Francis Tumblety and John Wilkes Booth's Errand Boy

By MICHAEL L. HAWLEY

President Abraham Lincoln's funeral ended in Springfield, Illinois, on May 4th, 1865. In attendance was the eccentric Dr. Francis Tumblety, arriving from St. Louis, Missouri, where he was operating a booming Indian herb doctor practice, and who also had been recently arrested for strutting the streets in a gaudy semi-military uniform.

In 1865 Tumblety was at the peak of his lucrative advertising Indian herb doctor business; never missing an opportunity to gain free publicity by staying in the public's eye and attending such a famous event as the President's funeral. Tumblety likely continued to wear loud attire in Springfield, mounted on a gorgeous steed, and assuming an aristocratic air.

The rich and powerful were also in attendance, such as the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, who likely witnessed this charade.

Just four years earlier, Tumblety rode his horse immediately behind President-elect Lincoln's horse and carriage along the entire route of the Inaugural parade in New York City, then followed General McClellan around Washington DC in the semi-military uniform claiming to have offered his services as a military staff physician. Tumblety pronounced he knew the Lincolns, and even relayed a story of treating President's son.

An article in the *Rochester Advertiser*, as reprinted in the *Newark Advocate* of November 29, 1861, stated that Tumblety made favor with President Lincoln through his son Robert, attending to his sprained ankle at a watering place in the summer of 1860. One particular Rochester witness stated that Tumblety introduced him to the Lincolns at the White House. But, Tumblety was arrested by federal authorities immediately after Lincoln's funeral.

Thanks to subsequent inaccurate newspaper reporting and crafty revisionist writing in his autobiography, the waters of truth were muddied and Tumblety successfully hid a dangerous fact; he did indeed know John Wilkes Booth. Unraveling this affair may come from investigating a key player in Tumblety's arrest, an unnamed young man from Brooklyn who the papers claimed was John Wilkes Booth's errand boy.

After attending Lincoln's funeral Tumblety returned to his office in St. Louis on May 5th, 1865 and was immediately arrested by federal authorities.[1] He was detained in St. Louis for two days then taken to Washington DC to the Old Capitol Prison.[2] He was imprisoned for three weeks without ever being officially charged. It was reported in the newspapers there were two reasons for his arrest: involvement in the murder of President Lincoln, and a pro-Confederate plot to spread yellow fever in Northern territory.

Lincoln's funeral in Springfield, Illinois

Being arrested for these conspiracies suggests that Tumblety was a pro-Confederate Northerner, or Southern sympathizer. Throwing a monkey wrench into this

1 *St. Louis Press*, May 6, 1865.

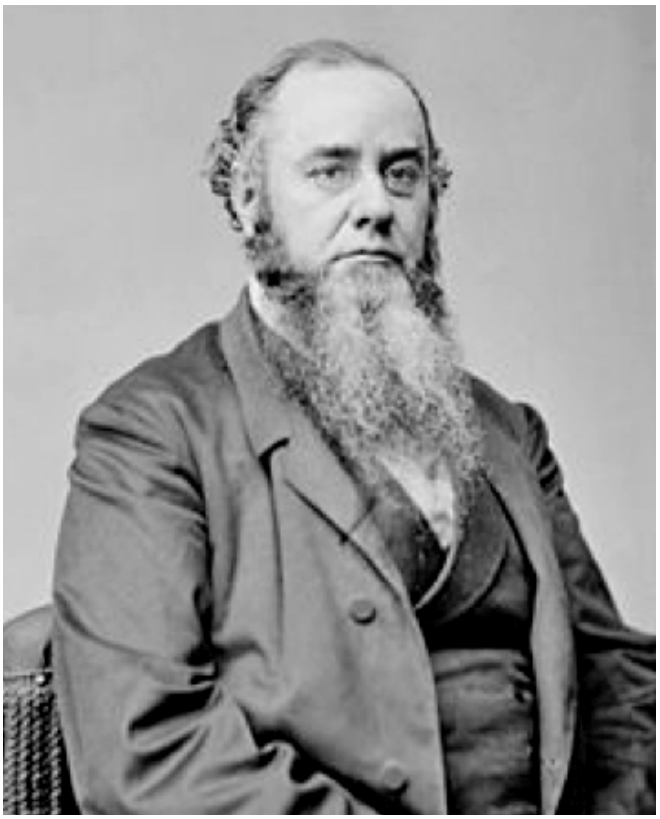
2 Tumblety, F., *A Few Passages in the Life of Dr. Francis Tumblety, The Indian Herb Doctor*, Cincinnati, 1866.

idea, though, has always been the fact that Tumblety claimed in his autobiography to be close with President Lincoln and his family, and close to the Secretary of State William Seward. Further, Tumblety even reprinted a warm response letter from Union General William T. Sherman in his 1872 autobiography.[3] He certainly did open up offices in cities that were known to be hotbeds of Southern sympathy, such as Montreal, Canada and St. Louis, Missouri.

At the time of the Civil War there were four conflicting political ideologies in the United States: the secessionist slave-holding states, or Confederacy, the pro-slavery Union Democrats, the moderate Union Republicans under President Lincoln, and the Radical Republicans in the Union, of which Edwin Stanton was a vocal supporter.[4]

Lastly, and as will be discussed, new evidence indicates Tumblety was not planning on establishing himself in St. Louis, Missouri, but in a different city.

His series of autobiographies actually reveals where his political loyalties lay during the Civil War. They were not FOR a particular political belief, rather AGAINST a party – the Radical Republicans. The reason, though, was personal and not political, because of his hatred for the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton.



Edwin M. Stanton

For example, Tumblety reprinted in his autobiography an entire article out of the *Washington National Intelligencer,* titled 'The Expulsion of Stanton':

> The people of the country will rejoice to hear that the War Department and the Administration have at last been rid of the incubus that has so long weighed them down… On the morrow he [Edwin Stanton] was made Secretary of War. His first act was to kick down the ladder by which he had mounted to the position. He persecuted McClellan and his staff and drove them all out of the army. He lent himself to the uses of the Radical Committee on the Conduct of the War, and conducted the war not for victory but for the benefit of the Radical Republican faction… We have nothing to say of his recent course. That he has been antagonistic to the Administration is known. That he has been a spy in behalf of the Radical revolutionists is acknowledged. That he is particeps criminis in the new conspiracy may perhaps be proved.[5]

Tumblety attacked Stanton throughout his autobiography, mentioning his name with regular disdain 26 times. His contempt for Stanton was for one non-patriotic reason; Stanton authorized his arrest on May 5th, 1865, which included the confiscation of his money and the subsequent three-week imprisonment in Washington DC:

> I have heretofore presented the reader with a tolerably graphic description of my arrest, incarceration, cruel treatment, and the great pecuniary damage I sustained, during the American Reign of Terror – for no more appropriate term can I find to stigmatize the regime of the then Secretary of War, the infamous Stanton…

