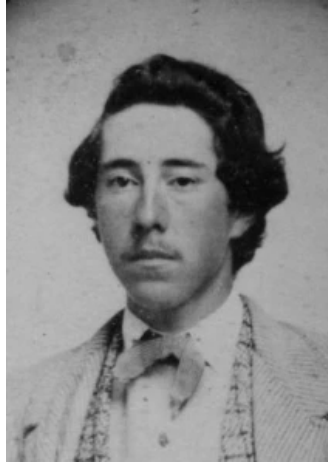


**WILLIAM STORKE JETT  
(1846-1884)**

The Jett Who was at the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

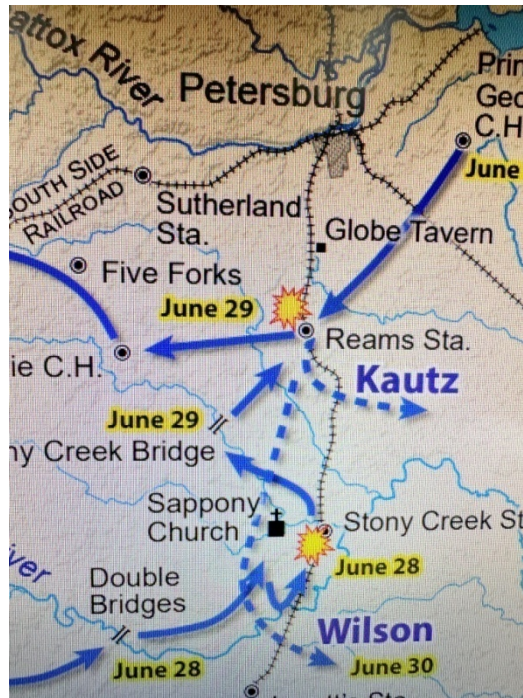


Willie Jett as a Young Man

Timing is everything, and the timing of William Storke Jett (“Willie”) was bad. This Jett slipped into a prominent place in Civil War History by being at the Port Conway/Port Royal Ferry with his friends Mortimer Bainbridge Ruggles and Absalom Ruggles Bainbridge on April 24, 1865. It was the wrong time and the wrong place.

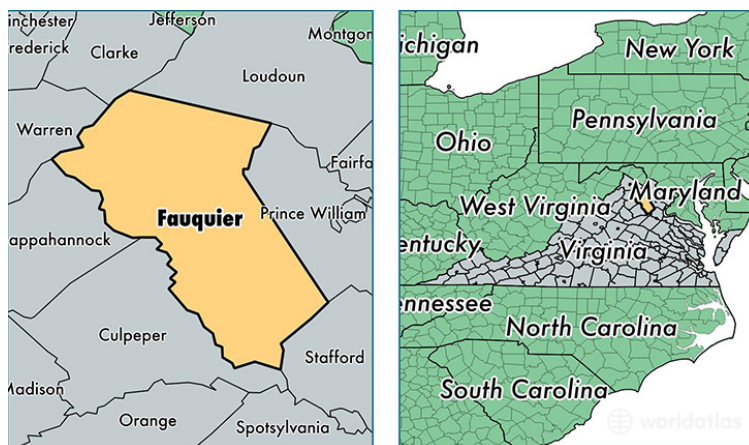
Prior to the Ferry.

Willie was born on December 2, 1846 in Westmoreland County, Virginia to Charles Coke Jett (b. 1806) and Mary Wallace Ball Towles (b. 1806). On June 16, 1864, he joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry as a Private. Shortly after he joined, on June 29, 1864, he was shot in the stomach while defending Reams Station just South of Petersburg, Virginia. Union Cavalry were raiding and tearing up railroad tracks of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. This battle was known as the First Battle of Ream’s Station and the South was able to repel the North although the North tore up about sixty miles of track.



