



An on-the-spot drawing by Thomas Nast of the crowd awaiting Abraham Lincoln at Calvert Station the day of an alleged death plot.

# Lincoln and the Baltimore Barber

The True Story of Cipriano Ferrandini and the Alleged Assassination Plot of 1861



Cipriano Ferrandini

By Richard G. Reese

**T**HEN do I understand, sir, my life is chiefly threatened by this half-crazed foreigner?" President-elect Abraham Lincoln asked Allan Pinkerton as the two men met in a Philadelphia hotel room.

"He only talks like a rascal, Mr. President," replied the famous Chicago detective, who was in the employ of Samuel Fishon, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad. "His capacity to do you harm must not be estimated." Pinkerton added that no conservative Northerner could understand the fanatical sentiment then gripping Baltimore in February, 1861.

According to the information told out by the detective, this sentiment had risen

to a head in a bold plot to assassinate the President-elect as he passed through the city February 23 on the way to his inauguration. The "half-crazed" foreigner who was whipping the plot into shape was Cipriano Ferrandini, proprietor of the barber shop in the basement of Barram's City Hotel at Calvert and Fayette streets. Pinkerton said his operatives had "penetrated to the very core of the plot."

Details of the machinations of the "Ferrandini assassins" read like wild detective fiction, which a good many reputable historians later claimed there to be. Marshal George Kase, Baltimore police chief, reportedly was on Ferrandini's side and would cooperate in the plot by sending out a

token force of policemen to Calvert Station upon the scheduled arrival of the President-elect. A gang of toughs would start a fight to distract the police, allowing the assassins to crowd around Mr. Lincoln and shoot at his hip.

**E**VEN in possession of this evidence, the President-elect was inclined to view the situation with a detached assessment. But finally he agreed with some reluctance to let Pinkerton "put him through Baltimore" secretly at night after he had made two previous appearances in Pennsylvania—one in Philadelphia and one in Harrisburg.

"What will the nation think of its President?"

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This 1861 Leslie's Weekly drawing purportedly shows Pickerton, left, Lincoln and Ward H. Lamon walking in Baltimore. Actually, they never left their train.

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dest, stealing into its capital like a thief in the night?" Lincoln was still asking at 4 o'clock in Harrisburg on the evening of Washington's Birthday, when it was time to begin the journey through Baltimore to Washington. But Governor Curtis of Pennsylvania and other friends said the question was not one for him to decide and saw him off on his night ride with only Pickerton and a friend, Ward H. Lamon, as companions.

A special train of the Pennsylvania Railroad took the three men to Philadelphia. Shortly after 10 they went by carriage from Pennsylvania Station to the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad's station in West Philadelphia, where they were put on the last car of the New York-to-Washington train. Bertha had been reserved for them on a sleeping car.

It was 3:30 in the morning when the train pulled into Baltimore's Calvert Station, where the Washington-bound sleeper was unloaded and pulled by horse to the Baltimore and Ohio's Camden Station. At 4 A.M. Lincoln and his two companions were in Washington.

But the aftermath of the night ride was just beginning. At about 12:30 P.M. the same day, the special Northern Central train from Harrisburg arrived at Calvert Station, right on schedule. More than 18,000 people gathered there out of three thousand cheers for Jeff Davis, those for the Southern Confederacy and three groans for the "Rail Splitter."

THE Rail Splitter was raising, however, and all the fun of jeering was gone. Mrs. Lincoln and the rest of the Presidential party stepped soberly from the train platform and promptly were whisked away by carriage to a reception at the Mount Vernon place home of Samuel Gillings. Muttering, the crowd dispersed.

Once the newspaper reporters and cartoonists learned what had happened, the affair took on all the aspects of a circus. As a runner and just might with the New York Times story, which reported that Lincoln had crept through Baltimore disguised in a South plaid cap and a long military

cloak, gained world-wide attention. It was untrue, and its perpetrator, Times correspondent Joseph Wood, was discredited, but it caused Lincoln as much embarrassment as he ever experienced from a newspaper story.

