

= Solomon P. Sharp =

Solomon Porcius Sharp ( August 22 , 1787 ? November 7 , 1825 ) was an American attorney and politician , serving as attorney general of Kentucky and a member of the United States Congress and the Kentucky General Assembly . His murder by Jereboam O. Beauchamp in 1825 is referred to as the Beauchamp ? Sharp Tragedy or " The Kentucky Tragedy . "

Sharp began his political career representing Warren County , in the Kentucky House of Representatives . He briefly served in the War of 1812 , then returned to Kentucky and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1813 . He was re @-@ elected to a second term , though his support of a controversial bill regarding legislator salaries cost him his seat in 1816 . Allied with Kentucky 's Debt Relief Party , he returned to the Kentucky House in 1817 ; in 1821 , he accepted Governor John Adair 's appointment to the post of Attorney General of Kentucky . Adair 's successor , Joseph Desha , re @-@ appointed him to this position . In 1825 , Sharp resigned as attorney general to return to the Kentucky House .

In 1820 , rumors surfaced that Sharp had fathered a stillborn illegitimate child with Anna Cooke , a planter 's daughter . Sharp denied the charge , and the immediate political effects were minimal . When the charges were repeated during Sharp 's 1825 General Assembly campaign , opponents publicized the allegation that the child was a mulatto . Whether Sharp made such a claim , or whether it was a rumor started by his political enemies , remains in doubt . Jereboam Beauchamp , who had married Cooke in 1824 , avenged the honor of his wife by fatally stabbing Sharp at his home early on the morning of November 7 , 1825 . Sharp 's murder inspired fictional works , most notably Edgar Allan Poe 's unfinished play Politian and Robert Penn Warren 's novel World Enough and Time ( 1950 ) .

= = Personal life = =

Solomon Sharp was born on August 22 , 1787 , at Abingdon , Washington County , Virginia . He was the fifth child and third son of Captain Thomas and Jean ( Maxwell ) Sharp , a Scottish woman . Through the male line he was a great @-@ great @-@ grandson of John Sharp , Archbishop of York . His father Thomas Sharp was a veteran of the Revolutionary War , participating in the Battle of King 's Mountain . The family briefly moved to the area near Nashville , Tennessee , and to North Carolina , before settling permanently about 1795 at Russellville , Logan County , where they lived in a log cabin near the Muddy River .

Sharp " [ intermittently attended ] one of Logan County 's academies " during his childhood years ; the schools of Logan County were primitive then . He read the law and was admitted to the bar in 1806 . He opened a practice in Russellville , but soon relocated to the busier Warren County seat of Bowling Green , which had 154 residents in 1810 . He engaged in land speculation , sometimes in partnership with his brother , Dr. Leander Sharp , and by 1824 , had acquired 11 @,@ 000 acres , mostly north of the Barren River in Warren County .

= = Marriage and family = =

After getting established , on December 17 , 1818 , Sharp at the age of 31 married Eliza T. Scott , the daughter of a physician who had served as an officer in the War of 1812 . She was from Frankfort and above him in social standing . They had three children together . He moved the family to the state capital of Frankfort in 1820 for his political career .

= = Political career = =

In 1809 , Sharp was elected to represent Warren County in the Kentucky House of Representatives . During his tenure , he supported the legislature 's election of Henry Clay to the U.S. Senate , the creation of a state lottery , and the creation of an academy in Barren County . He served on a number of committees , and for a time , served as interim speaker of the house during the General

Assembly 's second session . He was re @-@ elected in 1810 and 1811 . By 1810 , the county had nearly 12 @, @ 000 residents . During the 1811 session , Sharp worked with Ben Hardin to secure passage of a bill to ensure that state officers and attorneys at law would not be involved in dueling . He also opposed a measure allowing harsher treatment of slaves .

Sharp 's political service was interrupted by the War of 1812 . On September 18 , 1812 , he enlisted as a private in the Kentucky militia , serving under Lieutenant Colonel Young Ewing . Twelve days later , in a rapid rise even for the militia , he was promoted to major and made a part of Ewing 's staff . Ewing 's unit was put under the command of general Samuel Hopkins during his ineffective expedition against the Shawnee . In total , the expedition lasted forty @-@ two days and never engaged the enemy . Sharp recognized the value of a record of military service in Kentucky politics , however ; he was eventually was promoted to the rank of colonel .