Location of First Battle of Reams Station, Virginia

After being wounded, Willie was hospitalized. In late 1864, Willie joined his brother Lucius Jett who was serving in Company G, 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment Partisan Virginia Cavalry led by Colonel John Singleton Mosby also known as "The Gray Ghost". When General Lee surrendered to Grant, Mosby did not surrender but would later disband his forces and go into hiding. Although, Willie was still formally with the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia, he had since the evacuation of Richmond, Virginia by the Southern Army been serving in Fauquier County acting as a Commissary collecting food for the Confederate Army.



Willie had been staying at his sister's house and met up with a couple of others under Mosby's Command, who had been childhood friends, Lieutenant Mortimer Bainbridge Ruggles and Absalom Ruggles Bainbridge. The three headed South. The intent according to Willie, was to stop at Boling Green and his see his girl friend and then proceed to Richmond or to find the authorities which could

give him a discharge from the Confederacy. At that time, Willie and his friends had not learned that Lee had surrendered.



### When Things Began to Go Wrong

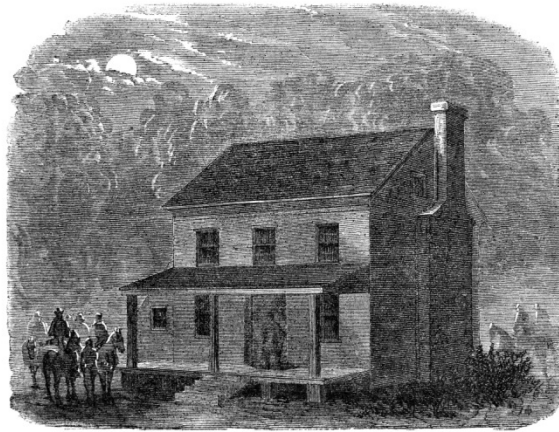
In order to head toward Bowling Green and Richmond, you had to go South that meant you had to cross the Rappahannock River and the place where the three Confederate Soldiers went to cross was the Port Conway/Port Royal Ferry.



The Rappahannock River  
And Point Conway and Point Royal

At Port Royal the three Confederates encountered two men in a wagon, one of whom was injured. One of the men was David Herold. Herold evidently at first told the three that he and the other man were part of A. P. Hill's force and that the other man in the wagon was his brother who was from Maryland and who had been wounded in fighting South of Petersburg (the wounded man in the wagon was John Wilkes Booth). Later Herold would admit to the three Confederates that they were the "assassins of the President." After crossing the ferry, Herold and Booth wanted Willie to find them a place to stay. He tried to get them a place to stay with the Peyton family. When that did not work out he,

accompanied by Ruggles and Bainbridge, got them a place to stay at the farm of Richard Garrett which was about two miles away from the ferry . Willie told Richard Garrett that the wounded individual was a wounded Confederate soldier named Boyd.



Farm of Richard Garrett

Willie, Herold, Bainbridge and Ruggles then headed south. The four of them stopped at Trappe (which was a Tavern and a “place of entertainment”). After a meal, Willie and Ruggles headed to the Star Hotel in Bowling Green.



Star Hotel in Bowling Green

Willie’s girlfriend, Izora Gouldman, was the daughter of the individual who ran the hotel. The next day, the four individuals met up and returned Herod to the Garrett’s farm and returned to the ferry where they encountered a large union force crossing the ferry who were pursuing John Wilkes Booth.



Booth's Flight to Garrett's Farm

They quickly returned to the Garrett's to warn Herold and Booth and then rode back to Bowling Green. The 16<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry chasing Booth, learned that Willie Jett had been involved crossing the ferry with Booth from a fisherman named Mr. Rollins. The fisherman's wife, Mrs. Rollins, said that Willie had a girl friend who was the daughter of the proprietor of the Star Hotel. Late on the night of April 25, the Star Hotel was surrounded by the Northern pursuers. One of the detectives, Mr. Conger, told Willie that if he did not cooperate "that he would suffer" and "no parlay would be taken. With a gun pressed to his head, Willie confessed his identity and agreed to take the Cavalry to the Garrett Farm.

