



**ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT**  
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**NEWS RELEASE** *for Immediate Release*

**No. 2024 – 072**

**April 22, 2024, 10:30 a.m.**

**Unveiling History: Karen Stone, St. Mary's County Museum Division Manager  
to Author the First-ever Published Book on the Black Diamond Disaster**

**LEONARDTOWN, MD** – St. Mary's County Government is very proud to announce that our own Karen Stone, Manager of the Museum Division within the Department of Recreation & Parks, will soon be the published author of the first-ever book about the Black Diamond Disaster. This "forgotten" tragedy occurred on the Potomac River near St. Clement's Island during the American Civil War in the hunt for presidential assassin, John Wilkes Booth. The synopsis unveils a tale that few, even within the local community, are aware of:

It has always been said that not a single life was lost during the hunt for John Wilkes Booth. This is said with pride, as it should be. If only it were true. In the 1860s, life on the Potomac River was quite different than it is today. Instead of the calm open waters, the river was the frontline of battle. The Potomac was the main lifeline out of Washington D.C. and for the federal government it was the dividing line between the warring sections of the North and South. For the people of St. Mary's County, Maryland, the most southern point on Maryland's western shore, just across the Potomac River from Confederate Virginia, it was the source of their livelihood and much of their food; and for some, it became their final resting place. This is a story of that river, and of the men whose lives were lost in the aftermath of the Civil War, in the hunt for the presidential assassin John Wilkes Booth. This work is for those 87 men and their families, so that they will no longer be forgotten.

Being published by *The History Press*, an imprint of *Arcadia Publishing*, the book is expected to be released in 2025.

Reflecting on her journey, Stone remarked, "I have been fascinated by this story since I first heard about it and was amazed to find it had been overlooked by history. The 87 men who lost their lives deserve to be remembered, so this work is dedicated to them."

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.

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Local artist, Angela Wathen, has been tapped to design potential cover art for the book. Wathen previously produced an original painting of the incident, which is the only known portrayal of the collision of the Black Diamond and the Massachusetts on that fateful night. Her work is based from an actual photograph of the Massachusetts and an image of a coal barge thought to be very similar to the Black Diamond. The artist generously donated the piece to St. Clement's Island Museum's permanent collection.

Stone's notable achievement, securing a book deal and the announcement of her upcoming publication, was unveiled at the Black Diamond Disaster American Civil War Commemoration event, which took place April 21, 2024, at the St. Clement's Island Museum. The event was filmed and will be available for the community to watch soon (post-production) on our YouTube Channel at [Youtube.com/@StMarysCoGov](https://www.youtube.com/@StMarysCoGov).

Follow the St. Clement's Island Museum Facebook page at [Facebook.com/SCIMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/SCIMuseum) for updates on the book's publication and release date!

### **About the Author**

Karen Stone has been the Museum Division Manager for St. Mary's County, Maryland, where this event took place, since 2017. She did her undergraduate work at Gettysburg College and obtained her master's degree at Penn State University. She has been a Lincoln fan and student of his assassination since childhood. Stone lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, with her husband, and they have one adult son who is married and living in Alexandria, Virginia.

### **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](https://museums.stmarysmd.com).

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