

# Long-time Bowen family fued leads to shooting death

When John Bowen died of bullet wounds in October 1913, it was the inevitable outcome of a family feud that went back a long way. Bowen was shot by his stepson during a fierce fight on their farm southeast of Bloomington.

As the *Bloomington Telephone* of Oct. 14 put it, "Bowen left home Aug. 29th because he and the stepson (Samuel Ray) were both high-tempered and could not live together." Bowen had apparently returned home on Sept. 12, when he was selling what he claimed were some of his possessions.

Bowen had other troubles. The newspaper revealed that "Saturday he was in Bloomington and made arrangements for the prosecution today of Wesley Back, with whom he had a knife fight a week ago."

Bowen may also have been angry about something Ray had told him about the farm. According to Bowen, Ray had said that the corn crop was very light. That may have meant less money for Bowen from the sale of it after the harvesting.

Actually, the farm belonged to neither Ray nor Bowen. *The Telephone* explained in a



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

statement from Mrs. Bowen. "I have been married three times — to Sam's father, also David Hays and Bowen, and have lived on this farm left me by Hays for 30 years."

She had been married to Bowen for five years and lived on the 63-acre farm. Though she loved him, she found his heavy drinking a great trial. "I loved him and begged him to stop his drink, because he became mad only while under the influence of liquor."

In 1910 Bowen and his stepson, Sam, had a fight, and Sam was driven out of the house. Bowen had a big club and threatened Sam's life with it.

So serious was the breach between father and stepson that by 1913 it was not possible for Sam to return to the farmhouse. The *Telephone* continued with Mrs. Bowen's state-

ment. "This summer Sam lived out in a tent and worked in a quarry near Oolitic. People who owned the place where he stayed wanted to take possession, and Sam returned home."

But Bowen said that when Sam's trunk came to the farm, he (Bowen) would leave. He made one harmless trip back to the farm, but the next one was one too many. That was when the fatal fight erupted.

There is no evidence in the Oct. 14 article about any intervention on the part of the family minister or relatives or friends. After Bowen's death, there were legal matters to be sorted out by the authorities.

Ray was in jail and unwilling to say much about the fierce struggle at the farm. (Some of his street and court-wise fellow prisoners had advised him to say as little as possible.

Meanwhile, a *Telephone* reporter had succeeded in digging up a couple of pieces of information about Bowen. He was an "old soldier" and a member of the Methodist faith.

The reporter had apparently talked to the Bowen's neighbors and shared the results with his readers. "It is said that two of the neighbors, L.C. McCammon and Frank

Chambers, have heard Sam Ray make threats of killing Bowen."

In the aftermath of the publicity, there were funeral arrangements to be made. The *Telephone* said that "Fred Bowen, of Bedford, came to Bloomington Sunday morning and made arrangements for sending his father's body to Bedford Sunday evening for burial. Fred Bowen is a working man with little money ahead, and he went to Bloomfield, where Bowen had been living with his grandchild since he and his wife were separated, to settle up some of the old man's affairs and get money to pay the expense of the funeral."

At some point, Ray must have been released from jail, probably on bond. Records in the Monroe County Clerk's Office indicate that although Prosecuting Attorney William M. Loudon filed first degree murder charges against Ray, the case was continued through November of 1913. On Jan. 12, 1914, the case was dropped from the court docket, which may mean that the law officers were unable to find him.

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