#### At The Farm

The Cavalry returned to the Garrett Farm and Jett was placed under guard. The Union soldiers learned that Booth and Herold were in the Tobacco Barn where they had spent the night. The barn was then surrounded by detectives Luther Baker and Everton Conger and the New York Cavalry led by Lieutenant Doherty. Herold agreed to surrender and Booth allowed him to leave the tobacco barn. On three occasions, Sargeant Boston Corbett volunteered to go inside alone and fight Booth to the death. Conger and Baker decided that the barn should be burnt down forcing Booth out without risk to the soldiers. Conger finally set fire to the barn. The fire resulted in the soldiers being able to see Booth through the slats in the barn. Sargeant Boston Corbett got near the slats and shot Booth with his revolver while Booth was aiming his carbine at Corbett. Corbett apparently had shot Booth in the neck paralyzing him.

Booth was carried from the barn to the Front Porch of the Garrett house where he died three hours later. Booth asked that his hands be raised and said "Useless, useless." According to Philip Jett in an Internet Article at [The History Reader](#) entitled "The Last Words of John Wilkes Booth" , there was one final statement made by John Wilkes Booth. According to that Article and according to the testimony of

one of the soldiers and one of the detectives, Booth heard Willie Jett's name and asked "Did Jett betray me?"



Booth at Garrett's Farm

### The Road Back to Washington

The Body of Booth was taken to Washington where it was examined and where it was positively identified as Booth by ten people who knew him well. Apparently on the way back, Detective Luther Baker had taken charge of Booth's body and Willie Jett. Since Willie either was not considered a threat and let go or he escaped. When Baker got to Washington, the Secretary of War, Edward Stanton, was angry that Willie had not been brought to Washington and re-ordered his arrest.

(Confidential)

Head Quarters Military Division of the James.  
Richmond, Va., April 28<sup>th</sup> 1865.

Brig Genl Patrick  
P. M.

Genl  
You will cause  
a rebel officer named  
Willie Jett to be arrested,  
ironed & safely guarded.  
W. M. Murray  
Maj. Genl

Order to Arrest Willie

On May 1, 1865 Willie was rearrested in Westmoreland County, Virginia and sent to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C. where the others involved in the Lincoln assassination were imprisoned.

Willie in Washington

Willie was investigated and wrote a statement regarding his actions dated May 6, 1865. He was interrogated about his actions on May 17, 1865 as a witness in Herold's trial. He took an Oath of Allegiance to the United States and was released from the Old Capitol Prison on May 31, 1865.

United States of America.

I, Willie S. Jett, of the  
County of Westmoreland, State of Virginia, do  
solemnly swear that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and Government of the  
United States against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign; that I will bear true faith, allegiance,  
and loyalty to the same, any ordinance, resolution, or laws of any State, Convention, or Legislature,  
to the contrary notwithstanding; and further, that I will faithfully perform all the duties which  
may be required of me by the laws of the United States; and I take this oath freely and voluntarily,  
without any mental reservation or evasion whatever.

*W. S. Jett*

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 31<sup>st</sup> day of May  
A. D. 1865, at Old Capitol Prison Wash D.C.

*J. H. Dingman* 116<sup>th</sup> Regt N.Y.V  
Coandg  
Guard

The above-named has Fair complexion, Brown hair, and Hazel eyes;  
and is Five feet Eight inches high.

Willie Jett Oath of Allegiance to United States

Apparently the authorities believed that they had bigger fish to fry and that Willie was no risk and had been accidentally involved.



War Department,  
Adjutant General's Office  
Washington May 29. 1865.

Major General G. B. Fugate,  
War Department of Washington,  
Washington D.C.

