

Case of 1907 boarding-house shooting goes to trial

"Otis Allen, who is also in jail, was indicted on the charge of killing Raymond Sparks at Sanders two months ago."

Bloomington Evening World, Nov. 7, 1907

On Sept. 16, 1907, Otis Allen told a newspaper reporter that he had not yet hired a lawyer to represent him in the case of the shooting of Raymond Sparks. But that was before Sparks died. (Three physicians had tried to repair the damage caused by the bullet.)

The courthouse loungers had plenty of notice about the case. The Evening World on Nov. 16 reported to its readers, "The only case of importance set for next week is the trial of Otis Allen for the murder of Raymond Sparks at Sanders last September. The state will be assisted by Attorney J.E. Henley, and the defense will be in charge of Attorney R.G. Miller."

The circuit court got down to the business of the State of Indiana vs. Otis Allen on the 18th of November. Whoever spoke for the prosecution told the jury that "on Sunday, the



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

15th (of September) Sparks and Allen were down to Peerless, Lawrence County, to engage in a game of baseball. They returned late in the evening, and in company with Donald Simpson, Sparks went to the Musser boarding house where Sparks and Allen lived."

Continued the prosecutor, after they arrived, Allen went to the phone to make a date with a young lady. "The telephone had a lightning arrester on the outside of the house, and by pulling at the arrester, the connection of the phone was shut off. Allen's conversation was interrupted by someone pulling at the arrester."

Allen was not pleased and went to his room, where he placed his 32 Ivers-Johnson

revolved in his hip pocket. He is quoted to have said, "Somebody is too d— smart to interfere with my business."

He found his roommate, Sparks, on the back porch, washing his hands before supper. Sparks asked Allen to who his remark was directed, and Allen replied, "You or any other d— man." Sparks' reaction was to slap Allen and try to grab the revolver.

The newspaper took up the narrative. "Pointing the gun at Sparks, Allen snapped it twice, but it failed to go off. This precipitated a general tussle between the two men on the back porch. Sparks twisted Allen and each of the young men fell across a couple of chairs, and in falling the grip of Sparks was released on the right hand of Allen which held the revolver."

The State alleged that Allen backed away a short distance and fired again. This time the gun worked, and bullet struck Sparks in the chest.

The charge, which the jury was to consider, was second degree murder. The jury consisted of Walter Polley, J.M. Wright, Norval

Weimer, W.W. Weaver, Nathan Smith, William Weimer, J.G. Urney, James Lanum, C.J. Axtell, Sherrill Delap, Dick Brown and J.C. Wells.

The prosecution and defense intended to call "a great many witnesses" from Sanders, Smithville and Oolitic.

On Nov. 22, the Evening World gave its readers this account of the trial. "After deliberating just one hour last evening, the jury in the case of Otis Allen, who killed his roommate, Raymond Sparks, in the stone quarry district Sept. 19. The murder was the outgrowth of a prank played by Sparks on Allen while the latter was making an engagement with his girl over the telephone. By pulling a lightning arrester Sparks cut off the connection and interrupted the conversation."

The defense pointed out that Sparks was "a man of high temper and that he struck the first blow..." It was also noted that after the shooting, when Sparks was laid on a bed, a slingshot was found in his pocket.

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