

Murder trial ended with acquittal of woman

"It was the dullest murder trial we ever saw. Outside of the prisoner and her attorney, the mother of the murdered man and the State's attorneys, no one seemed to take much interest in the case. We published all the particulars of the shooting in the *Courier* last week . . ." Saturday *Courier*, Oct. 1, 1887.

The headline on the Sept. 24, 1887, article about the murder at Harrodsburg had an exclamation point after it, but so did all of the other headlines on the front page of that edition. Nevertheless, "Fatal Shooting" was bound to capture more attention than "The New Railroad" or "Baby Show" (at the county fair).

The county census was decreased by one on the night Sept. 17 when Ellsworth Anderson began banging on the door of the home of the widow, Sarah Meadows. He was "tanked up" (with alcohol, as they put it in those days) and had some very dishonorable intentions toward the woman.

As the *Courier* put it, "Arriving at the house, he ordered the woman to open the door, using language to the effect that he intended sharing her bed with her." Through the door Mrs. Meadows reminded Ander-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

son that he "ought to have more respect for a young lady at Guthrie whom he was about to marry."

When Anderson left to get himself some more liquid refreshment, the woman immediately bundled her children off to the adjoining house of Joe Smith. She told Smith that if Anderson returned, she was going to shoot him.

Sure enough, the man was back. The *Courier* described what happened next. "He again demanded admittance, using and using indecent language. The woman appealed to him to go away, but finally Anderson kicked the door open, which was fastened only by a button."

Inside the room, Anderson grabbed Mrs. Meadows around the waist, but she pushed

him away. As he advanced again, she fired a .32-caliber pistol at him.

Continued the *Courier*, "It (the bullet) entered just above the collar bone and lodged in the back, making a frightful wound. Anderson ran a few yards and then fell, calling for help. He appeared to be dying."

Everything that could have been done for Anderson was done. A doctor dressed the wound, but Anderson lived only a couple more days in great pain.

When the coroner arrived, he discovered that there was no other witness to the shooting except the woman. He found her story to be believable, but she was arrested and transported to the Monroe County jail at Bloomington.

The *Courier* had continued to track the story, revealing to its readers that Mrs. Meadows was indicted by the grand jury. Meanwhile, her attorney, R.A. Fulk, told her to keep her mouth shut.

Mrs. Meadows was described as "a poor widow woman about 30 years old, her husband having died about two years ago. She moved from Guthrie last February. She has a brother, Thaddeus Butcher, now living in Guthrie."

Neither the accused nor the victim came off very well in the *Courier's* account of the incident. Mrs. Meadows: "She told a story which is generally believed, although, it is said, her reputation is not of the best." This was a careless allegation on the part of the reporter that should have earned the *Courier* a day or two in court to answer a libel suit. The depiction of Anderson: "The deceased was a rather reckless young fellow, especially when under the influence of drink."

The grand jury did indict Mrs. Meadows, but she did not spend all that long in jail. On Oct. 1 the *Courier* reported that the jury brought in a quick acquittal.

Concluded the newspaper, skating on the thin edge of libel, "The verdict seems to give general satisfaction about Harrodsburg where the parties are well known, but here opinion is divided. We have a number of women in this town of the same character the woman Meadows was represented to be, and if they were to shoot men every time they call and insist upon getting in, there would be a wholesale slaughter about here."

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