The "American Reign of Terror" comment was not a pro-Confederate remark, but a dictum referring to the short time period just after President Lincoln's assassination when Secretary of War Edwin Stanton took charge of the government with an iron fist until the unprepared, newly sworn-in President Andrew Johnson settled into the position.[6] At the time, Stanton had control of the Army and the congress was not in session, so he believed he was in the best position to circumvent any form of chaos. Stanton quickly gave a number of overarching orders, such as, the lockdown of Washington DC and the protection of homes of the Lincoln's cabinet members and Andrew Johnson. Stanton also took immediate charge of the hunt for the escaped assassins, knowing it was only a matter of

3 Tumblety, F., *Narrative of Dr. Tumblety*, Russells' American Steam Printing House, New York City, 1872.

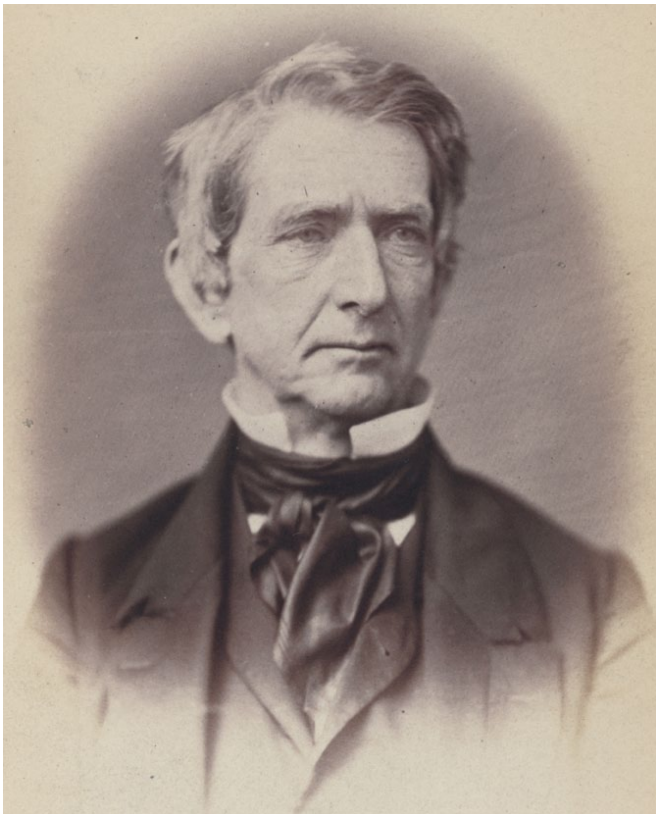
4 Kolchin, P., "Review: The Myth of Radical Reconstruction", *Reviews in American History*, V. 3, No. 2, June 1975, pp. 228-236. Johns Hopkins University Press.

5 Tumblety, F., 1872. op. cit.

6 Thomas, B. & Hyman H., *Stanton: Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1962.

time before John Wilkes Booth and David Herold would be safely hidden in the deep South. He also initiated a massive investigation to root out any and all conspirators. It was under this order that Tumblety was arrested and lost both his freedom and a large sum of money.

Before his arrest Tumblety had expressed no issues with Radical Republicans, even claiming to be a close friend to pre-war Radical Republican William H. Seward. When the 13th New York Regiment was at Fort Corcoran in Washington DC between July 21st and July 30th, 1861, Tumblety visited them on an Arabian horse. According to an article in the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* of April 5, 1881, one of the soldiers asked where he got the horse and Tumblety replied, "My friend Billy Seward gave it to me." A Buffalo resident stated in the *Buffalo Courier* of November 30th, 1888 that Tumblety presented a beautiful greyhound to William H. Seward.



William H. Seward

Regardless of whether these stories are true or not, it demonstrates that Tumblety had no issues being associated with a staunch Radical Republican.

At the time of his St. Louis arrest, though, it was not common knowledge what the notorious Indian Herb Doctor's political views were, and federal authorities were merely following leads. Although Tumblety claimed this arrest was inappropriate and unfounded, it certainly was legal IF it involved alleged offenses specific to the Civil War. The writ of habeas corpus, as written in the Suspension Clause of the U.S. Constitution, guarantees against illegal detention, but it was officially suspended in 1863 involving alleged offenses dealing with the Civil War.[7]

Even though he was legally detained then released, Tumblety felt compelled to respond. In the *Washington Star* of June 9th, 1865 Tumblety published a response titled "A Card from Dr. Tumblety" and even reprinted it in his 1866 autobiography, stating the primary reason for his arrest was a case of mistaken identity:

> My arrest appears to have grown out of a statement made in a low, licentious sheet published in New York, to the effect that Dr. Blackburn, who has figure so unenviably in the hellish yellow fever plot, was no other person than myself.

In 1864 Dr. Luke Pryor Blackburn, a nineteenth century expert in treating yellow fever, allegedly devised a plan to infect northern cities and Union soldiers with yellow fever by covertly distributing blood- and vomit-soaked linens of yellow fever victims.[8] According to the conspiracy, after an outbreak of yellow fever occurred in Bermuda Blackburn initiated his plot. Ultimately the plan soured, and three days after the Confederacy surrendered in April 1865, the plot was exposed. The U.S. Bureau of Military Justice ordered his arrest, but because he was in Canada he could not be detained. Tumblety was claiming that federal detectives read the New York dailies and became suspicious that he may very well be Dr. Luke Blackburn, so on May 5th, 1865 had him arrested in St. Louis on suspicion of the yellow fever plot.

The problem with this scenario is timing. The very first time Tumblety was mentioned in the paper in connection to the yellow fever plot was AFTER the arrest of May 5th. On May 9th, 1865 Tumblety was linked to the yellow fever plot in an Associate Press article, which was published in multiple newspapers around the country including the major New York City newspapers:

> Dr. Blackburn, who visited Bermuda for the purpose of obtaining clothing used in the yellow fever hospitals, in order to spread the disease in northern cities, turns out to be none other than Dr. Tumblety… He has been arrested.

Tumblety's claim that a New York newspaper report caused federal authorities to arrest him is unfounded.

7 Dueholm, J., "Lincoln's Suspension of the Writ of Habeas Corpus: An Historical and Constitutional Analysis", J*ournal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, V. 29, Issue 2, pp. 47-66, Summer 2008.

8 Greene H., *The Confederate Yellow Fever Conspiracy: The Germ Warfare Plot of Luke Pryor Blackburn, 1864-1865*, McFarland, 2019.

What Tumblety may have got correct is, if the DC detective did confront him about the yellow fever plot while he was sitting in his prison cell, they received this from newspaper reports.

