

January 26, 1876

The Idaville Murder

The excited crowd threatens to Lynch the Murderer

Recent accounts of officials finding the remains of Richard Herron in the woods four miles south of Idaville has caused consternation with the local residents of Idaville. Since then many additional particulars of the horrible crime have come to light. It appears that the deceased entered into a co-partnership with one John Kelly, a saloon keeper of Idaville about ten days ago. Herron suddenly disappeared, and until the finding of his gaggled remains on Sunday, nothing was heard of him. Herron's continued absence stirred suspicions of foul play.

The man who found the body was John H. Turner and stated that the body was lying hidden in a willow thicket a mile south of the railway track, and two miles east of Monticello. Turner was horrified at the ghastly appearance of the body as the flesh had been eaten by some animal and much of the victims face was missing.

The back of the head had seventeen large gashes one of which extended across the left cheek and jaw. Suspicions continued to grow while a case was being built against Jack Kelly and rumors floated around that the citizens were going to take action.

The indignant and excited citizens of Carroll and White counties had threatened to lynch Jack Kelly. Area reporters were sent to see what might take place. Everything was quiet during the night due to a heavy guard presence placed around the jail to prevent any possible attempt to lynch Kelly due to the excited mob.

The coroner's jury determined that the death of the murdered man was caused by congestion of the brain produced by blows that were delivered with an iron sharp edged weapon to the head of Herron.

The bar keeper of Jack Kelly, John Toothman, was a young man about twenty-two years of age, who was at last induced to confess the whole matter. It being represented to Toothman that if found guilty, Kelly would certainly implicate him also. Toothman turning State's evidence testified that he saw Kelly strike Herron with several blows with a hammer.

Upon this information, the officers procured a hand car and proceeded to Idaville last night, and entering the room in the rear of the saloon, occupied by Kelley and his two daughters were they discovered the blanket and a piece of iron, the latter wrapped in the former and both covered with large clots of blood. Kelly was at this point arrested and taken to jail.

Toothman was brought out to look at the corpse of the victim, but all efforts to induce Kelly to view the corpse were futile. Kelly remained in his cell.

The latest motive in regard to the cause of the murder is that the three men concerned were more or less intimate with the same woman living at Idaville, and that Herron appeared to be the most favored. It was hard however to tell how much faith to place in the report. No one was willing to post bond for Kelly and he was given ample time in the solitude of his cell to repent and become patient to await his entry into another world.

The investigation from the evidence and testimony it appeared that Kelly had killed Herron out on the prairie with a piece of wagon tire, hammered down and having a very sharp edge, striking him in all seventeen blows. Afterward the body was wrapped in old blanket, and placed across the railway track in order to have it run over by a passing train. However, the plan changed and the body was carried to the thicket where it was found and the blanket was removed. John Kelly, the supposed murderer, was a blacksmith by trade having followed that business for years past. He was a member of CO., F, 12th Indiana volunteers, and is said to have made a good soldier, brave and attentive to his duties.

In testimony before the Coroner's jury he stated that on Thursday, two weeks ago, he had severe words with Herron, and that they separated, he paying the murdered man what money was due him. They had fought, and the dead man was beaten about terribly. This was the last he had seen of him.

John Shaeffer, who lives one mile and a half west of Idaville, testified that late on Friday evening Herron stopped at his house and asked for a drink of water; he was covered with blood from cuts on his head, and seemed to be laboring under mental excitement. While Shaeffer was getting water for him to wash his face with, he disappeared, it is supposed for Brookston, as he inquired the way there. This was the last seen of Herron alive.

It was ascertained and reported that Kelly, on the day he had the fuss with Herron had sent his daughter with Toothman over to The Monticello Bank to draw out \$100 deposited there, giving as a reason for his conduct that he was going to leave the place immediately. The girl did as directed, returning on the next train, but it is said that Toothman walked back, arriving at the saloon at nine o'clock. From this it is supposed by many that Toothman met Herron by the road the latter being already weak, was easily dispatched by the former, the reason given for his desire to murder him, being that he had threatened to have Kelly arrested for selling whisky without a license and for having beat him the day previous. It was claimed that Kelly was about to testify against Toothman, but the latter hearing of it turned state's evidence himself. The coroner's jury has been in session all night and during today hearing testimony with closed doors. Nearly all the inhabitants of Idaville have been called in to testify.

Nothing like an intelligent report can be made of the case, as all sorts of rumors are afloat concerning the matter, everybody having some new theory. Great excitement prevails in the vicinity of Monticello, and the people seem divided in their convictions. Herron and Kelly are both well-known and neither bear very excellent characters.

Kelly is about 55 years of age, and a widower, with two children, both girls, who lived with him in the rear of the saloon. Herron was between 30 and 35 years of age. He has a brother who keeps a saloon at Monticello.

In June 1876 John 'Jack' Kelly was convicted of manslaughter and was sentenced to 18 years in the penitentiary.