Sir:

The Secretary of War directs that Willie  
Jett, confined in the Old Capitol Prison,  
be discharged on taking the oath of al-  
legiance to the United States.

Yours, Sir, Very Respectfully,  
Your Obedient Servant,  
Ed. Tompkins  
Assistant Adjutant General.

Release ordered as above May 31<sup>st</sup> 65  
Humble

National Archives - Washington, D.C.

Order Releasing Willie Jett

Ruggles and Bainbridge were also arrested in King George County. They were also imprisoned in the Old Capitol Prison on May 5. Ruggles and Bainbridge were never called to testify against the conspirators and were released on June 3 after taking the oath of allegiance.

The trial for the conspirators in the Lincoln assassination took about seven weeks. On June 30, 1865, Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, David Herold and George Atzerodt were sentenced to hang. Life in prison was given to Samuel Mudd, Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlen. One conspirator, Edmund Spangler was given six years. On July 7, 1865, the hangings were carried out at Fort McNair in Washington D.C.



Execution of Conspirators

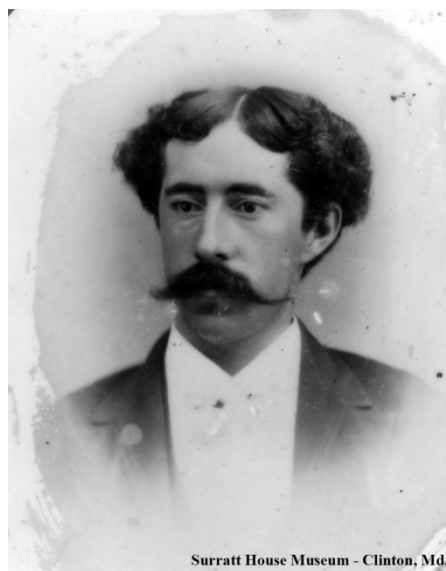
#### Later Life of Willie Jett

Willie not only was wounded in the war but like a number of others he was wounded by history being included among the conspirators plotting the assassination of Lincoln. From the side of the North, he had been involved but ultimately released due to his cooperation in locating John Wilkes Booth. From the side of the South, he was considered a traitor by contributing to the capture of Booth who had acted in the mistaken belief that he was helping the South. In addition, there were those in the South who felt that Lincoln would have been much more favorable to the South than the successors to Lincoln. Like the Garrett family, Willie was found in that strange “no man’s land between the South and the North where he was not liked by either side.

Many in the Jett family were unhappy with him as well. Willie lost the love of his girl friend Izora Gouldman who married John M. Stainback in 1869 at age 21. At a historical marker at the Starr Hotel it says, “After Booth’s killing their engagement was ended, and Jett left Virginia in disgrace.”



Willie did move to Baltimore, Maryland where either worked as a salesman or as a tobacconist. At age 26 he married Frances "Fanny" Krozer, the daughter of a doctor. In 1874, at age 27, he had one child John Krozer Jett.



Surratt House Museum - Clinton, Md.

Willie Jett Later in Life

Like most of Willie's life, the end was not a happy one. Apparently Willie began to show signs of mental deterioration. In 1882 he is described as waving a pistol at a Baltimore Street Car Conductor causing Willie to be arrested. At the police station he became violent and threatened to kill himself if they tried to restrain him. After being examined by his father-in-law and several other physicians he was pronounced insane. In April 1884 he was transferred to the Easter Lunatic Asylum in Richmond, Virginia. He passed away on July 17, 1884 with the cause of death being listed as "apoplexy." It seems to be unclear exactly what caused his death. Some have speculated it may have resulted from mental illness brought on by syphilis and others because of his old war wound.

Willie was 37 at his death and was buried at the Fredericksburg City Cemetery (Section 5, Lot 91).

Willie's story is a sad one. He became famous due an accident in history. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time and met John Wilkes Booth and David Herold and went into history as one of the people who was closely involved in the life of Booth and the assassination of Lincoln.