On December 1st, 1888 a reporter for the *New York World* interviewed a colorful character, Charles A. Dunham, for the purpose of relaying eyewitness accounts about Jack the Ripper suspect Dr. Francis Tumblety.[9] Dunham claimed to have witnessed Tumblety in Washington DC in 1861 giving an illustrated medical lecture to military officers and showing off his private collection of uterus specimens. Dunham also claimed to know why Tumblety was arrested in St. Louis.

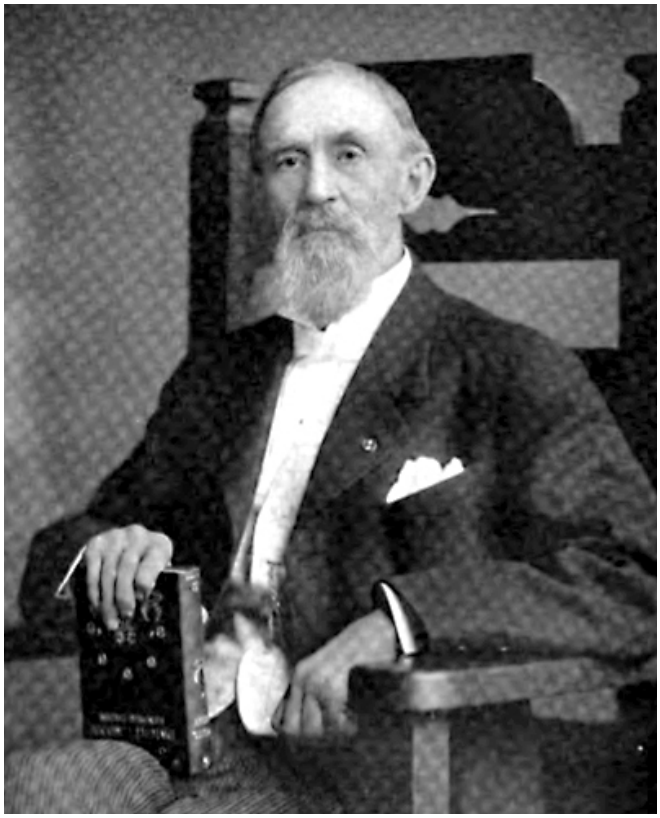
The significance of this is that he may have had inside information on the arrest. Dunham was a Manhattan real estate attorney all his adult life, but according to the foremost authority on Charles Dunham, Carman Cumming, he was most likely a Union spy during the Civil War, working for a high-ranking government official in Washington DC.[10]

At this time, certain spies were known to have reported to a particular individual in government as opposed to a department. During the December 1st, 1888 interview, Dunham had in his hands Tumblety's autobiography, and was asked by the reporter about the 1865 St. Louis arrest, in which he replied that Tumblety was arrested "on suspicion of being Luke P. Blackburn, lately governor of Kentucky, who had been falsely charged with trying to introduce yellow fever into the northern cities by means of infected rags."

As stated, federal authorities knew where Luke Blackburn was – in Canada – so it does not make sense that they would have arrested Tumblety in St. Louis. Keep in mind that Dunham was holding onto Tumblety's autobiography, and admitted he read from it for the interview. Since Tumblety wrote about his arrest being due to misidentification of Luke Blackburn in this very autobiography, it stands to reason this was the source of Dunham's claim.

Tumblety certainly did blame Stanton for his arrest, but he had full knowledge that the order was issued by Colonel James H. Baker, Union Provost Marshal for the Department of Missouri.[11] During the Civil War, Provost Marshals were Union officers charged with order and discipline among both military personnel and civilians.[12] They were basically the Union's military police, which included hunting down spies and disloyal civilians. Tumblety stated:

> I remained incarcerated in St. Louis two days, during which period I was visited by several military officers, who, to my anxious demand for the cause of my arrest, laughingly replied, "Oh, they have such an immense amount of excitement in Washington, that **Colonel Baker – under whose order the arrest was made** – thinks that we ought to have a little sensation here. ***[Author emphasis added]***



Colonel James H. Baker.
Union Provost Marshal for
the Department of Missouri in May 1865

According to an affidavit by the arresting officer, Captain Peter Tallon, Chief of the US Police, Department of Missouri, the order was directed by Colonel Baker, but was signed by his superior Major General Dodge, Commander of the Department of the Missouri.[13] Dodge was directed by his superiors in Washington DC.[14] This was actually the second time Tallon arrested Tumblety in St. Louis in the spring of 1865. The first was in March, before US authorities were informed of the yellow fever plot.[15] In this case, Tumblety was arrested for wearing a

9 *New York World*, December 2, 1888.

10 C. Cumming, *Devil's Game: The Civil War Intrigues of Charles A. Dunham*, Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008.

11 Tumblety, F., 1866. op. cit.

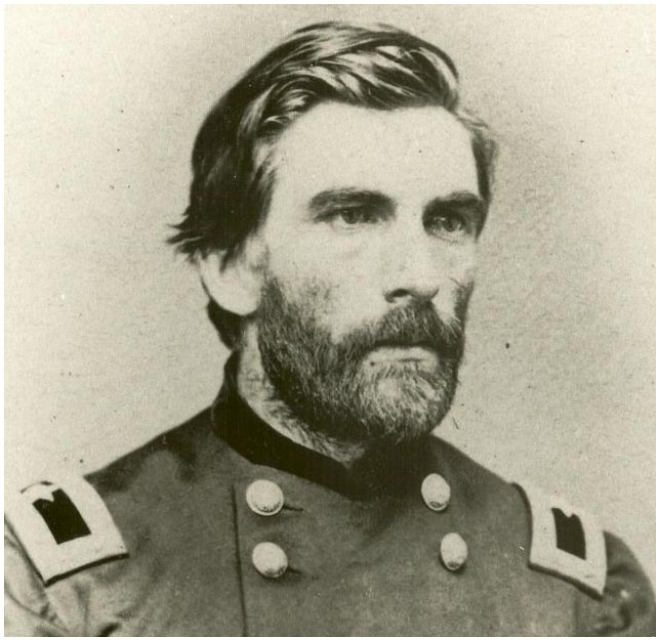
12 Craig, R., "Evolution of the Office of the Provost Marshal General", *Military Police Professional Bulletin Articles*, April 2004. www.wood.army.mil

13 Collection of letters and official affidavits discovered by David Barrat at the National Archives at Kew, London.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

semi-military uniform. The order originated from Colonel Baker and not General Dodge, meaning it was not directed by Washington DC. In view of this, the authorities in DC likely had no idea.



