

# Fighting words turned into a gunfight with tragic end

It all began when one of the Monroe County girls started playing one beau against another. She may have enjoyed the game, but it came close to having tragic results.

The year was 1895. On the 15th of June, the two young men were in Bloomington and engaged in a war of words over the young woman. Her name was not mentioned in an article that appeared in *The World* on Aug. 20.

Anyway, town was too tame for the kind of argument that was brewing. Fredrick Koontz and William Douglas decided to meet out in the country.

They were not alone. Says *The World*, "About one o'clock in the afternoon in company with Clarence and John Coleman, William and Con Thrasher, Samuel Koontz, Charles Helms and Clarence May, all young men of their acquaintance and respective neighborhoods, they drove down to the Cooper shop at the intersection of South Pike and the Rockport Road, where it would be decided who was the better man."

Koontz was the first to get down from his



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

horse, and he was walking around behind it when William Douglas whipped out a 22 caliber revolver and began shooting at Koontz.

Koontz was not inclined to stand there dumbly and let Douglas kill him. Douglas fired three times while they were wrestling. One of the bullets struck Koontz in the chest.

What happened next? According to the newspaper, "Koontz was carried to his father's house at South Union where he lay for weeks hovering between life and death..."

Meanwhile, Douglas was arrested, but was bonded out promising to be in court when his case came up in the October term. There is no indication that he had enhanced his reputation as a tough guy.

While he was convalescing, Koontz had plenty of time to think about getting even with Douglas. Toward the end of August, he did what he thought he had to do — file a lawsuit.

Thus, in the Aug. 20 edition we learn that Koontz had sought the advice of an attorney at law. In due course a suit was filed against Douglas. The complaint said that the defendant, William Douglas, on the 15th day of June, 1895, assaulted the plaintiff and shot and wounded the plaintiff whereby the plaintiff became lame and is, and for the balance of his life, will be lame, wounded, sick and disabled from attending to his business."

Koontz was obviously asking for more than he expected to get. The amount named in the suit was \$3,000.

At this point, it would be interesting to speculate whether either of the young men realized that the argument had become very costly, whatever the outcome of the case. As the newspaper put it, "The green-eyed monster's power began coursing through the

heated veins of each young man until it assumed blood heat."

At this point, would any readers care to venture a guess at the outcome of his case? In some ways it was not so surprising after all.

On Oct. 15, 1895, the case of Fredrick Koontz vs. William Douglas was dismissed and costs paid. The costs were probably picked up by the plaintiff.

But the State of Indiana was not through with William H. Douglas Jr. Dec. 18, 1895, was the date selected for his trial. The trial was held without benefit of a jury. The court record for Dec. 18 says it all.

"... the evidence being heard and the court being sufficiently advised in the premises finds the defendant guilty of assault and battery and assesses as his punishment a fine of ten dollars."

Actually Douglas was lucky. The prosecutor dismissed the "intent" portion of the charge, which would have carried a heavier penalty.

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