

Laura Keene

Name _____



Laura Keene was one of the most famous actors and stage managers of her time. She performed all over the world: in London, New York, California, and Australia. She achieved great financial success by starting her own theater in New York City. On October 15, 1858, *My American Cousin* debuted in Keene's theater. Keene had purchased the rights to the play, which was originally written by British playwright Tom Taylor. The story was a comedy about an American who must visit his English relatives to claim his inheritance. *My American Cousin* proved very popular – it was only scheduled to play for two weeks but instead, ran for 150 straight days.

Laura Keene, however, is best known for the events that occurred at Ford's Theater on the night of April 14, 1865, during the showing of *My American Cousin* in Washington, D.C. At 10:13 P.M., John Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln, who had come to watch the play with his wife in celebration of the Union victory over the Confederate States of America in the American Civil War. Amidst the chaotic scene, Keene made her way through a labyrinth of passageways to the presidential box. She carried a pitcher of water, which served as her ticket inside. Sensing history was being made, Keene begged Dr. Charles Leale, who was attending to Lincoln, if she could see the dying president. Amazingly, Leale agreed. Keene proceeded to create a scene only an actor could imagine. Carefully, she cradled the president's head in her lap for several minutes. Keene's theatrics served no medical purpose whatsoever and ultimately served as a bizarre side note to one of the most tragic episodes in American history to that point. Keene cherished the colorful floral dress she wore that night, because the cuff bore bloodstains from the dying president. Over time, the dress was lost, but the cuff still exists today – complete with Lincoln's blood. It was donated to the National Museum of American History.

1. Who was Tom Taylor?

- A. The author of *My American Cousin*
- B. An actor in *My American Cousin*
- C. Laura Keene's husband
- D. A doctor who was attending to Abraham Lincoln

2. Which of the following was not true?

- A. Laura Keene was well-known before the Lincoln episode
- B. Dr. Charles Leale surprisingly allowed Ms. Keene to enter Lincoln's box and cradle the dying president
- C. Lincoln was shot at Ford's Theater by John Wilkes Booth
- D. *My American Cousin* was the story of a British man visiting his American relatives

3. What does "debuted" mean in the following sentences?

My American Cousin debuted in Keene's theater. Keene had purchased the rights to the play, which was originally written by British playwright Tom Taylor.

- A. Made its first showing
- B. Ended
- C. Performed
- D. Listened

4. What purpose did Keene's presence in Lincoln's box serve?

- A. She brought water to the President
- B. She served no purpose
- C. She brought comfort to the President
- D. She brought hope to the President

5. What question is NOT answered?

- A. Why was Lincoln watching *My American Cousin*?
- B. Who watched *My American Cousin* alongside of Lincoln?
- C. Why did Dr. Leale allow Laura Keene to stage the scene with Lincoln?
- D. Does any part of the dress that Keene wore that night still exist?

6. Which of the following best describes the scene described in the second paragraph?

- A. Keene's actions made her one of the most famous people in American history
- B. Keene's actions served as a strange episode in a national tragedy
- C. Keene's actions served to comfort the nation during a horrible event
- D. Keene's actions proved she was one of the best actors of her time

7. What could be a title for the passage?

- A. The History of Ford's Theater
- B. Laura Keene's Dress
- C. Laura Keene – Making History with a Dying President
- D. Assassination – How Lincoln's Death Changed America