

**CW/VFM-42: *Joseph Holt***

Presented by Fred Weiser, Archivist, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA.

The “Conspiracy Trial” refers to the trial of Mary Surratt and accomplices.

Holt was a Kentuckian, loyal and active in support of the Union. Lincoln had wanted to confine political prisoners indefinitely by suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, but Congress in successive acts made specific provision that civil courts should deal with these cases. Lincoln did not trust these courts and appointed Holt as first incumbent to the new post of judge advocate general of the army, September 3, 1862.

Holt tired civilians in military courts, among them Clement Vallandigham, Henry Wirz, and Mrs. Surratt. He was very popular with the Radicals, but in December 1866 the Supreme Court pronounced against him and prevented the conviction for treason of Jefferson Davis and his cabinet. The Conservatives were against Holt and he was accused of suppressing Booth’s diary and withholding the recommendation of the military commission for clemency for Mrs. Surratt. Holt spent years vindicating himself.”

Ms.2pp.

- Letter requesting admittance of Edward Kenny to “the Conspiracy Trial”. Dated 12 June 1865
- Note explaining some provenance of letter and its contents.

**Keywords:** Lincoln – Assassination; Letters; Politics – Republican;

**Location:** Civil War Vertical File Manuscripts, Special Collections & College Archives, Musselman Library at Gettysburg College.

**See also:** [Civil War Sources in Special Collections](#)