

WEEKEND EDITION
Muscatine Journal 50¢
 SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2007

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Assassination mystery

Onetime Muscatine County resident's story disputes history books' account of President Lincoln's killer

Cynthia Beaudette
 of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Today marks the anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, who was fatally wounded at Washington, D.C.'s Ford Theater in 1865.

Most historical accounts state that Lincoln's assassin, Confederate supporter and actor John Wilkes Booth, was shot to death by government officials on April 26, 1865, when he was found hiding out at a farm in Virginia.



But onetime Muscatine County resident John Henry Stevenson, who claimed to have known Booth since childhood, died believing his infamous companion lived much longer and went on to do more harm. His story is chronicled in a 24-page autobiography he dictated to Lottie Eaton and believed to be authentic by some historians.

Stevenson spent his last years with sisters Emuna and Clara Brandt, who were living in eastern Muscatine County near the Mississippi River. Eaton was the Brandt sisters' niece.

The sisters are remembered for donating a large portion of land to the state as part of what became Wild Cat Den State Park.

Stevenson died in 1890 and is buried in the Wild Cat Den area according to Eaton. In his autobiography, he claims his true identity was Michael O'Laughlin.

The original document has been examined by American historians and authors Leonard F. Guttridge and Ray A. Neff, who report that the typographical errors it contains and the type style used indicate its authenticity. Among the errors is the spelling of the name O'Laughlin. According to government records, O'Laughlin is spelled with an "e," while Eaton spelled



BETH VAN ZANDT/MUSCATINE JOURNAL
 Gladys Mittman uses divining rods to try to locate the grave of Michael O'Laughlin Thursday morning near Wild Cat Den.

Confession

"Each man has something to be proud of and something to be ashamed of," Stevenson begins in his autobiography.

"I have lived less than 50 years on this earth and am not bound to live many more, but even now, I feel a terrible sense of guilt and remorse for the life which I have led."

Stevenson wrote that he drank and gambled to excess, overriding his desire to hold a job, and Booth employed him to carry out criminal activity in return for pay.

"My greatest sin came when I became involved in that terrible scheme which turned into the assassination plot and indeed the assassination of Abraham Lincoln," Stevenson wrote. "It was not to be a plot to kill, but as is often the case, those who

planned it did not reckon with the irrationality of Mr. John Wilkes Booth." Stevenson said the original plot was to kidnap Lincoln, along with the vice-president and secretary of state in order to intimidate other government officials. Other accounts say the plan was to trade the president for Confederate prisoners.

True?
 Eaton prefaced the Stevenson manuscript by stating she promised Stevenson not to reveal the story until after he died.

"With his passing, I am relieved of that promise," wrote Eaton on Feb. 9, 1891.

The manuscript, which is housed at the University of Indiana, is part of the research materials Guttridge and Neff used for their 2003 book "Dark Union." This book uses historical documents and other artifacts to support the authors' theory that Lincoln's death was the result of a plot created by politicians, profiteers and Booth

"He (Pollack) said that if I would help him get the gold, that he would see that I got out of prison," wrote Stevenson.

"I had assumed the identity of John Henry Stevenson, a name which I had used before my arrest to some small degree. I was covered by the fact that Michael O'Laughlin was dead."

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Ag learning center project gets boost from Cargill

Cynthia Beaudette
 of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Muscatine's proposed Agricultural Learning Center took another step forward Friday afternoon.

Representatives of Cargill Inc., an international provider of food, agricultural and risk-management products and services, presented the Friends of the Muscatine FFA with a \$125,000 donation for the \$3.5 million project.

Doug Hoag, president of the Friends of the Muscatine FFA, said Growing Together, an 18-month-old fundraising campaign for the Center, has raised more than \$2 million.

A group of approximately 15 area educators, Friends of the Muscatine FFA members and area residents met at Pearl Plaza in downtown Muscatine to welcome the Cargill visitors.

Pete Wamsteeker, general manager, and Mark Hulsebus, trading solutions manager of Cargill Animal Nutrition Plant in West Branch, joined Kevin Meyer, sales manager for Cargill's Ag Horizons in Muscatine and Buffalo, for the presentation.

"One of Cargill's areas of performance is to enrich communities we operate in," said Wamsteeker. "And education is a very important way to do that."

Hulsebus said Cargill and FFA organizations have partnered before to provide educational opportunities for students. Cargill has contributed nearly \$7 million to FFA, and Cargill employees have donated thousands of hours of their time to the organization since 1960.

