

= Jereboam O. Beauchamp =

Jereboam Orville Beauchamp (/ dʒ?r??bo?.?m ???rv?l ?bi?t??m / ; September 6 , 1802 ? July 7 , 1826) was an American lawyer who murdered the Kentucky legislator Solomon P. Sharp ; the crime is known as the Beauchamp ? Sharp Tragedy . In 1821 , Sharp had been accused in Bowling Green , Kentucky by Anna Cooke of fathering her illegitimate child ; it was stillborn . [a] Sharp denied paternity , and public opinion favored him . In 1824 , Beauchamp married Cooke , who was sixteen years older than he . She asked him to kill Sharp to defend her honor .

When Sharp campaigned in 1825 for a seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives , opponents revived the story of his alleged illegitimate child by Cooke . They distributed campaign literature claiming the child was mulatto . Enraged , Beauchamp renewed his intention to avenge his wife 's honor . In the early morning of November 7 , 1825 , he tricked Sharp to open the door at his home in Frankfort , and fatally stabbed him .

Beauchamp was convicted of the murder and sentenced to hang . The morning of the execution , he and his wife attempted a double suicide by stabbing themselves with a knife she had smuggled into prison . She was successful ; he was not . Beauchamp was rushed to the gallows before he could bleed to death , and was hanged on July 7 , 1826 . The bodies of Jereboam and Anna Beauchamp were arranged in an embrace and buried in a single coffin , as they had requested . The Beauchamp ? Sharp Tragedy inspired fictional works such as Edgar Allan Poe 's unfinished play , Politian , and Robert Penn Warren 's World Enough and Time (1950) .

= = Early life = =

Jereboam Beauchamp was born September 6 , 1802 , in the area that is now Simpson County , Kentucky . He was the second son of Thomas and Sally (Smithers) Beauchamp . Both parents were devout Christians . He was named after a paternal uncle , Jereboam O. Beauchamp , a state senator from Washington County .

Beauchamp was educated at Dr. Benjamin Thurston 's academy in Barren County , Kentucky until the age of sixteen . Recognizing that his father could not sufficiently provide for the family , Beauchamp found work as a shopkeeper to earn money for his education . While he saved money , he did not have enough time to pursue his studies . Recommended by Thurston , Beauchamp became preceptor of a school . After saving more money , he returned to Thurston 's school as a student . He later worked for the school as an usher .

By age eighteen , Beauchamp had finished his preparatory studies . After observing the lawyers practicing in Glasgow and Bowling Green , he decided to pursue a career in the legal profession .

He particularly admired Solomon Sharp , a young lawyer in his thirties in Bowling Green , with whom Beauchamp hoped to study . In 1820 , Beauchamp became disenchanted with Sharp when rumors surfaced that he had fathered an illegitimate child with Anna Cooke , a planter 's daughter who lived in Bowling Green . Sharp denied paternity of the child , which was stillborn .

= = Courtship of Anna Cooke = =

Beauchamp left Bowling Green to live at his father 's plantation in Simpson County , Kentucky , where he convalesced from an illness . He learned that Cooke had become a recluse nearby at her mother 's plantation after her public disgrace . Having heard from a mutual friend about her beauty and accomplishments , he decided to meet Cooke . At first , she rejected all attention , but gradually received Beauchamp under his guise of borrowing books from her library . The two eventually became friends , and , in 1821 , began courting . Beauchamp was eighteen years old ; Cooke was at least thirty @-@ four .

When he proposed marriage that year , Cooke told Beauchamp she would marry him on the condition that he kill Sharp . Beauchamp consented . Against Cooke 's advice , Beauchamp traveled immediately to the capital of Frankfort , where Sharp had recently been appointed attorney general by the governor .

== Challenges ==

According to Beauchamp 's account , he found Sharp and challenged him to a duel , but Sharp refused because he was not armed . Wielding a knife , Beauchamp took out a second knife and offered it to Sharp , who again declined the challenge . When Beauchamp challenged him a third time , Sharp tried to flee , but Beauchamp caught him by the collar . Sharp fell to his knees and begged Beauchamp to spare his life . Beauchamp kicked him , cursed him for a coward , and threatened to horsewhip him until he agreed to a duel . The next day , Beauchamp looked for Sharp in the streets of Frankfort , but was told he had left for Bowling Green . He went to Bowling Green , only to learn that Sharp was not there . Finally he returned to the home of Anna Cooke .