Major General Grenville Dodge.
Commander of the Department of the Missouri in May 1865

While still claiming he was arrested for the yellow fever plot – a charge he could easily refute – Tumblety then quickly glossed over a slight rumor connecting him with David Herold and John Wilkes Booth:

> While in imprisonment I noticed in some of the New York and other Northern papers, a paragraph setting forth that the villain, Harrold [sic], who now stands charged with being one of the conspirators in the atrocious assassination plot, was at one time in my employ. This, too, is false… For the past five years I have had but one man in my employment, and he is yet with me… Another paper has gone so far as to inform the public that I was an intimate acquaintance of Booth's; but this, too, is news to me, as I never spoke to him in my life, or any of his family.

Actually, newspapers reported Tumblety being implicated in the Lincoln assassination before any connected him to the yellow fever plot. Additionally, while the very first yellow fever report was published after his May 5th, 1865 arrest, the initial Lincoln assassination reports were published before the arrest; and just one day before. One article, in the *New York Evening Post* of May 4th, 1865, stated:

> …Herold, the companion of Booth …is well known to the citizens of Brooklyn as the agent and companion of a man known as "the Indian Herb Doctor"… The prisoner also stated that the doctor had been acquainted with Booth in Washington, and that it was through him that he became acquainted with Herold.

Additionally, the official reason why he was arrested on May 5th, 1865, as stated by Colonel Baker, was the Lincoln assassination. In a letter dated one day later on May 6th, 1865 to the Assistant Secretary of War, C.A. Dana, Baker reported this arrest on suspicion and distinctly made the connection between Tumblety and coconspirator David Herold:

> Sir, I have the honor to forward herewith, in compliance with your telegram of this date, Dr. Tumblety, alias Blackburn. All his papers had been carefully examined to implicate him with the assassination, or showing him to be in any way connected with Herold or any of the supposed assassins.[16]

Notice the damning sequence of events. On May 4th reporters published Tumblety's close ties with President Lincoln's assassins. On May 5th he was arrested by federal authorities tasked specifically with rooting out conspirators of the Presidents assassination. Finally, on May 6th, Colonel Baker reported this arrest to his boss, mentioning only the assassination, and even commented upon Tumblety's reported ties with the assassins. If Baker's reason for the arrest had anything to do with the yellow fever plot, he clearly would have reported this to the Assistant Secretary of War.

Corroborating Colonel Baker's report to the Assistant Secretary of War that the arrest only dealt with the Lincoln assassination is a later letter from Secretary of War William W. Belknap to the British Secretary of State, dated August 6th, 1873. He told the Secretary of State that he reviewed the official records and reported that Tumblety "was arrested in St. Louis… on suspicion of complicity in the assassination of President Lincoln, that he was committed to the Old Capital Prison on the 10th of May 1865, and that he was released on the 31st of May that year."[17]

Government officials investigating the Lincoln assassination plot were not in the habit of telling the press why they arrested Tumblety, and throughout late May and June 1865 almost every newspaper article reporting on his arrest incorrectly stated it was solely because of his involvement in the yellow fever plot. For example, an article in the June 2nd, 1865, issue of the *Baltimore Sun* stated, "Dr. Tumblety, arrested in St. Louis some weeks

16 Collection of letters and official affidavits discovered by David Barrat at the National Archives at Kew, Richmond, Greater London.

17 Ibid.

ago, and brought to Washington as a confederate of Blackburn in the yellow fever plot, has been released."

This error stuck, and when Tumblety's name again dominated the newspapers in 1888/89 because of the Whitechapel murders, and even after his death in 1903, almost every report stated he was arrested in 1865 because of the yellow fever plot. One of the very few articles that reported Tumblety's arrest correctly was in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* of December 11th, 1888, but there was an excellent reason. The reporter interviewed none other than Tumblety's 1865 arresting officer, former U.S. Detective Captain Peter Tallon:

> The Captain says that if he is not mistaken Tumblety is the man he arrested for being suspected of complicity in the plot to murder President Lincoln, while he was Chief of the United States Police for the State of Missouri in 1864. Tumblety was taken in custody on an order from the authorities at Washington.

Tallon never mentioned the yellow fever plot. He also corroborated the fact that while Major General Dodge signed the order for Tumblety's arrest, the directive came from Washington DC. As stated, there is a possibility that DC detectives considered a possible connection between Tumblety and Luke Blackburn because of newspaper reports as claimed by Tumblety, but this would have been after his arrest while he was incarcerated at the Old Capital Prison.

How the papers even connected Tumblety to Dr. Luke Blackburn is apparently based upon the following circumstances.

On May 6th, 1865, the day after Tumblety's arrest, an Associated Press article, which was published in numerous North American newspapers, reported from Halifax, Nova Scotia, the details behind the yellow fever plot from Bermuda. The report specifically named a "Dr. Blackburn." Curiously, in the dozens of reports on the yellow fever plot published in April and May 1865, Luke Blackburn's first name was never mentioned; only referring to him as Dr. Blackburn. On the very same day, May 6th – and in the same papers – a second Associated Press article was published reporting on Tumblety's St. Louis arrest of May 5th, 1865, and stated his alias as J.H. Blackburn:

> J.H. Blackburn, alias Dr. Tumblety… was arrested to-day in accordance with orders from the War Department.

Tumblety was connected to the name Blackburn; however, in St. Louis Tumblety was not using the alias "Dr. Blackburn", but published Blackburn as his partner. The 1865 St. Louis City Directory listed "Blackburn J. & Co. (John Blackburn and F. Tumblety), physicians." This John Blackburn was very likely Tumblety's valet, Mark A. Blackburn. Tumblety claimed he hired him in 1860 or 1861 in New York, and numerous eyewitness accounts have Mark A. Blackburn working for him in his Brooklyn office in 1864. Tumblety may very well have used "Dr. Blackburn" as his alias in Brooklyn, New York because he did so in Albany, New York in August and September 1863, just before he opened up his office at 181 Fulton Street in Brooklyn in October:

> Dr. Blackburne, the Indian herb doctor, will describe diseases, and tell his patients the nature of their complaints or illness without receiving any information from them. No charge for consultation. [*Albany Morning Express*, August 20th, 1863]

DR. TUMBLETY.

A reporter at the *Albany Evening Journal* recalled Tumblety opening up his office in Albany at this time, and reported it in their November 28th, 1888 edition: "When Tumblety was in Albany he started his establishment for herb cures… His career in Albany was not as satisfactory as he could wish and he soon packed off to Brooklyn, where he cut a great swell, and was known everywhere both in that city and on Manhattan island as the "Nankeen swell." One month later, Tumblety did indeed open up an office in Brooklyn. Peculiarly, he added the letter "e" at the end of "Blackburne" in his Albany advertisement. It was not uncommon for quack doctors to use alternative names, such as the first doctor Tumblety worked for in Rochester, New York in 1850, W.C. Lispenard.[18] His real name was Ezra J. Reynolds.

18 1857 Rochester (New York) City Directory.

