



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

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NEWS RELEASE *for Immediate Release*

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Shipwreck on the Potomac: Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer: Karen Stone, St. Mary's County Museum Division Manager Authors the First-ever Published Book on the Black Diamond Disaster

LEONARDTOWN, MD – St. Mary's County Government is proud to announce that our own Karen Stone, Manager of the Museum Division within the Department of Recreation & Parks, unveiled her newly published book, *Shipwreck on the Potomac: Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer*, at the 160th anniversary commemoration of the Black Diamond disaster this past weekend at St. Clement's Island Museum. This is the first-ever book about the Black Diamond Disaster, a “forgotten” tragedy that occurred on the Potomac River near St. Clement's Island during the American Civil War during the hunt for presidential assassin, John Wilkes Booth. The synopsis unveils a tale that few, even within the local community, are aware of:

It was a calm, moonless night in late April 1865. Robert E. Lee had surrendered. Abraham Lincoln was dead. Assassin John Wilkes Booth and accomplice David Herold, previously hiding in the swamps of Southern Maryland, had crossed the Potomac River to safety. The barge, *Black Diamond*, was anchored with the Potomac Flotilla near Blackistone Lighthouse, hoping to prevent that crossing and catch the perpetrators. All onboard were unaware that they were too late. The steamer *Massachusetts* was running downriver carrying U.S. soldiers back to their regiments. By dawn, the *Black Diamond* was on the bottom of the river, the *Massachusetts* was crippled, and eighty-seven men were dead. Author Karen E. Stone reveals the story of a heroic pursuit that turned tragic.

Published by *The History Press*, an imprint of Arcadia Publishing, the book officially went on sale April 29, 2025. Advanced copies were signed by the author at this weekend's Black Diamond Disaster event. The book is available online at [Arcadia](#) and [Amazon](#), or in the museum stores at St. Clement's Island Museum, Piney Point Lighthouse Museum, and the Old Jail Museum in Leonardtown, as well as other local bookstores and sellers.

Reflecting on her journey, Stone remarked, “Writing something like this, which tells a true story about real people, is a very scary venture, but I have had massive amounts of support along the way and have been inspired by so many different individuals to just write it, get it published, and not worry about having all the answers to all of the questions - and so I did.”

– MORE –

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She continues: "There are still more questions to answer and more names to be added to the list of men lost. But now the story is being told, and I hope others read it and appreciate what these men went through and recognize that not all history is great glory, huge battles, and medals. Some of them are small and simply tragic. But it is all important!"

In 2019, Stone authored "Peril on the Potomac: The Sinking of Black Diamond," for *America's Civil War Magazine* and found that there was much more to uncover about this forgotten tragedy. Stone's resulting, and ongoing research, has identified over 20 previously unknown souls lost in the incident. "I haven't yet identified all 87 men, but I haven't given up, and won't until they are all found," asserted Stone.

Follow the St. Clement's Island Museum on Facebook at [Facebook.com/SCIMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/SCIMuseum) for more updates and be sure to pick up your copy at a museum store – proceeds go towards the museums and continuing to preserve history in St. Mary's County.

About the Author

Karen Stone has been the museum division manager for St. Mary's County, Maryland, since 2017. She did her undergraduate work at Gettysburg College and obtained her master's degree from Penn State University; she has been working in the museum field ever since. She has been a Lincoln fan and student of his assassination since childhood, so she was fascinated when she first heard this story with its connection to Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth. And she was surprised to find that it had been overlooked by history. In her spare time, Karen sings with the Chamber Chorale of Fredericksburg and at as many Fredericksburg Nationals baseball games as she can.

About the St. Mary's County Museum Division

The St. Mary's County Museum Division was established by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County to collect, preserve, research, and interpret the historic sites and artifacts which illustrate the natural and cultural histories of St. Mary's County and the Potomac River. These sites include St. Clement's Island Museum, Piney Point Lighthouse Museum, the Old Jail Museum, and the Drayden African American Schoolhouse. With this as its charter, the Museum Division serves as a resource, liaison, and community advocate for all St. Mary's County public and private cultural assets. For more information, please visit: museums.stmarysmd.com.

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