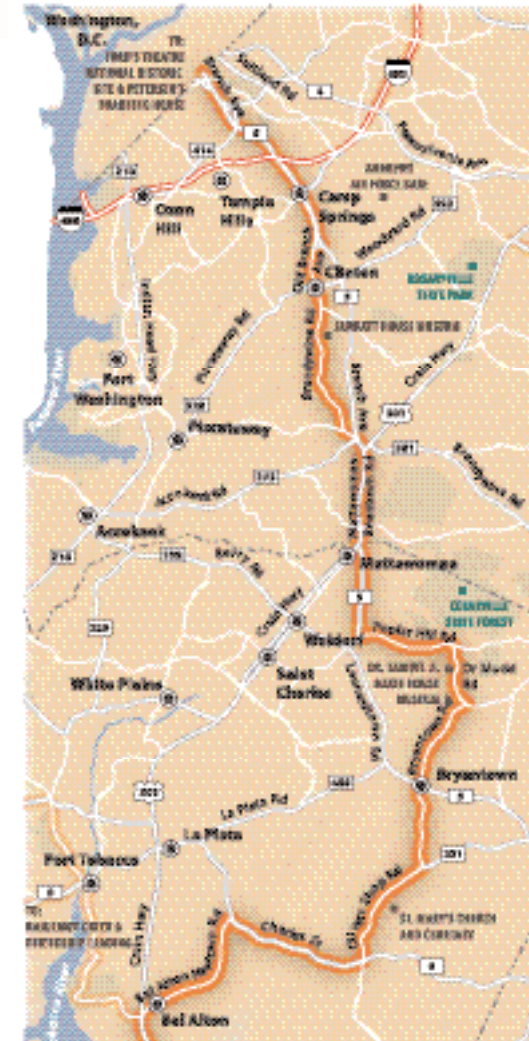


66 miles from Washington, D.C., to Popes Creek



the Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and was familiar with the layout of the building, having performed there less than a month earlier. Sneaking into the president's box, the assassin shot Lincoln and then leapt dramatically onto the Ford's Theatre stage, breaking his leg but managing to make good his escape. While the president was moved across the street to Petersen's Boarding House (the place where Lincoln would die), Booth fled on horseback over the Navy Yard Bridge to rendezvous with accomplice David Herold.

Booth and Herold followed Old Branch Avenue and Brandywine Road and came to a tavern that Mary E. Surratt operated as a Confederate safehouse. Today, the Clinton-based Surratt House Museum tells the tale



of the widow's Rebel ties, her role in the assassination plan, and how she became the first woman to be executed by the U.S. government.

Waldorf to Port Tobacco – Poplar Hill Rd, Dr. Mudd Rd, Bryantown Rd, Olivers Shop Rd, MD 6, Bel Alton Newton Rd, US 301

With fresh supplies, Booth and Herold quickly made their way farther south along Poplar Hill Road, arriving on the morning of April 15 at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd's Waldorf home, now a popular museum stop. The country physician, apparently unaware of his patient's role in Lincoln's assassination, treated Booth's broken leg – an act that would land Mudd in prison. The nearby village of Bryantown is where Mudd claimed to have first heard of Lincoln's assassination, and

just to the south down Olivers Shop Road is St. Mary's Church and Cemetery, one of many historic places of worship in Southern Maryland. It is Mudd's final resting place.

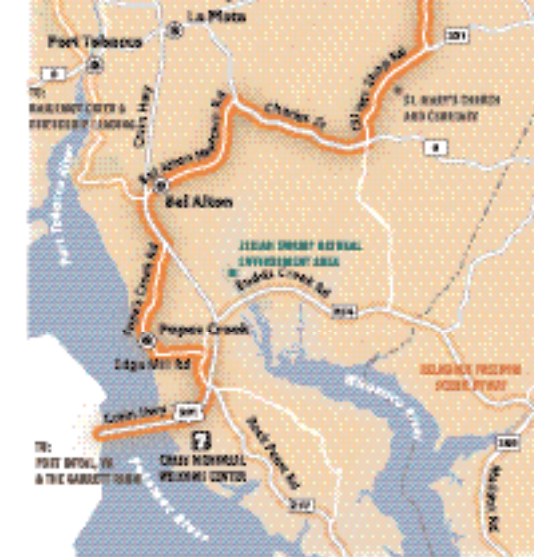
Moving carefully, Booth and Herold headed around the 21-mile-long, half-mile-wide Zekiah Swamp. This protected state wetland area, popular among canoeists and virtually surrounded by bicycle loops, contains habitats ranging from hardwood swamp to grass-and-sedge savannahs, providing natural shelter for many rare species of wildlife and migratory birds. The two men made their way to the home of Samuel Cox, near the present-day town of Bel Alton, and spent several days hiding in a nearby pine thicket.



Branching off to the west of US 301 on MD 6, you can visit one of the oldest communities on the East Coast, Port Tobacco. Formerly an Indian settlement, it became a major seaport in the 17th century and was the Charles County seat during the Civil War. Visit a museum inside the Port Tobacco Courthouse to see archaeological finds and gather more Civil War knowledge, including information about George Adzerodt, an assassination conspirator who lived in town.

Port Tobacco to Popes Creek – US 301, Popes Creek Rd, Edge Hill Rod, US 301

In the dark of night on April 20, Booth and Herold arrived at the Potomac River near Popes Creek Road and mistakenly rowed into Nanjemoy Creek, where they stayed until



crossing into Virginia the next night. The creek has plenty of natural charm as a nesting site for bald eagles and a fishing hole for boaters who use the Friendship Landing ramp. You can find out all about recreational and sight-seeing opportunities in this area from the Crain Memorial Welcome Center on US 301 north.

Cross the Potomac River on US 301 into Virginia, heading toward Port

Royal where Booth and Herold passed on their escape south. On the morning of April 26, Federal troops found Booth and Herold in a barn on Richard Garrett's farm. Herold surrendered, was taken to Washington, D.C. to stand trial, and was hanged. Refusing to turn himself in, Booth was shot while still hiding in the barn. He died on the porch of the nearby farmhouse.

OLD LINE LORE: *John Wilkes Booth was born on a farm near Bel Air, MD, the ninth of 10 Booth children. One of his older brothers, famed Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth, reportedly saved President Abraham Lincoln's son, Robert, from falling into the path of a train in New Jersey several months prior to the president's assassination.*

**Dr. Samuel A. Mudd Home and
Museum**

3725 Dr. Samuel Budd Rd
Waldorf, 20601
301-645-6870

**Ford's Theatre National
Historic Site**

National Mall
Washington, D.C.
www.nps.gov/foth/index.htm

**Friendship Landing, Nanjemoy
Creek**

Friendship Landing Road
Just off MD 425
Nanjemoy, MD 20662

Petersen's Boarding House

National Mall
Washington, D.C.
www.nps.gov/archive/foth/hwld.htm

Port Tobacco Courthouse

Off MD 6 on Chapel Point Rd.
Port Tobacco, 20677
301-934-4313

St. Mary's Church and Cemetery

11555 St. Mary's Church Rd
Charlotte Hall, 20622
301-934-8825;

Surratt House Museum

9188 Brandywine Rd
Clinton, 20735
301-868-1121
www.surratt.org

**Zekiah Swamp Natural
Environmental Area**

Cedarville State Forest
MD 4
Brandywine, 20613
301-888-1622.