

Skating rink shooting case confuses 1907 jury

"Pray, for I'm going to kill you," exclaimed Samuel Evans as he pointed a revolver at Lincoln Strange. Evans meant what he said on that evening of Nov. 22, 1906.

There were three bullets fired at Strange. One grazed his skin and another missed the man entirely. The most serious one lodged somewhere in the vicinity of Strange's liver.

What caused the violence to erupt at the skating rink in the old Armorial Theatre on West Seventh Street? To begin with, Evans had put some of his inhibitions to sleep by drinking alcohol.

But the event that had triggered Evans' anger was that his 9-year-old son, Jesse, had been fired from his job at the rink. He had been paid to build fires and oil the skates.

Strange, an employee at the rink, hadn't fired the boy, but the angry father didn't take the time to find out who did. After the shooting, Evans put the gun in his pocket and left the premises. Strange, who was bleeding profusely, was taken by cab to a fire station.

Dr. C.E. Harris probed for the 32-calibre bullet, but couldn't find it. He stopped the bleeding and cauterized the wound.

The *Bloomington Weekly Courier* of Nov.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

23, 1906, reported that Strange was conscious while Harris was working on him and told Marshal Ed Johns, "I had never had a word of trouble with Evans or his son. I did not discharge his son, but the boy was dismissed by the assistant manager ... Evans pulled the gun on me and shot me so quickly that I didn't have time to make any defense."

Bloomington was much smaller in 1906, and it didn't take Marshal Johns long to find out that Evans, a widower, had been spending time with a grass widow by the name of Emma Stevens.

While she was being watched, her behavior was certainly suspicious. Noted the newspaper, "She would try to elude the officers by darting through alleys and in the dark places of streets."

Finally, Stevens went to the Mason & Gilmore livery barn and rented a buggy. The *Weekly Courier* took up the story. "As soon as

it was hitched up, she drove north on Rogers Street to a point between Sixth and Seventh streets, and there Evans was in hiding."

Their plan to drive to Clear Creek where Evans would catch the 3:30 a.m. train was thwarted. They were both arrested. Evans was charged with assault and battery with intent to commit murder in the first degree. Stevens was charged with aiding and abetting a prisoner to escape from justice.

In describing the incident the *Weekly Courier* provided some particulars about the principal characters. Evans, a planerman at the Central Stone Mill, was 40, Stevens "about 26." Strange, who was married, had been a fireman before taking the job at the skating rink.

The newspaper described Evans as "a small built man with sandy mustache, well dressed and does not have the appearance of a criminal." His attorney was R.H. East.

Although Evans admitted to the shooting, he denied that he intended to kill Strange. Stevens was being held in jail because she could not raise the \$1,000 bail money.

Meanwhile, the *Weekly Courier* reported that Strange was recovering at the hospital. "He sits up, and although the wound is

painful, he rests well at night, and takes nourishment."

Evans' case went to trial at the end of January, 1907. The state's evidence was in the hands of Deputy Prosecutor Loudon.

Evans pleaded self-defense. Strange, who had recovered, was sitting in the courtroom.

An odd thing happened. The jury deliberated from 10 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and then announced that they had reached a verdict. But when they were polled individually, two, Andy Noel and Blank Palmer of Ellettsville, replied, "Not guilty."

There was considerable confusion in the courtroom. After a hasty conference of East, Loudon and the judge, the jury was polled again.

The second time all of the members voted "Guilty." The explanation for the earlier "Not guilty" votes was in the *Weekly Courier* of Feb. 1. "Two jurors did not exactly know what to do.

They had seen Strange, the man whom Evans shot, sitting before them as well as ever. When he testified that he was only laid up eight days and bore no grudge against the defendant, it seemed a shame to them to send a man to prison under the circumstances."

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