

THE FAMOUS PRISONER OF FORT JEFFERSON

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DR. SAMUEL A. MUDD

*Born December 20, 1833
Died January 10, 1883*

Dr. Samuel Alexander Mudd was born December 20, 1833, in Charles County, Maryland, the fourth of the ten children of Henry Lowe Mudd and his wife, Sarah Ann Reeves. Sam Mudd was raised on the family plantation, "Oak Hill," approximately 30 miles from downtown Washington, DC, and received his early education at Frederick, Maryland, where at age 14 he attended St. John's College for two years. Then on September 16, 1851, he entered Georgetown College, Washington, DC, and three years later enrolled as a student at the Baltimore Medical College (now part of the University of Maryland), from which he was graduated in 1856. After graduation Dr. Mudd returned home and began life as a practicing physician and farmer. Dr. Mudd married his childhood sweetheart, Sarah Frances Dyer. They became the parents of nine children and grandparents of 33.

On a Sunday in November of 1864, John Wilkes Booth first met Dr. Mudd at St. Mary's church near Bryantown. The two men discussed a horse sale, and Booth was invited to spend the night at Mudd's home. Then, on December 23, the two men met by accident on a street in Washington, DC. John Surratt and Louis Weichmann happened by, and Booth invited all three men up to his hotel room for a drink. Depending on one's point of view, the discussion and events at this "meeting" were either totally innocent or "suspicious."

On April 15, 1865, John Wilkes Booth shot and killed President Abraham Lincoln. Booth broke his left leg in his leap to the stage at Ford's Theater. Needing a doctor's assistance, he and David Harold arrived at Dr. Mudd's at approximately 4:00 a.m. on April 15, 1865. Mudd set, splinted, and bandaged the broken leg. Although he had met Booth on at least two prior occasions, Dr. Mudd said he did not recognize his patient. He said the two used the names "Tyson" and "Henston." Booth and Harold stayed at the Mudd residence until the next afternoon (roughly a 12-hour stay). Mudd asked his handyman, John Best, to make a pair of rough crutches for Booth. Mudd was paid \$25 for his services. Booth and Harold left in the direction of Zekiah Swamp.

Within days Dr. Mudd was under arrest by the United States Government. He was charged with conspiracy and with harboring Booth and Harold during their

escape. In court witnesses described him as the most attentive of the accused. He was dressed in a black suit with a clean white shirt. Testimony against him at the trial included the harsh treatment of some of his slaves. He shot one man (who survived) and flogged a young woman. Like the others, he was found guilty. His sentence: life imprisonment. He missed the death penalty by one vote.

At **Fort Jefferson Dry Tortugas**, Dr. Mudd was imprisoned and allowed to stay in the Dry Tortugas and was allowed to stay in mail contact with his wife. Mrs. Mudd also wrote letters to President Andrew Johnson seeking her husband's release. An attempted escape failed on September 25, 1865. In February of 1867 Mudd was assigned to the prison's carpentry shop. In the summer of 1867 yellow fever broke out on the island. After the fort's physician died on September 7 Mudd took a leadership role in aiding the sick. Mudd himself came down with the disease but recovered. Because of his outstanding efforts, a petition to the government in support of Dr. Mudd was signed by all noncommissioned officers and soldiers on the island.

In February of 1869 a courier from the United States Government knocked on the front door of the Mudd home. When Mrs. Mudd answered, the man handed her an envelope and said, "From the President of the United States. Please sign this receipt to certify that I have delivered it to you. If you have a reply, I shall return it for you." Mrs. Mudd opened the envelope and found a letter written on White House stationery. The date was February 8, 1869. It read:

Dear Mrs. Mudd. As promised, I have drawn up a pardon for your husband, Dr. Samuel A. Mudd. Please come to my office at your earliest convenience. I wish to sign it in your presence and give it to you personally.

Sincerely, ANDREW JOHNSON The President of the United States of America.

Dr. Mudd was released from Fort Jefferson on March 8 and arrived home on March 20.

More information can be found on www.yankeefreedom.com