

The Magistrate's House

For Alexander Bartlet and Thomas Hines

By Marty Gervais, Windsor's Poet Laureate

Sometimes I go out
in early morning
cruising up and down Windsor streets
in search of his house
—its sprawling Georgian verandah
the usual sash windows
sturdy front door with transom
and sidelights

They've moved it, but not far
I've narrowed it down
to two or three —
In a way I don't want to know
I want to paint my own story
of that that morning: 1865
of the billy-goat bearded town clerk
racing down a flight of stairs
to the landing —
paperboys fanning out into Ferry Street
from the ferry docks
a cold Easter Monday
the boys shouting "Lincoln Shot!"

I see the magistrate's frown
in the dim April dawn
his voice summoning the boys
to bring him the paper
see him pausing there in the gaping entrance
wondering what went wrong
a civil war across the river
the flight of slaves to his shores
now rumours of John Wilkes Booth
making his own run across the river

That Easter Monday
a sleepy town rouses itself awake
to the scuttlebutts
of a ferry boat captain
who stopped at nothing to spin the legend
of being held at gunpoint
by Lincoln's assassin

and the magistrate sorts out
the hearsay down by the docks
wind howling up that street
sweeping its way into the
shopkeepers' doorways
on that spit-gray day

It's all gone now but for that story
and the ramshackle house
that sits somewhere
quietly breathing
telling no one
the truth