

## Star-Spangled Relic

In 1998, Kelly Nolin stumbled across a lost piece of American history. Neatly folded in a glass-topped box in a storage room at the Connecticut **Historical Society**<sup>1</sup> lay an American flag.

This was no ordinary flag. Stitched on the flag's faded, star-filled blue field were these words: "Presented to the Treasury Guard Regt. by the Ladies of the Treasury Dept. 1864."

"I just got real quiet, and my heart skipped a beat," said Nolin, the Historical Society's head librarian in 1998.

Nolin had uncovered one of five American flags that workers at Ford's Theatre had placed in Abraham Lincoln's theater box on the night of his assassination, April 14, 1865.

After an exhaustive three-year study to prove the flag **authentic**<sup>2</sup>, the Connecticut Historical Society displayed the banner with other Civil War **relics**<sup>3</sup>.

Five American flags surrounded Lincoln; his wife, Mary Todd; and two guests on that fateful night as they watched a comedy called *Our American Cousin*. Historians say the flag hung on a pole to the left of the president. In fact, they believe, Lincoln might have clutched the flag immediately after John Wilkes Booth shot him in the back of the head.

How did a flag from one of the darkest moments in American history wind up in a basement in Hartford, Connecticut?

After the shooting, the flag went back to the U.S. Treasury Department. Sometime in the 1870s, a Treasury Department captain gave the banner to a Connecticut Civil War veteran. Years later, the veteran gave the flag to his son. The son then presented the flag, in 1922, to the historical society, where it remained for 76 years.

"The flag makes history real," said Susan Schoelwer of the historical society.

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<sup>1</sup> **historical society:** an organization whose members have interest in local history

<sup>2</sup> **authentic:** genuine; real

<sup>3</sup> **relics:** objects (usually the remains of an object) that are interesting because of their age or association with the past