= = = U.S. Representative = = =

In 1812 , Sharp was elected to the Thirteenth Congress as a member of the United States House of Representatives and took his seat at the age of 25 , the minimum for election . Aligning with the War Hawks , he defended President James Madison 's decision to lead the country into the war , and supported a proposal to offer 100 acres ( 0 @. @ 156 sq mi ; 0 @. @ 405 km2 ) of land to any British deserters . Sharp also " [ passionately denounced ] Federalist obstruction of the war effort " . In a speech on April 8 , 1813 , he opposed indemnity for those defrauded in the Yazoo land scandal in Mississippi . He allied with South Carolina 's John C. Calhoun in supporting the Second Bank of the United States .

Sharp was re @-@ elected to the Fourteenth Congress , during which he served as chairman of the Committee on Private Land Claims . He supported the controversial Compensation Act of 1816 sponsored by fellow Kentuckian Richard Mentor Johnson . The measure , which paid Congressmen a flat salary instead of paying them on a daily basis for the days when they were in session , was unpopular with the voters of his district . When the next congressional session opened in December 1816 , Sharp reversed his position and voted to repeal the law , but the damage was already done ; he lost his seat in the House in the next election .

In 1817 , Sharp was again elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives . During his term , he supported measures for internal improvements , but opposed the creation of a state health board and a proposal to open the state 's vacant lands to the widows and orphans of soldiers killed in the War of 1812 . Most notably , he supported the creation of 46 new banks in the state , and proposed a tax on the branches of the Bank of the United States in Lexington and Louisville .

= = = Accusations of illegitimate child = = =

In May or June 1820 , Anna Cooke , an unmarried planter 's daughter in her early 30s , claimed that Sharp was the father of her illegitimate child ; Sharp denied her claim . The stillborn child was rumored to have dark skin , and some speculated that it was a mulatto , with a black father . After her father 's death and the sale of their plantation in Fairfax County , Virginia , Cooke had moved with her mother and siblings to Warren County between 1805 and 1810 , when she may have met Sharp . In addition to losing the child , Cooke suffered the deaths of three of her five brothers between 1818 and 1821 .

The scandal soon abated for Sharp , as Anna had a reputation as " a freethinker , reader of romantic fiction , and a libertine . " Although Sharp 's political opponents would continue to call attention to his putative child in future campaigns , his reputation remained largely untarnished .

= = = Attorney general of Kentucky = = =

In 1821 , Sharp began a campaign for a seat in the Kentucky Senate . His opponent , attorney John U. Waring , was a notably violent and contentious man , frequently in court because of altercations . ( In 1835 , he shot and killed the attorney Samuel Q. Richardson . )

Waring sent two threatening letters to Sharp , and on June 18 , 1821 , published a handbill attacking Sharp 's character . Five days later , Sharp ceased campaigning for the senatorial seat . He accepted an appointment by Governor John Adair to the position of attorney general of Kentucky . Sharp 's nomination was unanimously confirmed by the legislature on October 30 , 1821 .

Sharp took office at a critical time Kentucky 's history . Still reeling from the financial Panic of 1819 , state politicians had split into two camps : those who supported legislation favorable to debtors ( the Debt Relief Party ) and those who favored the protection of creditors ( typically called Anti @-@ Relievers . ) Sharp had identified with the Relief Party , as had Governor Adair .

In the 1824 presidential election , Sharp alienated some of his constituency by supporting his former House colleague John C. Calhoun instead of Kentucky 's favorite son , Henry Clay . When it was clear that Calhoun 's bid would fail , Sharp threw his support behind Andrew Jackson . He served as secretary of a meeting of Jackson supporters in Frankfort on October 2 , 1824 .

After Governor Adair 's term expired in 1825 , he was succeeded by another Relief Party member , General Joseph Desha . Desha and Sharp had been colleagues in Congress , and Desha re @-@ appointed Sharp as attorney general . The Relief faction in the legislature passed several measures favorable to debtors , but the Kentucky Court of Appeals struck them down as unconstitutional . Unable to muster the votes to remove the hostile justices on the Court of Appeals , Relief partisans in the General Assembly passed legislation to abolish the entire court and create a new one , which Governor Desha promptly stocked with sympathetic judges . For a time , two courts claimed authority as Kentucky 's court of last resort ; this period was referred to as the Old Court @-@ New Court controversy .

Sharp 's role in the Relief Party 's plan to abolish the old court and replace it with a new , more favorable court is not known . As he was the administration 's chief legal counsel , historians believe he was closely involved . He is known to have issued the order for Old Court clerk Achilles Sneed to turn over his records to New Court clerk Francis P. Blair . By practicing as state attorney general before the New Court to the exclusion of the Old Court , Sharp provided it a measure of legitimacy .

