

Special Collections Department
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Indiana State University

Neff-Guttridge Collection

**Letter of Andrew Potter to Osborn Oldroyd. November 26, 1908. Marked as
“Copy.”**

Like Andrew Potter, Osborn Oldroyd was a veteran of the Civil War with intense interest in the life and death of Abraham Lincoln. He was also a collector of artifacts and documents. much of his collection is now on the national park service and available at the Ford's Theater museum, although some of the photographic materials eventually came into the possession of Neff-Guttridge Collection donor Dr. Ray A. Neff, who as a child met Oldroyd as an elder family friend.

Eventually, Oldroyd wrote *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, which he self-published in 1901 and reissued in 1917. He passed away in 1930, and the book which is no longer under copyright protection, has been reissued at least twice.

According to Potter's letter, who was a former member of the National Detective Police, itself a precursor of the modern-day FBI, they learned a great deal from each other. Potter himself wrote a book on his government service called *The Trumpets of Jerico* [Jericho], of which a printed copy has yet to be found. It should be noted that copies of some parts of Potter's book are available locally, and eventually these will be compiled and published electronically.

The text of Potter's letter to Oldroyd is typewritten. Potter was an imperfect grammarian and no great typist. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that Potter typed this letter himself, as it contains mistakes and a systematic idiosyncratic spelling of “thorough” in all its forms lacking the letters “ugh.” Rather than ignorance, Potter's seemingly idiosyncratic spelling may have been his adoption of a recommended reformed spelling. No doubt, many of the typing mistakes evident in the letter bespeak Potter's hurry to get the letter completed so that it could be mailed out that day rather than the next.

As the reader will note, the page images are rather smudged, indicating that the typewriter keys must have been caked with excess ink. No attempt has been made to make the document pages easier to read through photographic means or digital alterations of the original image.

David E. Vancil, PhD
Curator and Department Head
August 17, 2006

C O P Y

November 26, 1908

Dear Mr. Oldroyd-

I thowly enjoyed the long talk we had several weeks ago in Springfield and have thot much about it since I returned to my home. I have looked up a number of things which we discussed and I found that you were right on many points and that I was right on a number. I looked in my old journals for the first time in years and it brot back many memories and some amount of sadness to my heart.

I have not been able to find anything on Asball Cook and I do not know at all of him in the secret service. Could he have been with Col. Sharp of the Army of the Potomac? They went by the title of Secret Service. I never heard of Cook. Also, the tales you tell that he told you sound more like the Army of the Potomac than the National Detective Police. Such things never transpired in the NDP.

I have set down my thoughts from the record for you regarding the pursuit of John Wilkes Booth, William Watson, J. W. Boyd (Boyle) and the other smugglers and the part played by Fred Potter in the whole affair. I know that you will find it interesting and I can vouch for its truth. Fred is still living and is in good health. He lives on a farm near Galax, in Grayson County of Virginia. His address is care of Mr. & Mrs. Frank Bowman, RFD 2, Galax Virginia. Frank Bowman is his son-in-law who married his daughter Susan and Frank and Sue live on Freds farm. Fred owns a big sawmill and is pretty well off. He is about 68 and is hale and hearty. I saw him about three months ago when I was east.

Fred worked with Earl and me until General Wallace was appointed Governor of New Mexico in 1880. He quit then and went back east. He was a good detective and was then jut 34 and we tried to get him to stay with us but he decided to quit. He said that he was tired of always having to be afraid that he would miss seeing something which might

be the death of the General. At that time there was someone out to get him. There were a number of attempts made in that year before he became govner and that is one of the greatest reasons that he quit law practice and went to New Mexico. He always thot that it was a man by the name of Bentley who he had got convicted in court but I dont think so. I have other people pegged.

Of course, Earl and I staid with the National Detective Police until the death of General Wallace in February of 1905. When the General died the Government decided to disband the police since the youngest man in it was 58 and the need for it was ended. I was 65 and ready to retire. It is a little known fact that any of the old NDP staid on after the end of 1870 but there were still eleven of us in 1900. Now almost all are dead. Earl killed himself in June of this year. He had cancer of the mouth and was in pretty bad shape. He had had it for about three years but it just flared up all of a sudden in March and by June he was eat up by it. He just rode down to Cedar Creek and shot himself.

About Katie, she was born October 5, 1837 or 38 (she tells it both ways) in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania. Her father was John Armat Scott and her mother was Hanna Gray Scott. Katie was sweet on Cal Craig of Clarion and most everyone thot that they would marry. When Cal went back after his first enlistment, Katie went along as a nurse. But then she met John Wilkes Booth and they became very close friends. Cal was jelous and they quarreled. When Cal returned to Clarion he did not even come to see Kate but went over to Jefferson Greenville and the following February married Miss Elmira Craig instead of Kate. Kate was quite broke up about it. Kate is here with us now and has been for several weeks. She has funny ways even for a woman of 71. While she is here she can visit with her daughter which seems to help. When she is in Pennsylvania she stays with the Weavers. She has spent several winters in Washington with the Weavers who live there and seems to like it altho I dont think they are too happy about having her.

Katie's father was named Postmaster at Brookville, Pennsylvania by President Grant in about 1870 and he continued for some time in this position. I have always wondered why General Grant felt it necessary to do that for a family so close to Lincoln's assassin.

As I told you in Springfield we trailed Booth up the Fredericksburg road through Orange Court House to Swift Run Gap where we lost him. We picked his trail up again in September in Harrisburg but the trail was two days old. We followed him into New York City where we could find no further trace of him. We picked up information of him some months later but we never caught up with him. I don't know what we would have done had we caught him since everyone thought him dead.

Caleb died 5 years ago last July 16. He was 85 and hale and hearty till the day he died. He had took some pictures that day and had come home in the early afternoon and was developing them. Some way or other he got poisoned and was dead in less than ten minutes. He turned a bright red and his face puffed up. It sure upset the family worse than if he had died of a stroke or even as with Earl, had shot himself. Nobody thought it was foul play or doin' away with himself. It was an accident.

Caleb during his life had invented over a thousand things which were important. He was making pictures with dry plates in 1862. He made them from egg whites some way. He worked in the old warehouse that Baker had made into a work shop for him on Third tenth street in Washington. Caleb would make up plates several weeks in advance and let them dry. An old wet plate could never be used after it dried. Caleb trained Dr. Edward Curtis of the Army Medical Department to make photographs using his method and Dr. Curtis sold the idea to a fellow from New York and still the fellow from New York couldn't do it. He finally came to Caleb and Caleb was dumb enough to show him and didn't even charge him. Caleb had no sense of money and never really made anything on his inventions. He invented a block signal device for the railroad and some fellow with

the railroad got him to sign it over to the railroad for \$35. He sold the idea to a fellow from Ohio for a new type butter churn for creamerys for only \$50. They are now manufacturing that churn and making a fortune. Ill include more information on Caleb the next time I writ. I have to close now so that I can get this in the mail to you or it wont go out til tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,

s/ Andy

Mr. Osbourn Oldroyd
516 - 10th Street NW
Washington City, D.C.