

Newspapers in 1913 took sides in murder trial

Unfortunately, misery sells newspapers. And sometimes Bloomington publishers didn't let good taste get in the way of circulation revenues.

A case in point was the trial of Samuel Ray, 45, who was convicted of shooting his 76-year-old stepfather, John Bowen, in the early summer of 1913. The prosecution of Ray began in the first week of February 1914.

The sole witness was Bowen's wife, whose accounts of the affair immediately after the shooting and later in court had some serious discrepancies. The jury selection had been very unusual, according to the *Bloomington Telephone*, in that during the process neither prosecution nor defense challenged a single pro-



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By Rose McIlveen

spective jury member.

The men who decided Ray's case were: Alva Skirvin, quarryman, Stinesville; C.E. Stimson, meat market, Ellettsville; B.F. Elrod, south of town, farmer; Professor C.C. Davidson, Indiana University; George East, farmer, Indian Creek; Joseph Woodward, merchant, South Dunn Street; M.L. Borden, post office clerk, city; Sheldon Engledow, car-

penter/contractor, city; Pleasant Wampler, farmer, north of town; Frank L. Morris, florist, city; John J. Campbell, contractor, Pike Road, city; and Alva McConnel, farmer, Indian Creek. William Loudon, a former prosecutor, helped Joe Knox Barclay with the prosecution, and Ray was defended by R.W. Miers and W.A. Wellons.

Considering the testimony reported in the *Telephone* of Feb. 6, the case could have gone either way. Apparently, Bowen and his stepson had not managed to develop the kind of live-and-let-live understanding that keeps grafted families together. In the confrontation, Bowen was shot and Ray was slashed with a knife.

The *Telephone* tantalized its read-

ers with rumors, stating that Bowen was reputed to have boasted that he had killed three men. The newspaper added, "He was in two fights in Bloomington shortly before he was killed, and was in the habit of drinking liquor when he was in town, which made him quarrelsome."

Perhaps the little item in the *Weekly Star* had the yellowest tinge of all and skated on the edge of journalistic irresponsibility. In the Feb. 13 issue, the newspaper said of Bowen, "It is said that the victim, when in life, often boasted of having killed two Rebel soldiers while he was on picket duty during the Civil War. This bears out some of the evidence in the trial that the victim was of a vicious disposition. The

fact that he boasted of calmly slaughtering two men is enough. No man but a degenerate would take the life of a fellow being, under any circumstances, and then boast of it."

Despite the local newspapers' obvious bias toward Ray, he was convicted. His comment before being transported to Michigan City on a 2-to 21-year sentence was, "I'm sorry I killed the old man, but I'm satisfied with my sentence."

Exit Ray, But on Feb. 13 the *Weekly Star* painted a revealing portrait of the courthouse hangers-on. "A murder trial, *entertained* a large crowd in this city last week. Every detail of the sad story was listened

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