

## **SWAIN ANDERSON MURDER**

(Is it true that there was a man named Swain Anderson murdered in Wright County, MO? This was the question asked by a Mrs. Lorenz, who had heard this "rumor" at a family reunion. Written with permission from Mrs. Lorenz, the following is what I, Phyllis Rippee, discovered from Swain's probate file and from microfilmed newspapers from Mountain Grove, Springfield, Marshfield and Lebanon.)

### **SWAIN ANDERSON MURDERED; HIS WIDOW HANNAH ANDERSON, THEIR TWO SONS AND A FRIEND ARRESTED; MURDER MOST FOUL; SUSPECTS LODGED IN SPRINGFIELD JAIL**

thus were some of the headlines following the discovery of Swain's body May 24, 1886.

Swain Anderson, by all accounts, was a decent, hard-working man who was respected by the community. What he was like at home is up for conjecture for certainly he and his oldest son, Ed, did not get along. Ed considered his father a tyrant who ruled the family with an iron fist. As a matter of fact, Ed had left home for two years to seek his fortune in the west, only to return home where at first things were a lot better than when he had left. But, things did not stay that way.

Swain had attended a Masonic meeting in Mountain Grove that fateful night of May 23, 1886 and was returning home after dark when he was shot from ambush. His body was discovered the next morning. According to some of his friends, Swain had told them that he was upset at the way Ed was acting towards him and that he was also having trouble with his wife, Hannah. After a brief investigation, authorities arrested Hannah, Ed and Henry (the two oldest Anderson sons) and their friend Ewing Sanders. Fearing that the suspects would be taken from the rickety old Wright County jail at Hartville and hanged by a mob wanting to avenge Swain's death, authorities took the suspects, by train, to Springfield.

Brought back to Hartville for a preliminary hearing, they were bound over for trial and returned to Springfield. The oldest Anderson daughter, Jennie, took care of the younger children, but a Lindholm couple took care of the livestock and when Hannah was later released and not tried, Mrs. Lindholm helped Jennie clean the house for Hannah's return. Since Swain was a wealthy man for his time, the cost of lodging the Andersons in the Greene County jail, the caring for the livestock and cleaning of the home were all paid out of the estate.

Ewing Sanders was from a poor family. His widowed mother had raised him the best she could, but there was no money for legal fees. He was tried at Hartville, found guilty of first degree murder and sentenced to hang. People were outraged at the sentence, for they knew that Ewing would have been too timid to pull the trigger and if he was guilty of anything it was for associating with the likes of Ed and Henry Anderson....and they weren't the least bit happy that Hannah had been set free. Anyway, they petitioned

the Governor and asked that Ewing's sentence be commuted. The Governor granted the request and Ewing was to spend the rest of his life in the State Penitentiary.

Ed and Henry had the best legal defense that money could buy. They got their trials postponed several times and spent most of their time either in the county jail at Marshfield or at Lebanon. On October 15, 1887, Ed Anderson, Jake Thomas and Thomas Pearson, broke out of the jail at Lebanon. Henry Anderson refused to leave. Laclede County Sheriff Goodall offered a reward for their capture and the Masonic Lodge at Mountain Grove also offered a reward for the capture of Anderson. A week later, Wright County Sheriff Newton, ex-Sheriff Hensley and P. M. Feese found out that Anderson and Pearson were hidden in a thicket near Marshfield and lay in wait for them during the night. The next morning, when the two fugitives went for water, these officers surprised them and demanded their surrender. They ran, the officers fired at them but did not capture them. Later, Pearson appeared in Marshfield and surrendered, having been wounded in the leg. Nothing was heard from Anderson until three days later when word was sent to the authorities that he had been sighted, but a search of the area turned up nothing. Two weeks after he escaped, he sent word to the authorities that he would surrender if they would assure him that he would not be shot. The authorities were willing to give him that assurance, but it was a few more days before he was found and returned to the jail at Lebanon.

Before Ed was to come to trial, Jennie died. It was rumored at the time that she had been poisoned by Hannah for two reasons: First, that Jennie, who doted on her father, was going to testify against Ed. Second, that a young preacher had been calling on her and as Hannah was also considered attractive, there was a rivalry for his affections. But, what can be documented is that Jennie became ill, was under the care of a physician and when she died on February 9, 1888, at age 18, the cause of death was given as typhoid pneumonia (something that many other people were dying from during that period of time.) Some credibility might be given to there being trouble between Jennie and Hannah in that there is no evidence today that Jennie's grave was ever marked, although as previously stated, there was money in the estate. Receipts in the probate file show that Hannah was drawing money for support of the minor children.

Ed's first trial ended without a verdict, but at his second trial in Laclede County with Judge Bland presiding, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty." What evidence was presented by the defense, or why the prosecution failed to make its case, is unknown. What is known is that people who knew Swain Anderson were once more infuriated. "He was the guilty one. You just might as well turn Henry loose because you've spent \$25,000 to prosecute Ed and you won't get a conviction for Henry either." was the prevailing sentiment.

Well, Ed was turned loose. The Governor was again petitioned in regard to Ewing Sanders and his sentence was commuted to time served. Ed worked as a telegrapher in Springfield for a while. Hannah had remarried....to Lawson Wilson. Apparently, neither trusted the other, for they had drawn up pre-nuptial agreements, so he could not get what she had and vice versa. Hannah, Henry and the rest of the children soon left

Wright County and went to Chicago.....where 108 years later, one of Henry's descendants (Mrs. Lorenz) would become curious about the murder of her ancestor Swain Anderson and asked if there was any evidence indicating it had happened.

**(It is indeed a small world....on the jury that acquitted Ed Anderson was a Mr. Lorenz and a Mr. Rippy.)**

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