Following Beauchamp 's failed attempt , Cooke decided to lure Sharp to her house and kill him herself . Beauchamp wanted to take action to defend her honor , but she was determined to act for herself . He began teaching her to shoot a gun . Learning that Sharp was in Bowling Green , Cooke sent him a letter condemning Beauchamp 's attempt on his life and asking to see him again . Sharp suspected a trap , but replied that he would meet her at the planned time . Hoping to kill Sharp before the meeting , Beauchamp traveled to Bowling Green , but found his target had already left for Frankfort . He had eluded the trap . Beauchamp decided to finish his legal studies in Bowling Green and wait for Sharp to return there .

Beauchamp was admitted to the bar in April 1823 . He and Anna Cooke married in June 1824 . Still determined to defend the honor of his wife , Beauchamp devised a ruse to lure Sharp to Bowling Green . He wrote letters to Sharp under various pseudonyms , each asking for his help in some sort of legal matter , and each sent from a different post office . When Sharp failed to respond , Beauchamp decided to go to Frankfort again and confront him .

== Murder of Solomon Sharp ==

In Frankfort in 1825 , Sharp was in the middle of a bitter political battle known as the Old Court @-@ New Court controversy . He identified with the New Court , or Relief party , which promoted a legislative agenda favorable to debtors . In opposition was the Old Court , or Anti @-@ Relief party , which worked to secure the rights of creditors to collect debts . Sharp had served as the state 's attorney general under New Court governors John Adair , whose term lasted until August 1824 , and Joseph Desha , who succeeded him in office . The New Court party 's power was beginning to wane .

In 1825 , Sharp resigned to run for a seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives . During the heated campaign , opponents raised the issue of his alleged seduction of Anna Cooke . Old Court partisan John U. Waring had handbills distributed that alleged that Sharp had denied paternity of Cooke 's illegitimate child because it was a mulatto and likely fathered by a Cooke family slave . Sharp won the election , defeating John J. Crittenden .

Whether Sharp had made the claim is uncertain , but Beauchamp believed he had . He planned to murder him and flee with Anna to Missouri . He would murder Sharp in the early morning of November 7 , 1825 , when the new legislature convened its session , as he hoped that suspicion would fall on Sharp 's political enemies . Three weeks prior to that date , Beauchamp sold his property , telling his friends that he was planning to move to Missouri . He hired laborers to help load his wagons two days before the planned murder .

Beauchamp 's plan was complicated by a warrant sworn out against him by Ruth Reed . She sued him for support of her illegitimate son , born on June 10 , 1824 , claiming he was the father . Beauchamp later said he had ignored the warrant , dated October 25 , 1825 , on the advice of a friend who termed it harassment . He also said he had arranged for the warrant , as an excuse to be in Frankfort to kill Sharp . The historian Fred Johnson says that Beauchamp likely added the warrant into his story after the fact , as a means of damage control . It hardly looked good for him to have committed the act for which he ostensibly killed Sharp .

In preparation , Beauchamp packed a change of clothes , a black mask , and a knife with poison on

the tip , to be used as the murder weapon . Finding all the inns filled when he arrived at Frankfort , he took lodging at the residence of Joel Scott , warden of the state penitentiary . Between nine and ten o 'clock that evening , Beauchamp went to Sharp 's home . Dressed in disguise , he carried his usual clothes and buried them along the bank of the Kentucky River for retrieval following the murder . Discovering that Sharp was not home , Beauchamp looked for him in the city , finding him at a local tavern . He returned to Sharp 's house to wait for him , and saw him return at midnight .

At two o 'clock in the morning , Beauchamp thought the household was quiet . In his Confession , he described the murder of Sharp :

I put on my mask , drew my dagger and proceeded to the door ; I knocked three times loud and quick , Colonel Sharp said ; " Who 's there " - " Covington , " I replied . Quickly Sharp 's foot was heard upon the floor . I saw under the door as he approached without a light . I drew my mask over my face and immediately Colonel Sharp opened the door . I advanced into the room and with my left hand I grasped his right wrist . The violence of the grasp made him spring back and trying to disengage his wrist . He said , " What Covington is this . " I replied John A. Covington . " I don 't know you , " said Colonel Sharp , I know John W. Covington . " Mrs. Sharp appeared at the partition door and then disappeared , seeing her disappear I said in a persuasive tone of voice , " Come to the light Colonel and you will know me , " and pulling him by the arm he came readily to the door and still holding his wrist with my left hand I stripped my hat and handkerchief from over my forehead and looked into Sharp 's face . He knew me the more readily I imagine , by my long , bush , curly suit of hair . He sprang back and exclaimed in a tone of horror and despair , " Great God it is him , " and as he said that he fell on his knees . I let go of his wrist and grasped him by the throat dashing him against the facing of the door and muttered in his face , " die you villain . " As I said that I plunged the dagger to his heart .

