

Blossburg News & Views January 25, 2012

by Lonny Frost 23. January 2012 23:33

* Grace Community of Blossburg located at 248 Main St., will be open this Saturday, the 28th, with a large selection of free clothing to give away from 9 AM to 2 PM.

* Have you or someone you know ever received a life saving blood transfusion? If so why not pay it forward by donating blood at the Blossburg Community Blood Drive. This event is being hosted by the Blossburg UMC Friendship Circle at the Blossburg Methodist Church on Jan. 27th from noon to 5 PM.

On March 14, 1918, the body of Edward C. TenBroeck was found on the floor of his home with a wound to his head and the Commonwealth had charged 18 year old John TenBroeck of murdering his father in their home at Tioga Junction. It was said by reports that this trial had the greatest following and largest crowd of spectators than any that the area had in a very long time.

Back in those days members of the jury were all men. Their names, as well as, their occupations were listed in records and newspapers. This jury was comprised of seven farmers that were from the local areas of Charleston, Delmar, Liberty, Morris, and Richmond. Then there was an undertaker from Jackson, an agent from Mansfield, a clerk from Westfield and a clerk from Wellsboro. The last juror selected was William Bache of Wellsboro. This juror was the only one that did not have an occupation listed.

Right from the beginning Blossburg had "ties" to this highly publicized case. Our town was also mentioned by name in the proceedings during the trial which began late in September of 1918. Even the X-ray the Blossburg State Hospital did, would play an important role in the outcome of the verdict.

Edward C. TenBroeck, aged 52 of Tioga Junction was murdered in his home in the afternoon of March 14, 1918. He was shot from behind by an unknown person. The bullet, probably of 22-caliber entering the base of the brain on the right side.

Approximately a hour before the murder, Mr. and Mrs TenBroeck and their daughter, Hazel went with their neighbor, Mrs. Peter Schenck down to Lawrenceville to see the flood.

During their walk Mr. TenBroeck said he was not feeling well and decided to return home. His son, John aged nearly 18 yrs was at home upstairs.

John TenBroeck stated that he was upstairs sleeping and was awakened by a shot. He went downstairs to the door of the stairway that opened into the kitchen. There he saw his father lying on the floor apparently dead and 4 Negroes were standing over on one side of the room. He returned then ran upstairs according to his testimony, climbed out a window, down a vine and ran to the Erie railroad station, where he told the telegraph operator, Miss Kelly, that his father had been shot.

Back in those times the coroner had a jury who looked over the body to decide the cause of death. The Coroner, William F. White's jury was comprised of W. F. Reep, Willard Middaugh and D. A. Brown, of Lawrenceville, W. L. Spoor and George Walker, of Tioga. They returned a verdict of "murder from a gunshot wound inflicted by a person unknown to the jury."

John TenBroeck was arrested and in September of that year a trial unfolded as constables had to be brought in to help with with the crowds of spectators that flooded the area to follow the events of the case.

During the trial the following testimony occurred:

First witness was Dr. Meeker, who described how the body was found, as well as, point out the cause of death was by a bullet entering the head behind the right ear and coursing diagonally across the brain. The gunshot wound was not self-inflicted He also stated the condition of the house gave the appearance of having been disturbed, as if somebody had been searching for something.

Coroner Dr. William F. White of Wellsboro was called next. As coroner he had performed the autopsy. This was done the morning after the crime had been committed. The bullet which was found in the skull was taken to **BLOSSBURG**, as was the brain, and an X-ray picture was taken to prove the cause of death by the 22 caliber bullet, as well as, prove it was not a self-inflicted wound. On cross examination Dr. White testified that he had observed that no powder marks were

visible on the body of the dead man, nor did he see any evidences of powder marks about the house. As to the bullet, he testified that no fragments had been lost. To say how far the gun was held from the dead man when the crime was committed, Dr. White said he could not tell. It was said the bullet that killed Mr. TenBroeck came from a 22 caliber gun. A 22 caliber rifle and a shot gun had been found in the bedroom of Hazel TenBroeck.

The D. A. offered up a motive from witness, Roy Burdett, who worked with John in Elmira, NY. However, the defense claimed Mr. had a shady past and could not be trusted.

It took the jury 4 days to deliberate a verdict. During that time they came back to Judge Channel twice because they could not come to an agreement. Finally the jury settled with a verdict of guilty of murder in the second degree.

This research has a lot of details however, what stood out to me was the following:

1. Throughout the case John's testimony never changed at all. He claimed that he was awakened by a shot, when he investigated it he saw his father laying on the kitchen floor and he saw four "Negroes" [sic] standing there. He then ran upstairs and crawled out a window went down a vine and ran to the Erie station for help.
2. His family and several friends stuck by his side and testified that John never was mean or threatened his father.
3. It was evident that John left the house through an upstairs window. Because that is how he had to enter the house to open the door downstairs to let his grandmother in.
4. Also special police at the Erie Station in Corning had actually seen four Negroes traveling together, enter the toilet room of the station and wash up. But no one notified them of the murder so he did not pay much attention to them. Also other witnesses saw Negroes in and about that vicinity both on the day and the day after the commission of the crime. Which again supported John's testimony.
5. Police never found the \$10 bill which was missing from Mr. Edward TenBroeck trouser's pocket nor the \$3 that was gone from a hand bag belonging to Mrs. TenBroeck nor did they find \$10 in money from another place in the home.

6. The use of the X-ray from Blossburg supported the D. A.'s claims and supported the coroner's statements about the cause of death. It also supported the fact that the wound could not have been self-inflicted. But that is all that it proved.

So what do you think? Was John Guilty or Not Guilty?

This is an interesting trial because Blossburg State Hospital was used to prove certain medical evidence, although that is all it proved, it is amazing to see this used as far back as 1918 and maybe even sooner.

It is also neat to find the small "ties" that our little town has to the world outside its own borders.

If you enjoy these stories please let me know by leaving a message at the email listed below.

Remember send your announcements to news@blossburg.org or call (570) 638-2486.

