

Charles Forbes (- 11 Oct 1895)

*The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery
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MEMORIAL TO CHARLES FORBES, LINCOLN'S ATTENDANT AND FRIEND

In life as in drama, the supporting cast is often key to the success of the leading actors. As recognized by the Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia, Mr. Charles Forbes, who was buried at Congressional Cemetery on October 12, 1895 without a memorial, was not only Mr. Lincoln's personal attendant (from 1861 until Lincoln's assassination in 1865) but also a valued friend of the President and his family.

On November 12, 1983, the Lincoln Group unveiled a memorial at the graves of Mr. Forbes and his wife. The handsome ceremony, attended by over fifty people, was marked by an address by His Excellency Tadng O'Sullivan, Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland to the United States, by music of Lincoln's era played on historic instruments by the Fourth Maryland Patuxent Brass Band, and by refreshments served in the Chapel.

Mr. Forbes was born in Ireland in 1836 and emigrated to the United States as a boy. He was in attendance on Lincoln at Ford's Theater on the night Booth assassinated the President.

"The Lincoln Conspiracy," D. Balsiger & C.E. Sellier, Jr., Schick Sunn Classics Books, 1977 (pp 155-

Personal aide Charles Forbes carried the ever present heavy plaid shawl Lincoln favored, winter or summer.

Closest to the door of box eight, Forbes was seated on a straight chair.

As the two men (Parker and Burns) passed through the theatre doors on their way to Taltavul's Star Saloon, they saw Forbes who had left the Presidential party alone in the box. Forbes joined Parker and Burns at the bar.

Forman, Stephen M., A Guide to Civil War Washington, Washington, DC: Elliott & Clark Publishing, 1995.

Forbes was President Lincoln's valet. He was called Charlie by President Lincoln and "my friend Charles" by Mrs. Lincoln. Forbes was detailed to the White House as a clerk-messenger from the Treasury Department. Because of his discretion and versatility in handling details, he soon became the personal attendant to the president.

Forbes accompanied the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre on the fateful night of April 14. He was sitting in the audience just outside the presidential box as Booth passed him and the unattended post where a policeman was supposed to be stationed. Forbes regretted afterward that possibly there was something he could have done to stop the assassination. Mrs. Lincoln bore him no ill will and showed him only kindness and friendship. She gave Forbes the suit of clothes President Lincoln wore that night.