Sharp died within moments . Fleeing the scene , Beauchamp went to the river to retrieve his clothes , where he changed and sank his disguise in the river with a stone . He returned to his room at the house of Joel Scott .

When the Scott family awoke the next morning , Beauchamp emerged from his quarters . He feigned surprise when told of the murder and was apparently believed at the time . After being told there were no suspects yet , he called for his horse and began his return trip of four days to Bowling Green . Arriving , he told his wife Anna that Sharp was dead . The next morning , a posse from Frankfort arrived and told Beauchamp that he was under suspicion for the murder . He agreed to return with the men to Frankfort and face the charge .

= = Trial for murder = =

Beauchamp arrived in Frankfort on November 15 , 1825 . New Court partisans talked of Sharp 's murder as the work of the Old Court party , just as Beauchamp had hoped . One suspect was Waring , who had printed the handbills critical of Sharp . Known as a violent man , he had both political and personal motivation for the crime . He was cleared of suspicion when investigators learned that , at the time of the murder , Waring was in Fayette County recovering from unrelated injuries .

Suspicion moved to Beauchamp , as he was loyal to the Old Court Party , and was known to hate Sharp for his political principles . People knew of Sharp 's earlier alleged involvement with Anna Cooke before her marriage to Beauchamp . Witnesses placed Beauchamp in Frankfort the night of the killing , and his host , Joel Scott , said that he had heard Beauchamp leave the house during the night . After presenting preliminary testimony , Commonwealth 's Attorney Charles Bibb asked for additional time to assemble more witnesses . Beauchamp assented to the request . A second delay pushed the hearings back to mid @-@ December .

The dagger taken from Beauchamp at his arrest did not match the wound on Sharp 's body . (In his Confession , Beauchamp claimed to have buried the murder weapon by the bank of the river near where the murder took place . That knife was never found .) Beauchamp 's shoe did not match a track found outside Sharp 's house the morning of the murder . The posse lost a handkerchief found at the scene of the crime and believed to belong to the murderer . (Beauchamp later claimed to

have stolen and burned it after the posse had gone to sleep one night .)

Several witnesses testified against him . The widow Eliza Sharp testified that the voice of the killer was distinct . A test was devised allowing Mrs. Sharp to hear Beauchamp 's voice ; she immediately identified it as that of the killer . (Beauchamp claimed he had disguised his voice on the night of the murder and thought Mrs. Sharp would not recognize it .) Patrick Henry Darby , an Old Court partisan , claimed that in 1824 , he had a chance encounter with the man he now knew as Beauchamp . Darby said the man ? a stranger to him at the time ? had asked for Darby 's help in prosecuting an unspecified claim against Sharp . The man then identified himself as the husband of Anna Cooke and said he intended to kill Sharp . Based on the circumstantial evidence , Beauchamp was held for trial at the next term of the circuit court in March 1826 .

Beauchamp 's uncle Jereboam assembled a legal team for his nephew that included former U.S. Senator John Pope . The grand jury convened in March and returned an indictment against Beauchamp for Sharp 's murder . Giving Beauchamp the time he requested to gather witnesses , the court scheduled a special session in May specifically for his trial .

Beauchamp 's trial began May 8 , 1826 . After a change of venue was denied , Beauchamp pleaded innocent to the charge against him . A jury was empaneled , and testimony began May 10 . Eliza Sharp recounted the events of the night of the murder and reiterated that Beauchamp 's voice was that of the murderer . John Lowe , a magistrate of Simpson County , testified that he had heard Beauchamp threaten to kill Sharp , and said that on Beauchamp 's return from Frankfort , he saw him waving a red flag and heard him tell his wife that he had " gained the victory . " Patrick Darby repeated his testimony of the 1824 meeting between him and Beauchamp . Darby said that Beauchamp had told him that Sharp offered him one thousand dollars , a slave girl , and 200 acres (0 @. @ 81 km2) of land if he and his wife Anna would leave him (Sharp) alone . As Sharp had apparently reneged on the promise , Beauchamp told Darby he was going to kill the man . Other witnesses testified that Beauchamp habitually referred to Sharp 's friend , John W. Covington , as " John A. Covington " , the name used by the murderer to gain entry to Sharp 's house .

