

**The Haunted Major (Rathbone) - Part II**

**Lead: Caught by history when invited to join President and Mrs. Lincoln in their theater box on the night of Lincoln's assassination, Major Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris begin a journey of great tragedy.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Harris sprang to the President's aid and attempted to grab the assassin John Wilkes Booth but was stabbed and shoved aside as Booth made his escape. The blood from Rathbone's wound covered the dress of**

**his escort, Clara Harris, the daughter of New York Senator Ira Harris and Mrs. Lincoln mistook Rathbone's blood for her husband's. It is said that the sight of that bloody dress caused great emotional anguish in the President's widow contributing to advancing mental unbalance later in life.**

**In 1867 Clara Harris and Henry Rathbone married, but it was clear even from that time that Rathbone blamed himself for Lincoln's death. He began to suffer from delusion, physical ailments, and constant fears. Three years after their marriage he resigned from the army and began a long struggle to gain back his mental health. They consulted numerous**

**doctors and often sought the cure at spas in the United States and Europe. His obsession with the Lincoln assassination began to grow and transform itself into confusion about Clara's love for him. He became convinced that she would leave and take the children. This was a justified fear. As the dimension of his illness grew, Clara often told her family and friends, in private, that she would have left if it had not been for the disgrace associated with separation and divorce.**

**The climax to his illness came on a trip to Germany for treatment in the winter of 1883. On Christmas Eve, sometime before dawn, Rathbone entered the room and asked to see the**

**children. When his wife suggested that it was too early, he pulled out a revolver and killed her. He took a knife and stabbed his own arm repeatedly in the same spot Booth had cut him eighteen years before. After Clara's burial, Henry Rathbone was committed to an insane asylum where he remained in haunted isolation until his death in 1911.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

### **Resources**

**Bishop, Jim. *The Day Lincoln was Shot..* New York, NY: Harper Publishing Company, 1955.**

**Cisenachiml, Otto. *In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death.* New York,, NY: W. Funk Publishers, 1940.**

**Smith, Gene. "The Haunted Major," *American Heritage* 45 (1, February/March 1994), 110-111.**

**Weichmann, Louis J. *The True History of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and of the Conspiracy of 1865*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1875.**

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