

Restoration of Ford's Theater & Presidential Box Blue & Gray Education Society Partners with the National Park Service

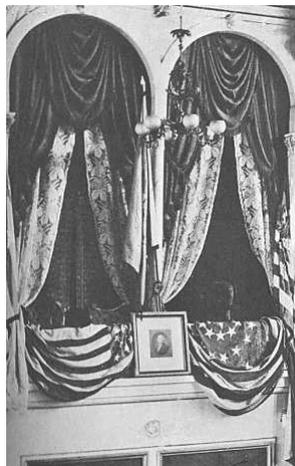
Abraham Lincoln is widely considered to be one of our greatest Presidents, with steadfast dedication to the ideals of freedom, democracy and equal opportunity. With the upcoming bicentennial of his birth, his life, assassination and legacy will become the focus of renewed interest. Undoubtedly, his tragic death at the Ford's Theater draws even more attention to his life and legacy.

The Blue & Gray Education Society has been asked to partner with the National Park Service in commemoration of the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth by providing replica flags for the Presidential Box at Ford's Theater. We are honored to be able to make this gift to the American people and ask that you join us in this effort.

The Ford's Theater was originally a church when John Ford rented it in 1861 and converted it into a music hall. It was soon destroyed by fire and then reconstructed and reopened as Ford's "New Theatre" in August 1863. The Theater was shut down following Lincoln's assassination; indeed, Ford was imprisoned for over a month until he was acquitted of complicity. When he tried reopening the Theater, his effort was met with significant enough threats to force Ford to close it. The government bought the Theater in 1866 and used it for office spaces until some interior floors collapsed in 1893, killing 22 office workers. After extensive restoration in the 1960's, Ford's Theater reopened in 1968, with the Presidential Box restored to its 1865 condition. While it is now maintained by the National Park Service, Ford's Theater continues to produce shows.

Currently, the Theater is undergoing another renovation – a new light and sound system, a new HVAC system and an elevator are being installed. The elevator will allow the museum and all levels of the Theater to be accessible to everyone. In addition, the flags which adorn the Presidential Box will be replaced with exact replicas of the flags which were in place the evening of Lincoln's assassination.

During the afternoon of April 14, 1865, the State Box at the Theater was opened to the adjacent box and was decorated for President Lincoln's attendance. The box was adorned with five borrowed flags (four American flags and a Treasury Department regimental flag) –American flags were draped across the front of each box, two other American flags were hung on either side of the boxes, and the Treasury Guard flag was hung from the pillar between them.



Stories of the flags and what happened to them after the assassination abound. By some reports, the Treasury Guard national flag was in Lincoln's hands at the time he was shot. Other reports tell the story that one of the flags was used to cushion Lincoln's head when he was laid on the floor. Undoubtedly, John Wilkes Booth's spur caught on the Treasury Guard flag as he leapt from the Presidential Box to the stage, causing him to stumble and break his leg. When photographers from Brady Galleries arrived to photograph the Presidential Box after the assassination, some of the flags were missing and flags had to be borrowed to re-create the Box as of the time of the shooting.

The Blue & Gray Education Society is participating in the current renovation of Ford's Theater by funding the replacement of three of the flags hung on the Presidential Box – one blue Treasury Guard flag and two Philadelphia depot pattern National colors. When we received these pictures of the flags we are replacing, we were taken with the fact that the National color flags include "North Anna," the site of BGES's first interpretative project back in 1997.



Up until the beginning of the 20th century, military flags were sewn and hand-painted or embroidered. Steve Hill with DuPage Military Flag Company specializes in creating museum quality reproductions of military flags and colors. He will make the silk flag reproductions for us, using the same types of materials and workmanship which went into the original flags in place on the evening of the assassination. The exact replicas BGES is funding will be made of hand painted silk. The tasseled fringe from the flags currently at Ford's Theater will be used on the replacement flags.

BGES is excited to be involved in this renovation project with the National Park Service. Lincoln's assassination was arguably one of the last major events in the American Civil War; as the site of that event, we believe the Ford's Theater should be preserved in much the same manner as the battlefields and are proud to be associated with that preservation. We will all be proud of the workmanship and quality flags that will be hung on the Presidential Box because of our generous supporters. We hope you will make a trip to Washington to see the flags for yourself.

Our flags will hang at the same place that they were when Lincoln was assassinated and help to tell the story of that event. I hope you can feel the moment as you read these eyewitness accounts . . .

Major Henry R. Rathbone – On the evening of the 14th of April last, at about twenty minutes past 8 o'clock, I, in company with Miss Harris, left my residence at the corner of Fifteenth and H Streets, and joined the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and went with them, in their carriage, to Ford's Theater, on Tenth Street. On reaching the theater, when the presence of the President became known, the actors stopped playing, the band struck up "Hail to the Chief," and the audience rose and received him with vociferous cheering. The party proceeded along in the rear of the dress-circle and entered the box that had been set apart for their reception. On entering the box, there was a large arm-chair that was placed nearest the audience, farthest from the stage, which the President took and occupied during the whole of the evening, with one exception, when he got up to put on his coat, and returned and sat down again. When the second scene of the third act was being performed, and while I was intently observing the proceedings upon the stage, with my back toward the door, I heard the discharge of a pistol behind me, and, looking round, saw through the smoke a man between the door and the President. The distance from the door to where the President sat was about four feet. At the same time I heard the man shout some word, which I thought was "Freedom!" I instantly sprang toward him and seized him. He wrested himself from my grasp, and made a violent thrust at my breast with a large knife . . . The man rushed to the front of the box, and I endeavored to seize him again, but only caught his clothes as he was leaping over the railing of the box. . . I then turned to the President; his position was not changed; his head was slightly bent forward, and his eyes were closed. I saw that he was unconscious, and, supposing him mortally wounded, rushed to the door for the purpose of calling medical aid.

James P. Ferguson – The President sat in the left-hand corner of the box, with Mrs. Lincoln at his right. Miss Harris was in the right-hand corner, Major Rathbone sitting back at her left, almost in the corner of the box. At the moment the President was shot, he was leaning his hand on the railing, looking down at a person in the orchestra; holding the flag that decorated the box aside to look between it and the post. . . . I heard someone hallo out of the box "Revenge for the South!" I do not know that it was Booth, though I suppose it must have been; it was just as he was jumping over the railing. His spur caught in the blue part of the flag that was stretched around the box, and, as he went over, it tore a piece of the flag, which was dragged half way across the stage on the spur of his right heel.