Details

■ For further information regarding the Growing Together campaign, call Paul Carroll at 563-264-3863.
 ■ Donations can be mailed to the Agricultural Learning Center Project, 208 W. Second St., suite number 213, Muscatine, IA 52761

The Learning Center will be a multi-purpose facility where students from the Muscatine Community School District and Muscatine Community College can learn more about agricultural sciences. The Center is a collaborative partnership among the Friends of the Muscatine FFA, Muscatine High School and Muscatine Community College.

The Center will include animal science and veterinary areas, stables, stalls and an arena to provide hands-on learning experiences.

There will also be space for community activities including agricultural shows, competitions and educational events.

MHS agriculture teacher David Fowler told the Cargill representatives his students appreciate the donation.

"We are one step closer to putting that spade in the ground and getting that project rolling," said Fowler.

Fowler and his fellow agriculture teacher Dave Tometch said nearly 99 percent of their students live in urban areas and introducing them to agricultural education at a young age can inspire them to become part of tomorrow's agricultural workforce.

"We are going to need urban people to work in agriculture," said Fowler. "We really have to

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More and more tax credits being awarded

Dan Gearino

Muscatine Journal Capital Bureau

DES MOINES, Iowa — If Iowa's state treasury is a bathtub, then corporate tax credits are a leak at the bottom that is making the water level drop faster than anyone expected.

A report issued this month by the Iowa Department of Revenue shows that there has been rapid growth in the awarding of tax credits, from \$110 million in the 2000-2001 fiscal year up to \$312 million in the first two-thirds of the current fiscal year. Nearly all of the credits are used by businesses.

Sen. Joe Bolkcom, D-Iowa City, the chairman of the Senate panel that oversees tax policy, says the Legislature has passed tax credits in recent years with little knowledge of the true cost and few safeguards to ensure the credits are doing any good.

"It's not that tax credits in and of themselves are bad, but it's clear that there is little accountability and oversight, and that needs to change," he said.

As with most debates at the Statehouse, the scrutiny of tax credits has deep partisan implications. Republicans and their

By the numbers

Total tax credits awarded by state agencies

2001:	\$111 million
2002:	\$145 million
2003:	\$98 million
2004:	\$132 million
2005:	\$196 million
2006:	\$202 million
2007:	\$313 million*

* Total only includes first two-thirds of fiscal year

Total state liability if companies and individuals cash in the tax credits they have been awarded

2005:	\$165 million
2006:	\$192 million
2007:	\$254 million
2008:	\$307 million
2009:	\$372 million

Source: Iowa Department of Revenue

allies in the business community have long supported economic development strategies that rely on open-ended tax breaks to encourage businesses to invest in new workers and equipment. Democrats, on the other hand, tend to favor direct assistance to selected businesses.

The state's largest economic development program, the Iowa Values Fund, is a mix of those two philosophies, crafted by

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BETH VAN ZANDT/MUSCATINE JOURNAL
 Joe Clarke, far left, Gladys Mittman and Tom Hanifan use coat hangers bent into "L" shapes to do some grave witching as they look for the grave of Michael O'Laughlin near Wild Cat Den State Park.

the name O'Laughlin, with an "L." **A Lincoln conspirator**

According to many historical documents, O'Laughlin was a childhood friend of Booth who was arrested for his part in the Lincoln assassination. The records state O'Laughlin was imprisoned in Dry Tortugas, Fla., where he died of yellow fever in 1867 — 23 years before the date of Stevenson's death in Muscatine County.

Stevenson wrote in the autobiography that his 1867 "death" was staged after a man named W.G. Pollack, a former member of the National Security Police, a

forerunner of today's FBI, arranged for his release from prison. Stevenson said Pollack facilitated the release because Stevenson knew Booth's wife, Izola Booth, who was in possession of a fortune her husband had amassed.

"He (Pollack) said that if I would help him get the gold, that he would see that I got out of prison," wrote Stevenson.

"I had assumed the identity of John Henry Stevenson, a name which I had used before my arrest to some small degree. I was covered by the fact that Michael O'Laughlin was dead."



