

Man found guilty in levee murder case

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testimony focused on the character of Stewart, rather than on the act of murder, itself. That tactic on the part of the prosecution was to lead to legal objections in the wake of the trial. Witnesses for the state were men present at the scene of the murder, Shaw's Pool Room — Sam Ault, Deffon Hacker, William Sanders, Sam Ford, Frank Jones and, of course, the proprietor, Charlie Shaw.

It may be remembered that both John Stewart and his victim, John Ridley, had been drinking off and on all day, and that there was bad blood between them. Although the

bringing of a large Newfoundland dog by Stewart into a little diner was the factor that triggered the fatal argument, it is possible that one of the men looking cross-eyed at the other could have served as the provocation. Too, their disagreement was neither the first nor the last on the levee.

There were indeed mitigating circumstances at the disposal of both the defense and the prosecution. Stewart had just served a year in jail in a paternity matter, while Ridley had had several brushes with the police. Too, Ridley did threaten before witnesses to "cut out Stewart's heart."

After the last of the testimony had been heard and the attorneys' summations made, the jury found

Stewart guilty of murder. Judge Robert W. Miers told the 28-year-old convicted man, "Your sentence by the court shall be that you be taken to and serve in state's prison the balance of your natural life."

No doubt the *Telephone* reporter was disappointed by Stewart's unwillingness to make a statement after the sentence. But later the newspaper did get a message from the jail. Stewart asked that the *Telephone* "to not hit me too hard; I have not give up all hope and expect some day to be back in Bloomington and live the right kind of life."

The death statistics for Monroe County indicate that a John Stewart, age 37, died in Bloomington, on Nov. 30, 1931.