



Accounts from outside on the street after President Lincoln was shot in the theatre and moved to the Petersen House.

Voice of George Francis

George Francis and his wife lived here at the Petersen House.

“They carried him on out into the street, and towards our steps. The door was open and a young man belonging to the house standing on the steps told them to bring him in there, expecting to have him laid upon our bed. But the door to that room being fastened they passed on to a little room in the back. ... Mrs. Lincoln came in soon after, accompanied by Major Rathbone and Miss Harris, -- She was perfectly frantic ‘Where is my husband!’ ‘Where is my husband!’ she cried, wringing her hands in the greatest anguish.”

Voice of Elizabeth Keckly

Elizabeth Keckly, an African American dressmaker and close friend of First Lady Mary Lincoln, looked for her friend without success.

“More excited than ever, we wandered down the street. Grief and anxiety were making me weak, and as we joined the outskirts of a large crowd, I began to feel as meek and humble as a penitent child. A gray-haired old man was passing. I caught a glimpse of his face, and it seemed so full of kindness and sorrow that I gently touched his arm, and imploringly asked: ‘Will you please, sir, to tell me whether Mr. Lincoln is dead or not?’ ‘Not dead,’ he replied, ‘but dying. God help us!’ and with a heavy step he passed on.”

Voice of Gideon Welles

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, spent the night in the Petersen House with the dying president.

“It was a dark and gloomy morning, and rain set in. ...Large groups of people were gathered every few rods, all anxious and solicitous. Some one or more from each group stepped forward as I passed, to inquire into the condition of the President, and to

ask if there was no hope. Intense grief was on every countenance when I replied that the President could survive but a short time. The colored people especially — and there were at this time more of them, perhaps, than of whites — were overwhelmed with grief.”

Accounts from the front parlor of the Petersen House while President Lincoln lay in a back bedroom.

Voice: Maunsell Field

Maunsell Field, an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, came to the Petersen House after Lincoln was brought there.

“I inquired where Mrs. Lincoln was, and was informed she was in the front parlor. I entered the parlor, and found her there entirely alone. She was standing by a marble-topped table in the center of the room, with her bonnet on and gloved, just as she had come from the theatre. As I came in she exclaimed, ‘Why didn’t he shoot me? Why didn’t he shoot me? Why didn’t he shoot me?’ I asked her if there was anything I could do.”

Voice of Clara Harris

Clara Harris and her fiancée, Major Henry Rathbone, accompanied the Lincolns to Ford’s Theatre, where John Wilkes Booth murdered the president and wounded Harris’s fiancée.

“My dress is saturated with blood; my hands and face were covered. You may imagine what a scene, and so, all through that dreadful night when we stood by that dying bed. Poor Mrs. Lincoln was and is almost crazy.”

Voice of Horatio Nelson Taft

Horatio Nelson Taft's son, Charles, was one of the doctors who tended to President Lincoln as he lay dying. Afterwards, Charles told his father what had happened.

“After the President died Dr Gurley went to Mrs. L and told her ‘the President is dead.’ O, why did you not let me know? Why did you not tell me? ‘Your friends thought it was not best. You must be resigned to the will of God. You must be calm and trust in God and in your friends.’”

Accounts from the back parlor of the Petersen House while President Lincoln lay in a back bedroom.

Voice: Major Henry Rathbone

Major Henry Rathbone accompanied the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre, where John Wilkes Booth slashed him across the arm as Rathbone tried to stop the assassin from escaping.

“The wound which I had received had been bleeding very profusely; and on reaching the house, feeling very faint from the loss of blood, I seated myself in the hall, and soon after fainted away, and was laid upon the floor. Upon the return of consciousness, I was taken to my residence.”

Voice: James Tanner

James Tanner was a wounded veteran of the U.S. Army living on 10th Street near the Petersen House. Because he worked as a clerk, he was

called to the Petersen House to take down notes as Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, interrogated witnesses.

“They had started to take what testimony they could regarding the assassination, having some one write it out in long hand. This had proved unsatisfactory. I took a seat opposite the Secretary and commenced to take down the testimony. We had Harry Hawk, who had been on the stage; Laura Keene, and various others before us. No one said positively that the assassin was John Wilkes Booth, but all thought it was he. It was evident that the horror of the crime held them back. They seemed to hate to think that one whom they had known at all could be guilty of such an awful crime.

Many distinguished people came in during the night. Our work was often interrupted by reports coming in to Secretary Stanton and more often interrupted by him when he halted the testimony to give orders. Through all that awful night Stanton was the one man of steel.”

Voice of Gideon Welles

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, spent the night in the Petersen House with the dying president.

“I seated myself in the back parlor, where the Attorney General and others had been engaged in taking evidence concerning the assassination. Stanton, and Speed, and Usher were there, the latter asleep on the bed. There were three or four others also in the room. While I did not feel inclined to sleep, as many did, I was somewhat indisposed. I had been so for several days. The excitement and bad atmosphere from the crowded rooms oppressed me physically.”

Accounts from the room where President Lincoln died inside the Petersen House.

Voice of Dr. Charles Leale

Dr. Charles Leale began attending to the wounded President Lincoln in Ford's Theatre, and accompanied him across 10th Street.

“As soon as we placed him in bed we removed his clothes and covered him with blankets. ...I then sent for bottles of hot water, and hot blankets, which were applied to his lower extremities and abdomen. ...As morning dawned it became quite evident that the President was sinking, and at several times his pulse could not be counted. ...While we were anxiously watching in profound solemn silence, the Rev. Dr. Gurley said: ‘Let us pray,’ and offered a most impressive prayer. After which we witnessed the last struggle between life and death.”

Voice of Horatio Nelson Taft

Horatio Nelson Taft's son, Charles, was one of the doctors who tended to President Lincoln as he lay dying in this room. Afterwards, Charles told his father what had happened.

“After the death Dr Gurley who was standing near Mr Stanton said shall we have any religious exercises here or elsewhere now? Yes, said Mr Stanton offer Prayer _____ now and here. For the last half hour before the death, the utmost stillness had prevailed in the room, not a word, not a whisper was heard. The President of the United States dying, surrounded by his Cabinet and many of the first men in the Nation standing like statues around the bed presented a scene for an artist seldom equaled for solemn grandeur.”

Voice of Gideon Welles

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, spent the night in the Petersen House with the dying president.

“A little before seven, I went into the room where the dying President was rapidly drawing near the closing moments. His wife soon after made her last visit to him. The death-struggle had begun. Robert, his son, stood with several others at the head of the

bed. He bore himself well, but on two occasions gave way to overpowering grief and sobbed aloud, turning his head and leaning on the shoulder of Senator Sumner. The respiration of the President became suspended at intervals, and at last entirely ceased at twenty-two minutes past seven.”

Voice: Elizabeth Dixon

Elizabeth Dixon was a close friend of First Lady Mary Lincoln and the wife of Senator James Dixon of Connecticut. She spent the night with Mary Lincoln in this front parlor, and wrote about that night in a letter to her sister two weeks later.

“At that hour, just as the day was struggling with the dim candles in the room, we went in again. Mrs. Lincoln must have noticed a change for the moment she looked at him, she fainted and fell upon the floor. I caught her in my arms and held her to the window which was open, the rain falling heavily.

She again seated herself by the President, kissing him and calling him every endearing name, the surgeons counting every pulsation and noting every breath gradually growing less and less. Then they asked her to go into the adjoining room.”