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Jerry Kleindolph draws on his love of history, retail and customer service

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Mystery

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conspirators. The Stevenson manuscript is also available for view on the University's Web site. Muscatine's Gladys Mittman, who grew up in the Wild Cat Den Park area in the late 1930s through the mid-1950s, remembers her father, Edgar Kemper, talking about a man who was buried on the land Kemper came to own. Mittman, 71, said her father was concerned that when he was clearing the land, he had pushed away the grave marker, mistaking it for a rock. Her father died in 1991, and the Kempers no longer own that land, which now has other, private owners. Gladys recalled her father's story in June 2006 when Guttridge, from Alexandria, Va., contacted her for information on a grave in the area of her childhood home. Guttridge told Mittman that Eaton's daughter, Gladys Thurston of Yardley, Penn., gave him and Neff the Stevenson manuscript after she learned about their research into a possible conspiracy in Lincoln's assassination.

Online

- Read the entire transcript of Michael O'Laughlin's (alias John Henry Stevenson) dictated autobiography at the Indiana State University Web site: http://odin.indstate.edu/about/units/rbsc/neff/PDFs/stevenson_olaughlin.pdf
- A historical timeline containing the name and arrest of Michael O'Laughlin can be found at: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/frtrial/inconspiracy/lincolnchronology.html>

A love story

Mittman said Guttridge told her the manuscript appears authentic and much of the information it contains is documented in other historical records. After taking on his new identity, Stevenson did contact Izola Booth but he did not cooperate with the plot to take her wealth. Stevenson said Izola had been in touch with John Wilkes Booth, who wanted her to meet him in San Francisco with their fortune. Stevenson wrote that he and Izola crafted a successful plot to escape Pollack and the others who were after the Booth fortune. In return for accompanying Izola to the West Coast, Stevenson wrote that the Booths

agreed to give him part of their assets. During their arduous trek to San Francisco, Stevenson fell in love with Izola and asked her to stay with him, but Izola boarded a ship with her husband after paying Stevenson for his trouble. Stevenson said Izola returned to San Francisco pregnant with Booth's child in October of 1870. She told Stevenson that she had been thrown off the ship she and Booth had been living on after her husband was killed during a mutiny. Stevenson wrote that he took Izola back to Maryland to be with the Booths' daughter, Ogarita. The couple married and Izola gave birth to a son on Feb. 22, 1870. "We gave him my name, which I had chosen, John Harry Stevenson," Stevenson wrote. "In later years, he went by the name of Harry Jerome, for both he and his mother shied away from the name John, particularly since he bore such a resemblance to his father." Stevenson said he and Izola eventually separated. "After the birth of Harry, I took a back seat in the life of Izola," he wrote. "We seemed to quarrel whenever we were together, and so I moved

An Iowa connection

In 1878, Stevenson was living with the Brandt sisters in Doylestown, Penn. "They had been most gracious to me since I had become afflicted with dropsy in 1877," he wrote. Mittman isn't certain how the Brandts met Stevenson, or why they were on the East Coast, but American Historical Society records show the Brandt sisters had a half-brother, William Ziegler, in New York. Ziegler, who grew up in Muscatine County, became wealthy after establishing Royal Baking Powder of New York. Society records indicate that Ziegler was generous with the Brandt sisters and gave money to the many causes they supported. According to Stevenson's autobiography, he came to live with the Brandt sisters in Iowa in 1882. **Bitter goodbyes** Stevenson ends his autobiography describing a final meeting with John Wilkes Booth's son. "I wished before going to their, the Brandt sisters, farm in the west, to see Harry Stevenson and let him know that I was not

really his father," Stevenson wrote. At Delmonico's restaurant in New York, Harry Stevenson told John Stevenson he learned of his true ancestry after reading his mother's diary. Harry also told Stevenson a man named Mr. Purdy said someone in the theater received a letter from a John B. Wilkes in the 1870s, and his handwriting was strikingly similar to Booth's. "Harry believed that Booth had not died on that ship," wrote Stevenson. "I do not know, nor do I really care. Booth never gave me anything but grief and heartaches. Before Izola went to San Francisco to meet him, she was warm and tender to me and showed me passion as no other woman had ever done. After she returned, she was dead inside." In "Dark Union," Guttridge and Neff write about a man named John B. Wilkes who was documented to have died in India in October of 1883. Izola and her daughter, Ogarita Booth, are among the six women that John B. Wilkes of India named in his will. According to ancestral records, Izola died in 1887 in Connecticut. **At rest** Eaton ended Stevenson's

