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MURDER NEAR SCOTTSBLUFF

Joseph Layton Killed in Own Home While Reading Newspaper— Shot Fired Thru Window

DOGS ACCUSE FATHER-IN-LAW

What has the appearance of being the most villainous murder committed in this state for many years occurred three miles east of Scottsbluff Friday evening, the 11th, when Joseph Layton was shot through the head by an unknown assassin while sitting at the supper table reading a newspaper.

The members of his family were all present in the room at the time of the murder, and all heard the shot and saw the murdered man's head slowly sink on his breast and blood stream from his nose and ears. Dan Jordan, Layton's father-in-law, according to the evidence submitted, quickly leaped up and blew out the light which was sitting on the table, and the women, including Layton's wife, Mrs. Dan Jordan, and Miss Esther Cutlett, who had been working in the Layton home, were taken into another room, after which Jordan summoned a neighbor and reported the affair to him. The neighbor, J. C. Moore, had heard the shot and shortly afterward a woman's scream. Mrs. Moore stepped out of the house for a moment, but hearing nothing more returned to the house, and in about fifteen minutes Jordan appeared and told the story.

The chief of police, a doctor, coroner, and others were called upon the scene, and it was but a short time until a large crowd had collected. M. J. Huffman, acting county attorney in the absence of Attorney White, was one of the first to arrive.

According to Mrs. Layton and Mr. Jordan, her father, the Russian farmers in the neighborhood had proven troublesome to Layton, and on several occasions he had expressed himself as wishing he was out of the country, as he feared they would kill him. As a sign of nervousness, they stated that he had fed the hogs three times Friday forenoon, and had also cleaned the barn twice in that time.

It seems that suspicion, in that unexplainable manner that usually occurs when there is a crime, fastened itself upon Jordan. He stated that the shot sounded like it came from a Winchester rifle, but stated that they had no such gun on the premises, which statement was confirmed by both Mrs. Layton and Mrs. Jordan.

As soon as any action could be taken, J. M. Fulton, at Hastings, was communicated with and asked to bring his noted bloodhounds to the scene, and they went through Alliance Sunday morning. Fulton and the hounds were met here by A. T. Crawford, who made the drive in his auto. As soon as they arrived at the Layton home, Jordan asked permission to speak to Fulton before putting the hounds on the trail, stating as he did so that "they might fasten suspicion on some innocent party."

The dogs were put on the trail about 8 o'clock Sunday morning, being used separately. The first hound dashed around the house and up to the door, making frantic efforts to obtain entrance; the second hound

followed the same course. As the door was opened, the dogs went straight to Jordan, and would have done him bodily injury had they not been held in leash by their owner. As Jordan saw the dogs coming, he took hold of his wife's dress and pushed her in front of him, but the dogs quickly went around the woman.

It developed in the testimony that three men in a buggy stopped H. T. Johnson, county commissioner, who with his family, was driving in his automobile to the home of a friend near Scottsbluff, while they were near the Layton home, and asked if he had been at Layton's, to which Mr. Johnson replied that Layton had been murdered. The identity of the men has not been ascertained, but it is thought that one of them was a Russian.

The woman when questioned told the same stories regarding their positions in the room when the fatal shot was fired. Miss Cutlett swore positively that Jordan was in the room when Layton was murdered, and that he did not leave the house until about fifteen minutes afterward. Mrs. Layton became hysterical when she was questioned and called for her hand bag, from which she produced a bottle of whiskey, which, it would seem, is her ever ready help in time of trouble. She has one child, which some of the witnesses claimed was by her first husband, while others claimed she had never before been married. Jordan told on the stand that she had never been married, and when questioned regarding the child he replied, "Well, don't some women have kids without being married?"

As an evidence that there was no great amount of consensuality existing between Layton and his wife's parents, was shown in the testimony of Mr. Moore, who stated that Layton told him on the morning before the murder, "Did you ever see anyone that would stick around and would do no more than these people here? Mrs. Jordan is sick, but as soon as she gets better they are going to have to move."

According to the physician, every bone in Layton's skull was broken from the force of the blow, the bullet passing entirely through both portions of the brain, death resulting instantly.

As soon as the bloodhounds were sent for, guards were placed around the Layton home, and a large piece of canvas was placed over the ground near the window through which the assassin shot, so that the hounds would have a clear scent.

What deepens the mystery is that a box of loaded cartridges, with only a few missing, was found in a trunk in the house and a 30-30 Winchester was found in the hay loft with one empty and one loaded shell, the empty shell coming out first on examination of the gun. The discovery of the gun in this out-of-the-way position was accidental, it being found by a neighbor who had come to assist the officers. Pieces of lead and the metal jacket were found strewn over the floor near where Layton had been sitting.

Mrs. Jordan, wife of Mrs. Layton's father, has been married five times, and she is but 21 years old. Mrs. Layton, wife of the murdered man, is only 19 or 20. It was found that the Jordans and Mrs. Layton had been imbibing freely in whiskey the day of the murder.

The coroner's jury returned a verdict that Layton came to his death by a bullet fired from a gun in the hands of an unknown assassin, and recommended that Mr. and Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Layton, and the hired girl, Miss Cutlett, be detained as witnesses in the case. The men who were guarding Mrs. Layton all day Sunday stated that she consumed about a quart of whiskey in that length of time.

It seems that Mr. Layton was a man of considerable means. Miss Mattie Layton, a near relative, has been appointed administratrix. Attorney L. L. Raymond, of Scottsbluff, will look after the legal matters for the Layton family.

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