On May 11 , 1825 , Sharp was chosen to represent the Desha administration in welcoming the Marquis de Lafayette , a hero of the American Revolution , to Kentucky . At a banquet in Lafayette 's honor three days later , Sharp toasted the guest of honor : " The People : Liberty will always be safe in their holy keeping . " Shortly following this event , Sharp resigned as attorney general , likely because Relief Party advocates thought he would be more useful as a member of the General Assembly .

The Anti @-@ Relief partisans nominated former Senator John J. Crittenden for one of the two seats apportioned to Franklin County in the state House . The Relief Party countered with Sharp and Lewis Sanders , a prominent area lawyer . During the sharply contested campaign , both John U. Waring and Patrick Henry Darby , a land speculator , said that Sharp 's life was at risk if he won . Opponents revived the charges of Sharp 's illegitimate child . It was also alleged that Sharp had claimed that the child was mulatto and said he had a certificate from Cooke 's midwife to that effect ; whether Sharp made this claim may never be known for certain . Despite the controversy , Sharp netted the most votes in the election , winning by 69 out of a total of 1600 votes cast in the county .

= = Murder and aftermath = =

" It was a land of the fiddle and whisky , sweat and prayer , pride and depravity . - Robert Penn Warren , *World Enough and Time : A Romantic Novel* ( 1950 )

In the early hours of November 7 , 1825 , the day the General Assembly was to open its session , a man knocked on the door of Sharp 's residence . When Sharp answered the door , the visitor grabbed him with his left hand and used his right to stab him in the heart with a poisoned dagger . Sharp died at approximately two o 'clock in the morning . After lying in state in the House of Representatives Hall , he was buried in Frankfort Cemetery .

Because of the bitterness of the campaign and the timing of the murder , speculation mounted that Sharp had been killed by an Anti @-@ Relief partisan . For some time , rumors traveled that Darby was implicated in his death . Sharp 's political rival , John J. Crittenden , tried to blunt such

accusations by personally introducing a resolution condemning the murder and offering a \$ 3000 reward for the capture of the assassin . The trustees of the city of Frankfort added a reward of \$ 1000 , and an additional \$ 2000 reward was raised from private sources . In the 1825 session of the General Assembly , a measure to form Sharp County from Muhlenberg County died on the floor due to the tumultuous politics of the session .

In the investigation that followed , the evidence quickly pointed to Jereboam O. Beauchamp , 23 , who had married the much older Anna Cooke in 1824 . ( She was a contemporary of Sharp . ) On November 11 , 1825 , a four @-@ man posse arrested Beauchamp at his home in Franklin .

He was tried and convicted of Sharp 's murder on May 19 , 1826 . His sentence ? execution by hanging ? was to be carried out on June 16 , 1826 . Beauchamp requested a stay of execution so that he could write a justification of his actions ; he continued to assert his avenging his wife 's honor . The request was granted , allowing Beauchamp to complete his book , The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp : who was hanged at Frankfort , Ky . , on the 7th day of July , 1826 , for the murder of Col. Solomon P. Sharp . After two failed suicide attempts with his wife , who died as a result of the second incident , Beauchamp was hanged for his crime on July 7 , 1826 . Beauchamp 's Confession was published in 1826 . Some editions included The Letters of Ann Cook as an appendix . Historians dispute whether Cooke was their author .

The following year , Sharp 's brother , Dr. Leander Sharp , wrote Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp to defend him from the charges contained in Beauchamp 's confession . In Vindication , Dr. Sharp portrayed the killing as a political assassination : he named Patrick Darby , a partisan of the Anti @-@ Relief faction , as co @-@ conspirator with Beauchamp , an Anti @-@ Relief stalwart . Darby threatened to sue Sharp if he published his Vindication ; and Waring threatened to kill him . Heeding these threats , Sharp did not publish his work ; all extant manuscripts remained in his house , where they were discovered many years later during a remodeling .

= = In popular culture = =

The events have inspired numerous works of fiction , drama and history :

Charles Fenno Hoffman 's novel , Greyslayer

William Gilmore Simms 's novel , Beauchamp

Edgar Allan Poe 's unfinished play , Politian

J.G. Dana and R.S. Thomas 's history , Beauchamp 's Trial .

L.F. Johnson included it in his Tragedies and Trials .

1950 , J. Winston Coleman published a history of the events .

1950 , Robert Penn Warren wrote a novel that was a " critique of romantic values " in World Enough and Time .

Richard Taylor 's play , Three Kentucky Tragedies , was based on this .

1992 John Hawkins created an outdoor drama on this subject , Wounded is the Wounding Heart , produced in Frankfort , Kentucky .