manuscript by writing that he was buried in a small plot he had selected near the Brandt home at Wild Cat Den. "It overlooked the Mississippi River and gave a beautiful view," wrote Eaton. Mittman has located an oblong depression in the earth on a bluff at Wildcat Den. It was a spot she had identified as Stevenson's grave site in the past because of its proximity to one of the Brandt homes and its view of the river. **Connections** The mystery his manuscript proposes didn't die with Stevenson. Guttridge told Mittman that he and Neff, an emeritus professor at Indiana State University, examined the files of Andrew Potter, a member of the National Detective Police. The men discovered photos of the Brandt sisters in those files as well as a photo of a man who resembled O'Laughlin with the name John H. Stevenson written on the back. Another, a photo of a wilderness area, is labeled Wild Cat Den. Contact Cynthia Beaudette at 563-262-2331 ext. 323 or cynthia.beaudette@muscatinejournal.com

Credits

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former Gov. Tom Vilsack, a Democrat, and a Republican-controlled Legislature. The Values Fund was signed into law in 2003 and then stripped down because of a court ruling. The program was revised by the Legislature and governor in 2005. The Values Fund spends about \$50 million per year on a variety of programs, including direct assistance to new or relocating businesses, job training and university research. But the \$50 million per year doesn't include the cost of tax credits that were approved as part of the Values Fund. Just one of those tax credits, the High Quality Job Creation Program, is projected to cost \$47 million in the 2009 fiscal year, according to the Department of Revenue. One of the main authors of the Values Fund, Rep. Clarence Hoffman, R-Denison, stands by his belief in tax credits. He says the widespread use of the credits shows they're working. "You only give tax credits when a job has been created," he said. "It's better than grants because the results are going to be there. If there are no results then you have no tax credits." **Return on investment** MMS Thermal Processing in Davenport is one of the hundreds of businesses that have received state aid for an expansion or relocation. In late 2005, the Iowa Department of Economic

Development approved a \$500,000 loan, along with tax credits through the High Quality Job Creation Program and the Community Economic Betterment Account. The metal-treatment company was the early stages of a \$5 million expansion that would involve hiring 17 new workers. Nine of the new jobs had high enough pay and benefits to qualify for tax credits and training assistance. The dollar value of the tax credits is part of the company's tax return, which is not public record. Craig Schnoor, MMS's president, says the help from the state was an essential element of making the expansion work. "We were investing in pretty unique technology and investing from the ground up, so we needed a lot of help and we got a lot of benefit," he said. This is the kind of situation that supporters of tax credits like to cite. Mike Ralston, president of the Iowa Association of Business and Industry, says tax credits should be viewed as an investment by the state that will lead to greater economic activity. He has a unique view of the issue because he was director of the Department of Revenue during the Vilsack administration. "I don't care if (the cost of tax credits) quadruples or quintuples. That's not necessarily bad if there's a return on that investment," Ralston said. Bolcom, the state senator, agrees up to a point. He thinks tax credits can be an effective

investment, but there's no way to know unless there's a way to measure the gains and compare them to the costs. The problem is that it's difficult, if not impossible, to measure the outcomes of tax credits. There is also the question of oversight by the Legislature and state agencies. Bolcom says tax watchdogs are hindered by the confidentiality of business tax returns. He would like to see greater disclosure from the companies that get the largest credits. Short of that, he would like to see state agencies be more mindful of the long-term financial implications of tax credits. "Transparency and accountability is increasingly important as we see these credits exploding, really, in the future," he said. But that's unlikely to happen during the current Legislative session, which is scheduled to end in two weeks. Lawmakers who are concerned about tax credits hope to convene a special committee to investigate the issue over the summer and come up with proposals for next year. **High quality, high cost** The High Quality Job Creation Program gives a credit to companies that meet certain conditions for wages and benefits. The credit ranges from 1 percent to 10 percent of the investment, depending on the size of the company's investment in the project, the number of new jobs and the wages. To use a hypothetical example, a company with 16 new jobs and a new investment of more than \$600,000 would be eligible for a 5 percent credit on that

