

A blue mark here means that the subscriber of this copy of The News is behind on subscription. Please make a payment as soon as convenient.

# The Mount Airy News.

VOL. XXXIV

MOUNT AIRY, NORTH CAROLINA, THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 1914.

NO. 30

## PATRICK CITIZEN MURDERED.

### Body of Will Lawson Found in Field Near His Home—Was Murdered By Blow in Forehead With Axe—His Son Must Answer to the Charge.

To be buried in a coffinless grave and with no shroud but a gunnysack wrapped about the head and shoulders, with no minister and no prayer or song; to be buried at the dead of night in an old field with the cold rain pouring down upon the wet clouds as they were hurriedly piled in the newly made grave upon the lifeless and limber form was the lot of Will S. Lawson who spent his life on a 100 acre farm in the country ten miles north east of this city.

The News of last week carried an interesting story about how Will Lawson had disappeared from his home about the holidays and how the neighbors had been hunting for him far and near for many days.

The ink was hardly dry on the paper that told the story before a clue was found that finally located his dead body in a newly ploughed field near his home. The newly made grave had been concealed by fresh plowing over the gruesome spot.

An inquest was held Saturday morning of last week and the new grave that was found on Friday was opened and the remains of Lawson examined. The coroner's jury found that he came to his death by a blow with an axe in the forehead. His oldest son, Charly Lawson, aged about twenty years, was committed to jail at Stuart, Va., without bail to answer the charge of murder.

It is a long and a dark story, but it is our duty to tell it. The story runs something like this: Will S. Lawson spent the forty five years of his life in the section of country where he died. In early life he married Miss Nannie Jessup, the step daughter of Mr. Hillery Jessup and to them were born thirteen children, the oldest being twenty years of age and the youngest a child two years old.

Mrs. Lawson inherited money from her people with which she bought a hundred acres of land and on this small farm the family has lived and prospered as well as most of their neighbors. During the years at times the family was hardpressed for means and more than once Mr. Lawson left the farm and spent several months in the coal fields of West Virginia where he made good wages and saved money with which he returned and paid his debts. Some years ago he built on the farm a good dwelling house and he was as well fixed for living in the way of out buildings, barns, farm tools, stock etc. as most well-to-do farmers.

The family had never been connected with any church. They were in faith Primitive Baptist, but they attended no church service only occasionally. They lived within three miles of a Methodist church but usually went several miles away to a Primitive Baptist church when they went anywhere.

During all the years of his married life Will Lawson had been what would be called a hardworking farmer. Last Summer he raised eighteen barns of tobacco and had sold at the time of his death about nine hundred dollars worth of tobacco and had yet on hand several barns. But he drank at times. And he was quarrelsome when drinking. He would work hard for weeks and then go off to a town or to some still place in the mountains and get liquor and quit work for days at a time. He was not a man who would get down drunk, but he would drink enough to be quarrelsome and unpleasant about his home. It was his habit to abuse his wife and children when he would come home under the influence of liquor. After his sons got old enough to protect their mother they were not dissatisfied to sit by and see her abused. His oldest son Charly is said to have freely expressed himself that unless his father quit drinking his mother he would

kill him. About three years ago his oldest son, Charly, then a boy of about seventeen years, protested when he was trying to whip his mother and in the row that followed Charly shot him with a pistol. The boy fired five shots at his father, one of which made a flesh wound in his leg and another would have caused his death possibly had the ball not been stopped by a heavy watch that Lawson was carrying and which was broken all to pieces when the ball hit it. After that Charly left home and spent a year away during which time he traveled with a show company. After being away some months he returned home and made a crop there last year.

About ten days ago the neighbors who live about Mr. Lawson got to talking among themselves that he had not been at home for some time. Inquiry was made and the family gave out the news that he left home on the day before Christmas and that they had not seen or heard of him since. Mr. Hillery Jessup, step father to Mrs. Lawson, told that he had seen him pass his home on the day before Christmas and told how Mr. Lawson had invited him to go with him to the mountains where they could get some liquor.

