

Convicted killer expected jurors to set him free

Thomas Hardin of Bloomington was accused of shooting his wife, Jessie, and mother-in-law, Jennie Richardson, to death. The crime had been committed on March 3, 1914. On April 2 his name appeared in the Monroe County Court records as "The State of Indiana vs. Thomas Hardin — indictment for murder in the first degree."

The case began to follow its path through the court. A motion to quash the indictment was denied by Judge James B. Wilson. Legal counsel for Hardin filed a special plea of insanity.

Hardin, who said he was innocent, asked for a continuance and on April 21 petitioned for a change of venue. The case was sent to Owen County on June 24.

On July 21 the *Bloomington Telephone* reported, "After the weeks he has been in jail Hardin showed some sign of jail pallor, but is in good health and fairly good spirits. He enjoyed the auto ride to Spencer, but was not happy at the transfer to the Owen County jail." For that day, at least, he was the only prisoner there.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The case was scheduled for Sept. 29, but there was a hitch. An article in the Sept. 25 issue of the *Telephone* explained that "There is a strong possibility that the Thomas Hardin murder trial which is set to begin Tuesday at Spencer will be postponed until after the election."

Most of the attorneys and many of the witnesses would like a postponement — especially the attorneys who are practically all running for office."

When the smoke (or rather hot air) cleared after the election, the trial got under way on Nov. 23, 1914, at Spencer. On the prosecuting side were J.K. Barclay, J.E. Henley, Freemont Miller (of Franklin, an uncle of Jessie Hardin) and Hubert Hickam of Spencer. Robert G.

Miller, Frank Regester and Homer Elliott (of Spencer) defended Hardin.

Whether he had shot his wife and mother-in-law was not at issue. There were too many witnesses who saw Hardin go into the Jennie Richardson residence on South Rogers Street, heard gunshots and saw Hardin emerge at a run. There was also the statement given by Mrs. Richardson to Dr. C.E. Harris, naming Hardin as the killer of her daughter.

Actually, the defense attorneys were fighting for Hardin's life. Witnesses for the prosecution — women who had been working in their yards at the time of the shooting — were Mrs. Harry Fowler, Mrs. George Garten and Mrs. Carl Morris. There was also the neighbor who had been shaving and, with soap on one side of his face, chased Hardin down the street.

The defense team claimed that Hardin was "of unsound mind" and put his two sisters on the stand. One stated that after the separation her brother stayed at her house in Mooresville. During one night he put on his clothes and "walked through the business

part of town in his stocking feet." Eight others testified that Hardin seemed insane.

Predictably, there were tears in the courtroom. Even before the verdict, Hardin's mother kissed him good-bye and returned to Bloomington.

The defendant was put on the stand by his defense attorneys and said he could not remember the shooting. He didn't have any trouble remembering that he believed his wife had been unfaithful.

The jury deliberated all night. The *Telephone* of Nov. 30 described Hardin after the guilty verdict had been read. "When the verdict was read Hardin made no more display of feeling than the most disinterested spectator in the court room. Apparently he has never exactly realized the situation in which he is in, and the verdict made no impression on him." He had told his attorneys he expected to be acquitted.

The sentence was life in prison. On Dec. 2, Hardin's attorneys asked for a new trial, but the request was turned down by the judge.

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