

1903 'duel' on courthouse lawn in Brown left one dead

Dueling-to-the-death has been depicted by historians as an archaic means of settling an argument or underscoring a traditional code of "honor." That kind of behavior certainly didn't happen in this part of the country at the turn of the century. But if the encounter between a Bloomington man and a Brown County farmer wasn't a duel, what was it?

Readers of the Bloomington *Evening World* on May 19, 1903, were informed that Marshall Taylor had been seriously wounded in a duel on the Brown County courthouse lawn. There had been a grievance,

according to information the newspaper had received from Nashville.

"Taylor had been before a Justice of the Peace yesterday morning on a charge of stealing cattle belonging to the estate of Hester Brown, deceased, who was the mother of the man who did the shooting. On mo-



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By Rose McIlveen

tion, the affidavit against Taylor was quashed, and this so embittered Thornton Deckard to such an extent that the fight resulted."

It is possible that the courthouse lawn became the particular location of the confrontation because the session with the justice of the peace had taken place inside the building. The *Evening World* article does not suggest that the duel time and location had been pre-arranged.

Furthermore, other details of the shooting indicate that the formal rules that applied to duels — counting by a third party, a certain number of paces apart, and "seconds"

(appointed attendants of the combatants) did not seem to apply to the Taylor/Brown shooting. Still, the *Evening World* insisted it was a duel. "The affair was in the nature of a duel, six shots being fired, two taking effect in Taylor's abdomen . . . After Deckard had shot Taylor twice, Taylor chased him around the courthouse yard twice before falling."

If the newspaper knew the nature of Taylor's business in Brown County in the first place, it wasn't shared with the readers of that May 19 edition. But there were some strange twists to the man's life.

Marshall Taylor, who lived at 322 S. Davidson St. in Bloomington, had been out of the country recently. According to the *Evening World*, "Taylor had only recently returned from South America where he has been working in timber for W.H. Buskirk, of this city. Shortly before he went to South America, his wife died and was buried at Rose Hill. He has a son about 15 years old."

After he collapsed, Taylor was taken to a hotel, his condition described as, "in eminent danger of death." Die he did, conveniently for

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