In April, 1905, President Lincoln was assassinated in Washington by John Wilkes Booth. Eventually, this proved to center interest once again on the Baltimore incident. Finally, in 1905, Allan Pickerton's complete reports on the 1861 plot were published and several important discrepancies came to light. Most baffling among these was the case of Cipriano Ferrandini, the Baltimore barber who was the plot's supposed ringleader.

WHAT makes the Ferrandini case so baffling is the simple fact that it ends abruptly with the safe arrival in Washington of President-elect Lincoln. The barber was never brought to justice for any attempt at high treason, although Allan Pickerton, his accuser, worked as a detective and intelligence operative for President Lincoln's Administration all through the Civil War. Instead, Ferrandini continued to eat, drink at Burnham's until that establishment was closed in 1869 to make way for the Equitable Building. When Pickerton's accounts were made public in 1905, Ferrandini was 55 and still living in Baltimore.

This was a strange state of affairs if the Pickerton accounts were true. According to one of the Baltimore reports included in these accounts, Ferrandini had made a speech early in February, 1861, at a secret meeting of the military company he commanded. In this speech, the Pickerton report stated:

"He loudly advocated the doctrine of State Rights. . . . As he proceeded, overcome by the violence of his emotions, he drew from his breast a long, glittering knife, and waving it aloft, exclaimed: 'This glittering Lincoln shall never, never be President. My life is of no consequence in a cause like this, and I am willing to give it for his.'"

Also strange was the fact that while

scores of prominent Baltimoreans were being locked up in Fort Mifflin during the Civil War for their Southern sympathies, Ferrandini remained free. And why was he not even so much as questioned in 1861 when Lincoln was really assassinated? A good part of that plot had been hatched right at Burnham's City Hotel. Ferrandini had probably cut the hair of John Wilkes Booth on many occasions.

According to Ferrandini's grandson, retired Naval Lt. Edmund V. Ferrandini, of 131 Goddard road, the answer to these questions is simple. No plot ever existed. Most of the existing evidence supports that viewpoint.

In 1861 Ferrandini was a past commander of a Baltimore militia company known as the LaFayette Guards and had been working with another company, the Constitution Guards, as a drill master. Because these were groups dedicated to preventing "invasion of the South by Northern forces," his association with them got him investigated by Congress on February 5, 1861, when there was a rumored Confederate plot to capture Washington and prevent Lincoln's inauguration.

FERRANDINI'S congressional testimony, given before the Select Committee of Five at the second session of the Thirty-third Congress, exonerated him in this case. But the mere fact of his summons by Congress marked him as a suspect in Pickerton.

As Pickerton and his operatives put Ferrandini under surveillance, they reported that the barber had strong Southern leanings as a result of his long residence in the South. Edmund Ferrandini points out that this was completely inaccurate. Actually, Ferrandini had come directly to Baltimore from his native Ajaccio, Corsica, in 1825 at the age of 18. He had left only once—for three months in 1850 to serve briefly as a captain of infantry in Suarez's army in Mexico. His brother, Raphael, however, did operate a barber shop on Broad street in Richmond, Va., and was probably recruited for Cipriano.

In 1867 Gov. Thomas Swann of Maryland, "reposing special trust and confidence in the fidelity, courage and good conduct" of Cipriano Ferrandini, appointed him a captain in the Maryland National Guard. When Ferrandini died on December 25, 1910, at his brother-in-law's house on Radnor avenue, The Sun took note of his passing in a short article. The article said he had been "for 40 years a well-known barber at old Burnham's Hotel" and "became acquainted with the best citizens of the town and took pleasure in waiting on them." It made no mention of any part in a Lincoln assassination plot of 1861. That was pretty much the way he had always treated the incident himself—with a steadfast silence.



The Sun's cartoonist was taken in by the false reports about how Lincoln made his journey.