The family pretended to get interested in finding him and inquiry was made by phone about over the country, but nothing could be heard of him. Soon the impression got abroad that the man had disappeared and that he was possibly dead and his body exposed somewhere about the neighborhood unburied. Many excellent citizens began to take an active interest in the search and, finally, the whole country, for many miles around, engaged in a systematic hunt for the body of the supposed dead man. Telegrams were sent about to distant towns and neighbors went to Winston-Salem searching for him.

During all this time the family took some interest in the search, contending all the time that he was dead and that he left and went towards the mountains. They took enough interest in the hunt for him to not arouse suspicion, but yet the children kept going to school while every man in the neighborhood was away from home searching the hills and hollows and streams for their father's body. Neighbors got to noticing this, and the impression gradually was created that the family was taking too little interest in the search. Old man Jessup repeated, time and again, to the neighbors how he had seen Lawson going towards the Mountains on the day before Christmas.

It got noised about the neighborhood in some way that the family had had a row of some nature on the day before Christmas Eve. It was known that he had about fifty dollars of his own money and the report got abroad that he had collected from some of his friends in the neighborhood as much as fifty dollars more and was to make a trip to the mountains just before Christmas and bring them liquor. The impression was thus made that he had as much as a hundred dollars and some thought that, because of the family difficulties, he had taken this money and skipped the country intending to desert his family.

All kinds of theories were advanced as to where he might be and as to how he could have left the country and left no trace of where he had gone. In the meantime the interest in the search continued and from day to day hundreds of men searched through the fastness of the mountains miles away and up and down Dan River and all the other streams of the neighborhood.

The clue that led to the discovery of the body is as interesting as a piece of detective work. Two citizens who live in that part of the country, but not near enough so that they had been taking part in the daily search, were eating dinner in a restaurant in this city one day last week. While sitting at the table in the restaurant they talked about the missing man and the efforts to locate him. One citizen remarked to the other

that he was suspicious of that plowing. Then he told how Grant Smith, a neighbor to Mr. Lawson, had seen the two Lawson boys, plowing in a field on their farm on Christmas eve morning. This is the first time any one had thought of the plowing, at least it is the first time it had been discussed as having any relation to the subject of the lost man. Then the citizen recalled how the neighbor had said that he saw the Lawson boys in the field and he remembered that the neighbor said that he saw them plowing about good day light. Then the two citizens, while eating, reasoned about the matter. One of them recalled how the land was too wet to plow. One remembered that the day before the plowing was done it had rained all day and then continued to rain all night. They recalled how it was slowly raining on the morning of Christmas eve. The land was too wet to plow beyond question. Then why were the Lawson boys out that early in the morning plowing? Thus they reasoned and analyzed the facts while they finished their dinner.

On this same day a citizen who had been taking an active part in the hunt was here in town. The two men saw him and told him of the little discussion that they had been engaged in during their meal. One of them went so far as to tell the citizen that if he would go home and search that plowed land he might find the missing man. He reasoned that that land was plowed for some serious purpose and possibly to cover up some crime.

The citizen went home and the next day, as was their custom, the neighbors met at the Lawson home to begin the day's search. Some one said that they had better hunt over in the direction of the field where the plowing had been done. And the Lawson family at once proceeded that it was useless to hunt over there, for the man had gone towards the mountains. But they went over to the field anyway. After walking about and seeing the nature of the land and had considered the unreasonableness of plowing there on Christmas eve and as early as day light, the neighbors went home agreeing to return next morning and every man bring a "spud," the same being an iron tool with which bark is peeled from trees. With these iron "spuds" the next morning, the same being on Friday, of last week, they began to go about over the newly ploughed land and press them down in the ground to see if the land was loose below the plowing. In a very short time some man stuck his "spud" in the ground at a place where it appeared to be too soft. Then they examined and found that the clay below the plowing was loose. Then they got tools and dug down and found a new grave in which the body of Mr. Lawson was uncovered.