Testimony in the trial concluded on May 15 , 1826 ; summations concluded four days later . Despite the lack of physical evidence , the jury deliberated only an hour before convicting Beauchamp of Sharp 's murder . He was sentenced to death by hanging on June 26 of that year . Beauchamp requested a stay of execution to write a justification for his actions . The stay was granted , and the execution was rescheduled for July 7 , 1826 . Though Anna Beauchamp was questioned , a charge against her for being an accessory to the crime was dismissed .

= = Execution by hanging = =

While imprisoned and awaiting execution , Beauchamp wrote a confession . He accused Patrick Darby of perjury with regard to the alleged 1824 meeting between them . Many believed Beauchamp 's accusation was meant to curry favor with New Court governor Joseph Desha ? who considered Darby a political enemy ? and to secure a pardon from him . When Beauchamp finished the confession in mid @- @ June 1826 , his uncle , Senator Beauchamp , took it to the state printer for immediate publication . An Old Court supporter , the printer refused to publish it .

Anna Beauchamp joined her husband in his cell in the dungeon ; the only entry was through a trap door at the top of the room . During their incarceration , they tried to bribe a guard into allowing them to escape . When that failed , they tried to pass a letter to Senator Beauchamp asking for help to escape , an attempt which likewise failed . Both the senator and the younger Beauchamp asked for a pardon from Governor Desha , but to no avail . Beauchamp 's final request to Desha for a stay of execution was rejected July 5 , 1826 . With the last hope exhausted , the couple attempted a double suicide by drinking a vial of laudanum which Anna had smuggled into the cell . Both survived . The following morning , Jereboam and Anna were put on suicide watch and threatened with separation .

The night before the execution , Anna took a second dose of laudanum but was unable to keep it down . On July 7 , 1826 , the morning of the scheduled execution , Anna asked the guard to give her privacy to dress . Once the guard left , Anna revealed to Beauchamp that she had smuggled in a knife , and she and her husband stabbed themselves . Anna was taken to a nearby house to be

treated by doctors .

Too weak to stand or walk , Beauchamp was loaded onto a cart to be conveyed to the gallows . He begged to see Anna , but the guards told him she was not seriously injured . The guards finally allowed him to see Anna , and Beauchamp was angered that they had underplayed her critical condition . He stayed with her until he could no longer feel her pulse ; then the guards took him to the gallows to be hanged before he died of his stab wounds .

Beauchamp asked to see Patrick Darby , who was among the assembled 5 @, @ 000 spectators . Beauchamp smiled and offered his hand , but Darby declined the gesture . Beauchamp publicly denied that Darby had any involvement with Sharp 's murder , but accused him of having lied about their 1824 meeting . Darby denied the death march accusation and tried to get Beauchamp to retract it , but the prisoner was moved on to the gallows .

Two men supported Beauchamp as the noose was put around his neck . He asked for a drink of water , and the band to play " Bonaparte 's Retreat from Moscow " . At his signal , the cart moved out from under him , and he died after a brief struggle . His father requested his body . Following Beauchamp 's earlier instructions , he had the bodies of Jereboam and Anna arranged in an embrace and buried them in the same coffin . A poem written by Anna was etched on their double tombstone .

Senator Beauchamp eventually found a publisher for his nephew 's Confession . The first printing ran on August 11 , 1826 . Sharp 's brother , Dr. Leander Sharp , attempted to counter Beauchamp 's Confession with Vindication of the Character of the late Col. Solomon P. Sharp , which he wrote in 1827 . In this book , Dr. Sharp claimed to have seen a " first version " of the confession in which Beauchamp implicated Darby . Darby threatened to sue Dr. Sharp if he published Vindication , and John Waring threatened to kill him if he did so . Sharp did not release the manuscript and hid it in his house . The completed printed version was found in 1877 during a remodel of Sharp 's house .

= = In popular culture = =

Edgar Allan Poe 's play , Politian , was based on the events above .

Robert Penn Warren 's World Enough and Time was also inspired by them .