

# The Magistrate's House

*For Alexander Bartlet and Thomas Hines*

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*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