

# Bedford murder case gets even more complicated

The case against Frank Evans and William Browning for the murder of Bedford schoolteacher Sarah Schafer in 1904 began to come apart at the seams before the grand jury had the opportunity to give it much consideration.

Browning's wife and another person were arrested for perjury, along with an Indianapolis reporter.

Some Bedford citizen expressed their own suppositions about the guilty party in a rather bizarre fashion.

According to the Bloomington *Evening World* of Feb. 25, 1905, early that morning people passed



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

through the downtown area of Bedford saw ropes with nooses and placards dangling from a tree on the court house lawn.

Commented the newspaper, "On a piece of brown paper stuck in the noose of one of the ropes were written three names, one of which was

thought to be S.B. Lowe." Lowe was a lawyer, head of the Bedford school board and a member of the citizens' investigating committee.

The *Evening World* suggested that other names attached to the ropes were those of Mayor J. Hixon Smith, Deputy Prosecutor Fred Fletcher, Eli B. Stephenson and Miss Eva Lowe — persons "who tried so hard to convict Jim McDonald for the murder of Miss Schafer" and "are now working just as hard to balk the case against Browning and Evans . . ."

The implication of that particular combination of names was not lost

on the people of Bedford. It is likely that at that point, the investigation had become hopelessly entangled in a futile attempt to separate fact from the murky areas both supposition and perjury.

Who murdered Sara Schafer? At the distance of 86 years, several theories present themselves:

■ **Chance.** She happened to be in the wrong place at the right time and was attacked by a local person or someone passing through town who may have had rape or robbery, or both, in mind. Unfortunately, time (the body wasn't discovered for some 12 hours after the crime)

and the weather (heavy rain had obscured some clues) were on the side of the killer.

■ **Premeditated murder.** The newspaper that covered the Schafer murder case occasionally skated on the edge of libel when printing information. There was the implication in and out of court that attorney Lowe and Schafer's roommate, Love, were having an affair. Another, even murkier piece of local speculation was that Love had become pregnant, traveled to Indianapolis for consultation with a female doc-

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