

Did John Wilkes Booth survive?

27 April 2008

Two distant relatives of Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth want a chance to prove the family legend that he was not killed in a Virginia tobacco barn.

Sisters Joanne Hulme of Philadelphia and Virginia Kline of Warminster, Pa., told The Philadelphia Inquirer they heard in childhood that Booth lived to old age; that soldiers at the Garrett family farm shot another man, one who happened to resemble Booth.

Booth, the son of an English actor, was a member of one of the foremost theatrical families of the 19th century. His brother, Edwin, was the greatest U.S. Shakespearean actor of his time, and another brother, Junius Brutus Jr., also went on the stage. Booth himself was a matinee idol.

Hulme and Kline would like to test DNA samples from bits of the man in the barn preserved in museums in Philadelphia and Washington. They say that DNA might also be obtained from Edwin Booth relics at the Players Club in New York.

A curator at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia said the specimen there will not help because it was preserved in formaldehyde.

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