

# Three lives ruined in a tragic fight to the death

*"In a fight to the death Saturday night 7½ miles southeast of town, John Bowen, a well-known old soldier aged 76, was mortally wounded by his stepson Samuel Ray and died 12 hours later at the city hospital."*

—Bloomington Telephone, Oct. 14, 1913.

It was one of those horrible misunderstandings that should not have happened. Three lives were ruined.

To begin with, the newspaper had a hard time deciding what the victim's name was. In a headline it was Alonzo Bowen, but in the body of the story it was John Bowen.

Prior to the incident, Bowen had moved out of his farm home because he and his wife's son could not get along. She had filed for divorce on grounds that Bowen called "a pack of lies" — drunkenness, failure to provide and desertion. In fact, when the county clerk read the divorce complaint to him (Bowen couldn't read), he swore that he would go home to the farm and confront his wife.

The visit to the farm ended in tragedy. The *Telephone* described what happened. "Sat-



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

day night he drove to his home with Joseph Bane and according to Mrs. Bowen, he knocked upon the north window, and she told him to come in. They talked for a few minutes and during this time Ray (the stepson) was on the south room."

As soon as Ray was aware that Bowen was in the house, he came to the door and said his stepfather should be ashamed of himself. Bowen retaliated by leaving and calling names at Ray from the yard and daring him to come outside.

When Mrs. Bowen saw Ray left with a gun, she ran out after him "to prevent trouble." Continued the *Telephone*, "She clung to the neck of her son and implored him not to shoot. While they were scuffling, Bowen

climbed the bank from the road in the yard and approached them with a rock in his hand, and when Bowen was about 4 feet away, Ray fired the first shot."

It merely slowed Bowen down a bit, but he kept on coming at the pair, scuffling with them. A second shot was fired, but the bullet hit Mrs. Bowen in the arm. The third shot went into Bowen, who ran almost 100 yards and sank down.

During the scuffle Ray had shouted to his mother, "Well, mother, let me loose, he is cutting me to pieces." He was able to run to a neighbor to use the phone to call a doctor. Two responded. They were C.E. Harris and Raymond Akin.

The newspaper story was well-balanced in that it included different sides of the story. "Bowen claimed that he said he would leave the house and then went out and cured Ray. He stated that Ray came outside with the revolver and when he and his mother began scuffling he ran to her assistance and that Ray then shot him. He admitted having the rock in his hand, but says he did not use the knife

until after he was shot."

Recuperating from her wound, Mrs. Bowen said she was between the two men, and her son did not know Bowen had drawn a knife. ... I did all I could do to prevent this from happening. I wish it had been me killed because I am better prepared to die than either Sam or John."

In his cell at the Monroe County Jail Ray gave only a sketchy account of the fight because his fellow prisoners warned him to talk to a lawyer first. His abbreviated version was also quoted in the *Telephone*. "Mother clung to me and held me while John was slashing me with the knife. He hit me on the head with a rock before I shot him. I don't know whether he had it in his hand or whether he threw it."

The newspaper reporter described Ray as calm. "He is 45 years old, wears a mustache and is about 5 foot 10 inches high. About 30 years ago he lived with his mother at the corner of Third and College in the old brick that stood where the new garage building is being constructed."

To be continued.

H-T

4/10/95