

BEACH READING

The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln

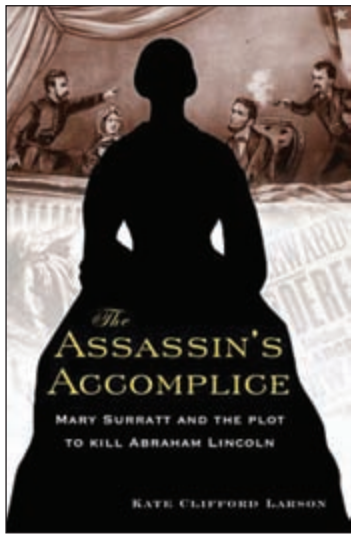
By Kate Clifford Larson
(Basic Books, \$26.00)

REVIEWED BY LARRY COX
Special to Florida Weekly

Mary Surratt earned her place in American history books on the afternoon of July 7, 1865, when less than three months after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, she became the first woman executed by the United States government.

When Kate Clifford Larson, a historian and author of the celebrated biography of Harriet Tubman, began researching her latest book, she assumed that Mary Surratt was a minor participant in the plot to kill the president. She was wrong. She quickly discovered that Andrew Johnson was probably correct when he described Surratt as the woman who kept the nest that hatched the egg.

Although there have been countless books written about the Lincoln assassination, most of the attention has been focused on John Wilkes Booth and three of his accomplices, Lewis Payne, David Herold and George Atzerodt. Historians have generally portrayed Surratt as a 43-year-old widow,



devout Catholic, boardinghouse owner and Confederate sympathizer who just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people. It took Larson's meticulous research to finally connect the dots and show just how deeply she was involved.

Following the murder, Mary Surratt became one of the most hated people in the country. Her lawyers were green and unprepared, and her trial before a military commission was a foregone conclusion. The one person who might have saved her, her son, John, hid in Canada while both the trial and execution unfolded.

Using interviews, confessions and court testimony, Larson provides an insightful, fresh perspective on America's most famous murder. "The Assassin's Accomplice" is historical reporting at its very best. ■

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