Mark Blackburn travelled with Tumblety throughout the late 1860s and helped in his offices in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. Blackburn was so significant to him that Tumblety bequeathed a large sum of money to him in his 1903 will and testament, so it is not a surprise that he used Mark's last name as his alias. While earlier in Washington DC, between 1862 and April 1863, Tumblety ensured his full name was branded on all of his multi-column newspaper ads, but he purposely omitted his name in his Philadelphia ads between May and June 1863. In the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of June 27th, 1863 the ad stated, "TEN DOLLAR REWARD, if the Indian Herb Doctor from Canada fails to describe diseases and tell his patients the nature of their complaints without receiving any information from them. No charge for advice or consultation."

One possible reason why Tumblety added an alias was because on July 1st, 1863 the mayor of Philadelphia issued an arrest warrant on Tumblety for perjury, and he sneaked out of the city.[19] On two other occasions when Tumblety was in trouble with the law, in 1881 when he was arrested for sodomy in Toronto and in 1888 when he absconded from England, he hid in upstate New York staying with his sister.[20] He likely did the same, since we have an eyewitness account of him in Buffalo, New York, in July 1863, then opening up an office in Albany, New York, one month later.

Three months later in Brooklyn, Tumblety opted for the "$30 REWARD" advertisement and referred to himself as "Indian herb doctor." Notice that the reward increased from $10 to $30. A warrant was still out for his arrest, so it is not a surprise that he continued to use the alias of "Dr. Blackburn" while in Brooklyn.

An Associated Press newscable report published in the *Northern New York Journal* of May 9th, 1865 finally connected Tumblety to Luke Blackburn, which stated the following:

> Dr. J.H. Blackburn, alias Tumblety… has been arrested at St. Louis. **Is this the Bermuda Blackburn?** ***[Emphasis added]***

This clearly shows that newsgathering organizations were fully aware of the Dr. Blackburn coincidence. A reporter or editor at the *Rochester Daily Union & Advertiser* called a *New York Tribune* reporter out for making this connection. In their May 12th, 1865 edition, the Rochester paper reprinted part of an earlier article from the Washington special correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, then stated:

> The *Tribune*'s correspondent has here confounded [SIC: confused] Dr. Tumblety alias Blackburn, the "Indian Doctor" …with Dr. Blackburn the yellow fever importer, who at last accounts was under examination in a port of one of the Provinces. The latter is not in federal custody. The coincidence in names is a little singular.

As stated, how Tumblety came to be connected to the Lincoln assassination was made public one day before he was arrested in St. Louis, and it involved the arrest of a boy who allegedly worked for John Wilkes Booth. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the *New York Evening Post*, the *New York Express,* New York City special correspondents for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Philadelphia Press all independently released a local New York story on Thursday, May 4th, 1865 about a teenage boy having been taken into custody in Brooklyn on Tuesday, May 2nd, 1865. The New York correspondent for the *Philadelphia Press* stated:

> The Government seems to be energetically at work ferreting out the scoundrels who were concerned in the assassination plot, and a new arrest has been made here which may assist it in placing the dread responsibility on every one to whom it properly belongs. The prisoner, to be sure, is only a boy, but his relation to the chief assassin, the confidential matters in which he must have been engaged, will render his testimony exceedingly valuable. He was arrested, on Tuesday evening last, while sauntering along Court street, Brooklyn, immediately opposite the Montague Hall.

The correspondent for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on the same day gave additional details not reported in the *Philadelphia Press*:

> The Boy was caught on Court street, near the City Hall, by one of the Government officers, who accidentally, as they expected they might do, met him face to face. The boy was taken by the officer to the nearest place of detention, which happened to be the 41st Precinct Station House…

The fact that these newsgathering organizations received the very same story only one day after the boy's arrest and reported different details suggests their source had timely inside information. The *New York Express* reporter even commented in their May 4th, 1865 article upon the trustworthiness of this source, stating, "Were in not that the above facts were obtained from such a

19 *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 2nd, 1863.

20 Sworn testimony of Thomas Powderly, Tumblety's nephew, Circuit Court Archives, City of St. Louis, State of Missouri, Case Number 31430, Series A., 1904-1908; *Waterloo Observer*, December 12th, 1888.

reliable source, it would be difficult to believe they were other than the productions of some enthusiastic novelist.". The *New York Evening Post*, in their May 4th, 1865 issue, commented upon their own reporter speaking directly with that source, "He [the boy] refused to give his name, and as the officer who arrested him declined to give it, our reporter is unable to furnish it." This inside source was one or more of the local 41st Precinct police officers.

What made the story particularly newsworthy was the boy's jailhouse confession to the police. He stated that for the past few months he had been in Washington DC as the errand boy for President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth; a man who was on the run and killed just five days earlier:

> During the time that the prisoner was in the station house he conversed with some of the police officers, and from his conversation it was discovered that he had been employed by the assassin Booth for some months prior to the assassination of President Lincoln…

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of the same date goes into additional detail about who this boy was:

> Recent events which transpired in this city, have brought to light some facts in connection with the assassination of President Lincoln and the Identity of Harold [sic], the accomplice of Booth, and partner in his attempted flight, which will startle the people of this locality somewhat, and form another link in the history of the assassin, who is now about to pay the penalty of his enormous crime with his worthless life. …the Washington detectives discovered, on visiting his haunts, that there was a boy, whose name they could not ascertain, and whose face, on his appearance being described to them, was familiar to all of them. This boy was in the habit of being a good deal of his time with Booth, being employed by him as a sort of errand boy, carrying letters, etc. On the day after the assassination the boy was missing and all search for him proved to be fruitless.

The 41st Precinct officers then revealed the connection this boy made between the assassins and Dr. Francis Tumblety:

> It appears also from his [the errand boy] conversations with the officers during his stay at the station house, that Herold, the companion of Booth in his flight, and who is now in custody in Washington, is well known to the citizens of Brooklyn as the agent and companion of a man known as the "Indian Herb Doctor," who came to Brooklyn some eighteen months since and opened an office on Fulton street, where he made himself notorious by the peculiarity of his dress. [*New York Evening Post*, May 4th, 1865]

This news of Booth's Brooklyn errand boy came at a time when the magnitude of the Lincoln assassination conspiracy was not entirely known. The country was on edge, since President Lincoln was only murdered less than three weeks earlier. How many other conspirators were still at large? Each correspondent gave a slightly different angle to the errand boy story, but they all reported that the boy was at Booth's Washington DC residence – likely the National Hotel – at the time of the assassination, on April 15th, 1865, then he fled the capital the next day.[21] The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* story gave great detail on how the detectives in Washington DC first believed the conspirators may have murdered the missing boy because he knew too much, but they then discovered a boy answering the description of him being seen taking a train to Baltimore. The detectives then followed his trail through Baltimore and finally to Brooklyn.