investment, or \$30,000. The credit would be spread over five years, so the annual payment would be \$6,000. In addition to the investment credit, this hypothetical company would also be eligible for a sales tax refund and a tax credit for research activities. That's not all. Some of the companies that qualify for the High Quality Job Creation Program are doing their projects in areas designated as enterprise zones, which unlocks even more tax credits. The Enterprise Zone Program is intended to stimulate development in economically troubled neighborhoods by offering tax credits. In the current fiscal year, the Iowa Department of Economic Development has awarded an estimated \$191.6 million in credits through the High Quality Job Creation Program and \$100.9 million through the Enterprise Zone Program, according to the Department of Revenue. The awards will be cashed in over the next five to 10 years, as long as the companies stay in business and continue to meet the state's conditions. Together, the two programs account for more than 90 percent of the credits awarded by the state this year. One reason for the large cost of the programs is that the Legislature created the credits with no cap on the dollar value of the awards. Companies that apply and meet the standards will almost always get the credits. "When you set up system where all you have to do is

apply for them and you get them, we lose the public review of those projects, and that's a real concern," said Sen. Bill Dotzler, D-Waterloo, chairman of the committee that oversees economic development spending. For the state treasury, the credits show up as reduced tax revenue, which detracts from the state's ability to cover new and existing spending. The growth of tax credits is already affecting the state's budget planning. A panel of budget experts met April 6 and issued an estimate that the state general fund would take in \$5.6 billion in the current fiscal year, which ends in June. The Department of Revenue report about tax credits was one of the sources used to come up with the estimate. Gov. Chet Culver's top budget adviser, Charles Krogmeier, said in an interview after the April 6 meeting that the rapid rise of tax credits threatens to put an uncomfortable squeeze on the budget. "There are some huge impacts three or four years out on the tax credit side which will eat up possibly all of the growth in revenues from those years," he said. Contact Dan Gearino at 515-243-0138 or at dan.gearino@tee.net

Cargill

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look at the needs of our urban students." Lifelong Muscatine resident and entrepreneur Dick Maeglin said the Ag Learning Center is one of the most impressive projects he's seen proposed in Muscatine in his nearly 70 years in the city. "I'm not aware of anything that comes near this," said Maeglin. In October of 2006, the Friends of the Muscatine FFA, announced the \$1.3 million purchase, from Jerry Timm, of 80 acres of land that will be used for the facility. The land is located on the corner of Lucas and Houser streets near the U.S. Highway 61 Bypass. Hoag said his organization may announce a possible starting date for the construction project by the end of the year. In the meantime, Hoag said MHS FFA students will host an open house at the Center site Saturday, May 26. The event will include a free lunch, Hoag said. Contact Cynthia Beaudette at 563-262-2331 ext. 323 or cynthia.beaudette@muscatinejournal.com

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CHICKEN SUPPER

Thursday, April 19th, 2007
4:00-7:00 pm

New Hope United Methodist Church
3215 Tipton Road, Muscatine

MENU

Chicken and Gravy Sandwiches
Mashed Potatoes
Homemade Noodles and Chicken
Salads
Pies and Cakes
Drinks

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CITY OF MUSCATINE

SPRING CLEAN-UP WEEK

The City of Muscatine, in conjunction with Keep America Beautiful Month, will be having **Spring Clean Up during the week of April 23-27, 2007.**
This is a great opportunity for residents to clean up their yards, basements, and neighborhoods.

Place all large unwanted items out the night before your regular garbage day.

- Items accepted per address include:
- Large items such as: furniture building materials in small amounts, dismantled swing sets, and other misc. items.
- Up to 8 tires.
- Up to 4 appliances (Please remove doors on refrigerators and freezers).

- Items NOT accepted:
- Car bodies.
- Large Trees
- Excessive amounts of concrete and building materials.

- Paint and other hazardous chemicals (Accepted at the Transfer Station).
- Motor Oil (Accepted at the Transfer Station)
- Camper refrigerators.

Yard waste must be in City of Muscatine yard waste bags. Brush must be tied in bundles no larger than 18 inches in diameter and 4 ft. in length.

Questions regarding Spring Clean Up week can be directed to the Muscatine Recycling Center and Transfer Station at 263-9689.

301 E. Third Street
Muscatine, IA 52761
563/263-2331 or 800/383-3198
Fax 563/262-8042

Reader's Guide

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The Muscatine Journal (USPS 368-460 • ISSN 1067-9483) is published daily Monday through Saturday by the Muscatine Journal, a member of Lee Enterprises Inc., at 301 E. Third St., Muscatine, IA 52761. Periodicals postage paid at the post office in Muscatine, Iowa.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: MUSCATINE JOURNAL • 301 E. 3RD ST. • MUSCATINE, IA 52761

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