The *Philadelphia Press* gave additional details, stating the boy was well-known as Booth's errand boy, that he disappeared in the morning, and that only one detective was assigned to trail the boy. The newspaper also reported the detective was attached to Colonel Baker, stating:

> One of the detectives, said to be attached to Colonel Baker's force, was immediately detailed to find him and he did find him as stated.

This is not the same Colonel Baker who arrested Tumblety in St. Louis, since Colonel James Baker's jurisdiction was specific to Missouri. This was Colonel Lafayette C. Baker, Provost Marshall for Washington DC, the Head of the National Detective Bureau, and government master spy from September 1862 to November 1863, but then transferred to New York to work for the Assistant Secretary of War, Charles Dan.[22]

Colonel Lafayette C. Baker

21 Sandburg, C., *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Volume IV, p. 318, Harcourt Brace & World, 1939.

22 Waller, D., *Lincoln's Spies*, Simon & Schuster, 2019.

Immediately after the assassination, Stanton ordered Baker back to the capital for the singular purpose of capturing John Wilkes Booth and David Herold and rooting out the rest of the conspirators. It is known that Colonel Baker was at this very moment assigning detectives to investigate various leads, as in the case with Detective Theodore Woodall, when he sent him to lower Maryland on April 24th to assist in Booth's capture.[23]

The DC detective reportedly spotted the errand boy on Brooklyn's Court Street on Tuesday, May 2nd, 1865 then arrested him. The officer then brought him to the 41st Precinct Station in order to hold him while he left for further instructions from his superiors. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of May 4th, 1865 stated that the detective spoke with the captain of 41st Precinct, Captain Smith:

> …the officer showing his authority for making the arrest, asked Captain Smith to keep him in close custody until he should be called for by him. The boy remained in the Station House that night, and on the following day he was privately conveyed to Washington.

A list of precinct captains published in the *Brooklyn Daily News* on May 16th, 1866, reported Captain Joel Smith assigned to the 41st Precinct.

The *Evening Post*, May 4th, 1865 corroborated the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report that the DC detective returned the next day to retrieve the boy, writing: "Yesterday [May 3rd, 1865] the officer called again and took the prisoner to Washington, where he is now in custody."

Although, the boy stated he did not know if Tumblety was involved with the assassination, a close and recent relationship with the assassin clearly piqued the interest of the Washington DC detectives, as evidenced by Tumblety being arrested the very next day on May 5th, 1864 in St. Louis:

> The notorious "Dr. Tumblety" spoken of, who has for some time been massing a fortune in this city, under the nom de plume of Indian Herb Doctor, who had previously assumed the name of Dr. J.H. Blackburn, was yesterday arrested by a United States detective, on a charge of complicity with the assassination of President Lincoln… Harrold [sic] and the herb doctor are said to have been partners in Brooklyn… [*St. Louis Press*, May 6th, 1865]

A May 5th, 1865 arrest makes sense. For Colonel Lafayette Baker and the US detectives, the publishing of the May 4th, 1865 articles came at a bad time. If their intentions were to arrest Tumblety and question him on the Lincoln assassination, their suspect was about to be forewarned, so they had to act quickly. On the very same day Tumblety was arrested the story went national when the Associated Press picked it up and transmitted it to dozens of newspapers across the country and in Canada. Additionally, the *New York Express* story was transmitted to multiple newspapers around the country, making its way into Washington DC's *Evening Star* on May 5th, 1865. This meant that Tumblety likely did not read about his connection to the Lincoln assassination until after he was arrested.

An article in the *New York Times* dated May 5th, 1865 contradicts the five separate May 4th, 1865 accounts, stating that the teenager was not Booth's errand boy, but merely a young man who was arrested for theft in Brooklyn, who then spun the story in order to get out of the charge:

> A few days since a young man, whose name has not been divulged, was arrested by Detective Frost and others on the charge of theft, and, proving to be a smart fellow, told something more than he knew to be facts, in order to exculpate himself from the actual offense of which it is alleged he is guilty. He stated that he knew the assassin Booth …and said that Harold had been a resident of Brooklyn and an attendant of a physician who formerly resided here. The officers believing that he knew something of the assassination, and having an eye to the reward, kept him in custody for some days, and reported the case to General Superintendent Kennedy, of the Metropolitan Police. That officer examined the matter thoroughly, and as reported, found it to be "bosh."

Notice that the reporter for the *New York Times* received the story from a different source than reporters from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the *New York Evening Post*, the *New York Express*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Press*, and received it a day later. While their stories came from officers at the 41st Precinct on the very same day the DC detective supposedly retrieved the boy – and who the *New York Evening Post* reporter commented upon their credibility – the *New York Times* reporter received second-hand information. The *Times* reporter clearly read their stories, then approached Superintendent Kennedy at headquarters the day before Tumblety was arrested in St. Louis. If Superintendent Kennedy was telling the truth, then Tumblety getting arrested the next day makes no sense. There was no other connection between Tumblety and President Lincoln's assassination but from this boy. Colonel Baker would have known the story was bosh, since his detectives were claimed to be involved, and it

23 Edwards, W., *The Lincoln Assassination – The Reward Files*, Univ. of Illinois Press, 2012.

is a stretch to believe the federal authorities would have arrested a man on a complete lie. If Colonel Baker and his detectives informed Superintendent Kennedy of their plans and asked him to keep their interest in Tumblety confidential until they decide to arrest him, then Kennedy stretching the truth and leading the *Times* reporter on a wild goose chase makes sense. Kennedy may even have been attempting to bury the story coming from the 41st Precinct officers before it went viral.

Actually, there are other issues with the *New York Times* account. Nowhere did the newspaper report that one of Colonel Baker's federal detectives who pursued the boy from Washington DC was in Brooklyn to arrest the boy, then escorted the boy back to Washington DC on May 3rd. In fact, the *Times* account concludes this to be "bosh."

Where did this part of the story come from if untrue? It could not have come from the boy, since part of the story involved the boy being gone; escorted out of 41st Precinct by a DC detective. The police would not have spun a big lie like this, because Kennedy stated their interest was to collect the reward money. The local police certainly would not have baked a story involving Colonel Baker's detectives, since the very same Washington DC people would be releasing the reward money and would have known it was an elaborate lie. Merely stating they arrested a Brooklyn boy and who claims Tumblety knew Booth and Herold would have better improved their chances of collecting a reward.

One suggestion is that the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reporter made the whole story up, but this conflicts with the fact that reporters from four other newspapers received the story from the 41st Precinct police, and even reported on distinct events. None of the reports could have been a source for the other four. Even the Associated Press reporter, an independent newsgathering organization, corroborated this 41st Precinct police story and not the Kennedy story.

Further contradicting Kennedy's claim that the boy fabricated the story in order to get out of the theft charge is that information he gave proved correct, and correct on three levels.

First, the boy knew Tumblety had an office in Brooklyn, then left six months earlier, meaning around December 1864. Second, he claimed Tumblety left for New Orleans, and indeed he did. According to a passenger list recorded in the *New York Daily Tribune* of December 5th, 1864, Tumblety sailed for New Orleans onboard the S.S. *George Cromwell*. The boy had to have interacted with Tumblety in the fall/winter of 1864 to know these events. It would not be a surprise that Tumblety developed a relationship with the 15-year-old Brooklyn boy, since Tumblety always sought out the attention of older boys and younger men in every city he operated out of. Third, and most importantly, the boy stated to the police on May 3rd, 1865, that he believed Tumblety was still in New Orleans:

> The doctor [Tumblety]... left this city, and is said to be in New Orleans at the present time, and Herold returned to Washington.

This means that the boy likely believed Tumblety opened up an office in New Orleans. While it has been suggested that Tumblety left Brooklyn for St. Louis, and merely passed through New Orleans, he actually opened up an office there in December. At the end of 1864 New Orleans was occupied by the Union under the compassionate control of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, undoing harsh and repressive directives implemented by his predecessor, General Benjamin F. Butler. New Orleans' economy was prospering.24

Tumblety would have been enticed by New Orleans and would have felt comfortable attempting to exploit its citizens, even hedging his bets by calling himself a Canadian. His newspaper advertisements stated, "$30 Reward, the Indian Herb Doctor, from Canada," as he did in Philadelphia one year earlier. He placed the ad in the New Orleans dailies, the *Daily True Delta*, *Times-Picayne*, and *Times-Democrat*, up until December 28th, 1864. Found in the December 28th, 1864 issue of the *Daily True Delta*, corroborating his stay until the end of the month is a letter waiting for him at the post office on December 30th, 1864, as listed in the *Times-Picayune* on that date. It was no longer on the list the next day, meaning that the letter was retrieved by Tumblety. By January 5th, 1865 Tumblety had opened up an office in St. Louis, using the very same $30 dollar reward advertisement he used in New Orleans, placing it in the *Missouri Republican* of January 5th, 1865.

If Tumblety was ultimately headed to St. Louis, then the boy would likely have known it. Tumblety was known to leave a city earlier than intended, for a variety of reasons. If he believed it was time to exit New Orleans at the end of December 1865, then his next city was likely a business decision. He was not done earning a lucrative living as an Indian herb doctor. The next logical, ripe, and unexploited city was St. Louis. It was the fourth largest city in the United States at the time, and the trip was just a direct, lazy riverboat ride north on the mighty Mississippi River.

While one of the bombshell stories in the articles was Booth's errand boy claiming that Tumblety had hired David Herold in 1864, there is evidence that this was a case of mistaken identity.

24 Capers, G., *Occupied City: New Orleans under the Federals, 1862-1865*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.

In the *Brooklyn Daily News* of May 4th, 1864, the boy claimed Tumblety had two young men working for him, and he claimed the taller one was David Herold. He stated that the taller valet would wear Tumblety's clothes that he wore yesterday. Tumblety claimed in his autobiography that he was exactly six feet tall, so in order for this taller valet to fit in his clothes, he must have been near six feet tall. Herold was actually six inches shorter; according to the $100,000 reward poster for the capture of John Wilkes Booth and David Herold, Herold was five feet six inches in height. Herold would not have been considered tall, even in 1865.

The biggest clue to the boy mistaking Herold as the tall valet is the name he stated Herold called himself when he was working in Tumblety's Brooklyn office:

> Herold, **or Blackburn, as he called himself**. While here was generally considered a good fellow by those who knew him… ***[Emphasis added]***

It appears the boy had mistaken Herold with Tumblety's longtime valet Mark A. Blackburn, who had been working for Tumblety in Brooklyn and was with him in St. Louis. We know Blackburn had to be near the same height as Tumblety, because we have numerous accounts of Blackburn wearing Tumblety's clothes, even as reported in this article.

An Albany resident in 1888, Mr. Arden Smith, was the private secretary for General Frank P. Blair during the Civil War and told an *Albany Journal* reporter in their November 30th, 1888 edition that he remembered seeing young David Herold as Tumblety's attendant. Smith stated:

> "He [Tumblety] had his quarters in Brown's Hotel at Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street. He had a big greyhound with him and an attendant named Harold [sic], the same young man who was afterward hanged for his connection with the assassination of Lincoln. While in Washington Tumblety was never known to speak to anyone but Harold [sic], who followed him about like a spaniel.

In 1863 Tumblety's offices were in the Washington Buildings, also at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street. It is wrong to assume that Smith was mistaken about Tumblety staying at Brown's Hotel, because in St. Louis less than two years later, according to his ads and the St. Louis City Directory, his offices were at 52 North Second Street where his assistant Blackburn stayed, while the City Directory records Tumblety rooming at the posh Lindell Hotel.

While there is the possibility that Herold did work for Tumblety in 1863 in DC and 1864 in Brooklyn, the comments made by Booth's errand boy suggest Smith also saw Mark A. Blackburn, who likely looked very much like Booth's photos in the newspapers.

David Herold

Of more significance than Tumblety possibly being connected to David Herold was the boy's claim that Tumblety had an intimate relationship with Booth, the mastermind of the Lincoln assassination plot. The *Detroit Free Press* of May 8th, 1865 reported, "He [the boy] states, however, that the doctor and Booth were on very intimate terms."

The *Philadelphia Press* of May 4th, 1865 gave additional details:

> Booth was acquainted with the "doctor" in New York, and received many visits from him in Washington… The fact of the intimacy of this quack with the assassin, and its duration to a recent date, together with his mysterious disappearance, lead many to believe that he, also, knows something about the conspiracy.

With the boy being from Brooklyn where Tumblety had an office, being a teenager – the perfect age and gender for Tumblety's usual hires – and knowing accurate details about the doctor, it is likely the young man was Tumblety's errand boy before he was Booth's. The boy stating that Booth was acquainted with Tumblety does have merit. Tumblety had a passion for theater, and it was reported on multiple occasions throughout his lifetime that he attended a performance. For example, under sworn testimony Richard Norris stated that Tumblety introduced himself in 1881 during intermission at the St.

Charles Theatre in New Orleans.[25] Tumblety even knew the New York actors by name. Young Martin McGarry stated in the *New York World* of December 5th, 1888 that Tumblety hired him as a travel companion and errand boy in 1882.

McGarry stated:

> Usually he went up to the Morton House, where he pointed out the actors to me and told me who they were and what they did. Sometimes in the afternoons we would drop in to the matinees.

Although John Wilkes Booth was spending more and more time in Washington DC, he was periodically in New York City. Not only did John Wilkes Booth's older brother Edwin work out of New York City in the 1860s, their mother still lived in the city.[26] Tumblety would have been familiar with the famous Booth family. There is even an eyewitness account of Tumblety being intimately acquainted with Booth in Buffalo, New York, in July 1863:

> One particular week that will ever remain notable in local history was in July 1863... In fact quite an intimacy sprang up between him [John Wilkes Booth] and a Dr. Tumblety – or Tumulty. He drove around selling cure-alls for everything, giving lectures with Thespian emphasis. He frequently located himself on the Terrace, where he would draw big crowds by distributing bags of flour. [*Buffalo Courier*, May 31st, 1914]

John Wilkes Booth was indeed in Buffalo, New York, in July 1863, performing at the Metropolitan Theatre from July 4th to 10th in *Richard III*, *Lady of Lyons*, *Hamlet*, *Money* and *Macbeth*.[27] The Buffalo resident was unusually precise in witnessing Booth in Buffalo down to month and year, which makes the eyewitness account very credible. Moreover, his recollection involved Tumblety. As discussed, Tumblety was known to be in New York at this time, which corroborates the Buffalo resident's account.

Tumblety fled Philadelphia on July 1st, 1863, just one week before Booth performed in Buffalo. Weeks later, Tumblety opened up an office in Albany, New York; a city just due east of Buffalo, New York. Tumblety was known to attend the theater when in Buffalo. Buffalo resident Charles W. Gibbons witnessed Tumblety at Buffalo's Metropolitan Theatre in early 1859. Gibbons stated to a *Buffalo Courier* reporter, published in their November 30th, 1888 issue:

> Tumblety used to go to the theater with a beautiful greyhound and paid $5 to get the dog in. The dog used to lean over the railing and take in the play with great interest. He afterwards presented the dog to William H. Seward.

Curiously, when Tumblety opened up his Brooklyn office in October 1863, John Wilkes Booth was performing *Richard III* at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn.[28] This was only three months after their reported friendship in Buffalo, New York.

Not only does the Brooklyn boy's claim that Booth was recently acquainted with Tumblety have corroboration, but another comment he made explains how he may have come into Booth's employ as an errand boy, and that it conforms to the whereabouts of both Booth and Tumblety in November 1874.

According to the *New York Evening Post* of May 4th, 1865, the boy told the 41st Precinct officers that he had been "…employed by the assassin Booth for some months prior to the assassination of President Lincoln." John Wilkes Booth was in New York City five months before Lincoln's assassination in November 1864, and that is when he would have met up with the Brooklyn boy. Booth participated in a one-evening-only major Shakespearian theatrical event at Winter Garden in New York City on November 25th, 1864, marking the "tercentenary" of William Shakespeare's birth.[29] Booth joined his brothers Edwin and Junius performing *Julius Caesar* as a benefit to pay for a statue of the Bard in Central Park. It was a highly publicized event, which produced a packed crowd.

L-R: John Wilkes Booth with his brothers Edwin and Junius. This photo was taken November 17, 1864 in New York City

25 Sworn Testimony of Richard Norris, Circuit Court Archives, City of St. Louis, State of Missouri, Case Number 31430, Series A., 1904 – 1908.

26 Bloom, A., *Edwin Booth: A Biography and Performance History*, McFarland & Co., 2013.

27 Loux, A., *John Wilkes Booth: Day by Day*, McFarland & Co., 2013.

28 *Brooklyn Union*, October 21st, 1863.

29 Winter, W., *Life and Art of Edwin Booth*, Macmillan & Co., 1894.

It would have been out of character for the theater-loving Tumblety not to have attended this historic event in New York. While the performance was on November 25th, 1888, he did not leave New York until November 28th.[30] This means John Wilkes Booth stayed in New York for a few days before heading off to his next performance. Since Tumblety had socialized with Booth in the evenings in Buffalo the previous year, it is plausible that Tumblety sought out Booth's company, and Booth met Tumblety's errand boy. Since Tumblety left New York City/Brooklyn soon after, the boy would have been out of a job, and this may have been the time Booth offered him employment. We do know Edwin Booth had an errand boy named Garrie at the time, so John Wilkes Booth may have followed his brother's footsteps.[31]

Although numerous newspaper reports on Booth's errand boy stated his name was not released, there is one newspaper article that gave his name – A. Berry:

> BOOTH'S ERRAND BOY ARRESTED. New York, May 4. – **A. Berry** has been arrested at Brooklyn and taken to Washington, whose conversation leads to the belief that he was possessed of Knowledge of the assassination. He was an errand boy of Booth's. It appears that Harrold [sic] turns out to have been the agent and confidant of the notorious Dr. Tumblety, who lately suddenly disappeared from Brooklyn. [*Daily Milwaukee News*, May 5th, 1865] ***[Author's emphasis added]***

While this report has no corroboration, it would be strange that a newspaper organization would randomly invent a name, especially since faking a name gives little additional weight to the story. The newsworthy aspect of the story is about Tumblety possibly being part of the Lincoln assassination conspiracy.

Researching through genealogical data, death records and city directories shows that there were possible candidates for an 'A. Berry' living in Brooklyn around 1865. The reports stated that the boy was about fifteen years old in 1865, so born around 1850. The 1870 census shows an Alphonzo H. Berry born in 1848, living in Brooklyn and married to a Christina. The 1870 census also shows and Alexander *Barry* (not Berry), born in Scotland in 1849, living in Brooklyn. An Arthur Berry is also shown in the 1870 census, born in 1851 and living in Brooklyn. The 1865 New York State census has an Alfred Berry, born in 1848 and living in New York City. Death records show an Arthur Berry, born in 1850 and living in Brooklyn.

In December 1888 Charles Dunham claimed Tumblety connected himself to the yellow fever plot merely for notoriety. The premise for Dunham's argument is that Tumblety was arrested for the plot and not for the Lincoln assassination conspiracy. The evidence is clear: Dunham was wrong on both counts, thus, his conclusion on Tumblety's attention-seeking agenda is wrong. Besides, Tumblety did indeed proudly promote his eccentricities when he was running his quack doctor business in the 1860s, but never did he promote anything that would hurt his public persona as a law-abiding upper class citizen. The reason why Tumblety even wrote his 1866 autobiography was to correct the record and immortalize his reputation.

The problem was that young A. Berry was eyewitness to Tumblety's friendship with John Wilkes Booth, even though he was not involved with Booth's murderous plans. Luckily, Tumblety could easily deflect this truth by exaggerating the newspapers' mistake about the yellow fever plot and take advantage of the errand boy's misidentification of Mark Blackburn as David Herold.

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30 Titone, N., *My Thoughts Be Bloody: The Bitter Rivalry Between Edwin and John Wilkes Booth that Led to an American Tragedy*, Free Press, 2010.

31 Menser, P., *Anecdotal Shakespeare: A New Performance History*, The Arden Shakespeare, 2015.

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