This find was made about ten o'clock on the morning of Friday of last week. As soon as the men had dug down to a point where they saw that the body was that of Mr. Lawson they sent for the Commonwealth Attorney, Edgar Woolwine, of Stuart, Va. who came and held an inquest Saturday morning at which time the body was taken from the ground and a post mortem examination held. Drs. Thos. J. Smith of Westfield and Dent, of Stuart, Va. made the examination. It was brought to light that the body had been placed in the grave with no covering of any kind except a sack tied about the head. The red clay had been piled in upon the body which was dressed as the man appeared the day before his death with the exception that he wore no shoes. The post mortem examination showed that the man came to his death by a heavy blow in the forehead made with the back of an axe. The man who struck the blow could have made it in no other way than to have stood behind his victim and made the liek while the man's head was resting on some hard substance. The blow was delivered in a way to sink the poll of the axe deep into the head in the forehead and the deepest point of the wound was right at the frontal bone. For a man to

stand behind another, asleep on the floor, and strike him in the head with an axe would make just the wound found on the dead man. The blow in the forehead with the axe was made with such force that the back part of the skull was crushed into as many as sixteen pieces. It is the opinion of the doctors who made the examination that the only way a skull could be crushed as in this case would be for the skull to be resting on some hard, firm substance at the time the blow was made.

The residence was searched to see if evidence of any kind could be found that would throw light on the situation. Blood was found on the floor and about the room in more than one place. It had been washed up and white sand covered the place where it had been, yet the stain was in the planks of the floor. Blood was found on clothing about the house. Mrs. Lawson undertook to account for this blood by natural causes, and her story if believed would account for the blood.

The above is the story and about all the evidence that could be secured at the time of the inquest. Not a member of the family would admit a thing that tended to incriminate any one. They appeared to be as much in the dark about the whole sad affair as any of the neighbors.

But the string of circumstantial evidence has caused many people to reason something like the following, and without knowing positively who did the killing the opinion of the neighbors has fixed the guilt on the family and especially on the oldest son, Charly. Here is the way they have reasoned it out from the facts that are known: Charly went to a Christmas entertainment at Friends Mission on the night before Christmas eve. There was a disturbance of some kind and this is known because Mr. Lawson remarked before some of the neighbors during the day about it being bad to be run away from home.

They think that when Charly came home at night from the entertainment he was possibly drinking and found that the old man had been raising a further disturbance. It is most likely that the old man had pulled off his shoes and was asleep before fire. Charly is supposed to have gone out and secured the axe and come back determined to put a stop once and for all to the abuse of the family. Then he is supposed to have stood behind his victim and with one heavy blow sunk the poll of the axe deep into the skull, literally breaking it to pieces. All this is supposition, but it is the way many people are accounting for the facts in the case.

After he was dead the question was what could be done with the body. It occurred to them to take it out to the plowed field and bury it and then plow over the newly made grave. Before the dawn of day the bloody body was placed three feet deep under the sod with a fertilizer sack about the head and the cold, wet clay piled hurriedly about the lifeless and limber form.

From then until the morning light the matter was discussed and it was decided that if some plow was used it would cover up all tracks. The body had been buried in a field a quarter of a mile from the home and some of the land had already been plowed. The body, either on purpose or by accident, had been placed on the edge of the newly plowed land. Anyway the two Lawson boys were out in the rain plowing by day light next morning, and, in the rain, continued to plow until they had made several rounds and covered the newly made grave.

Hundreds of people thranged the field at the inquest and attended the preliminary hearing the afternoon. Mrs. Lawson declined to look upon the remains and claimed to be too sick to go to the grave in the field or to attend the funeral and final interment.

The remains were prepared for burial in the field where they were found and placed in a wagon at once and carried to the home of the deceased's father,

Mr. John Lawson, who lives about nine miles away and near the family burying ground where the remains were laid to rest Sunday afternoon, the funeral services being conducted by Elders Elijah Bartlett and Gilbert.

Charly Lawson, the man in jail who must answer for the crime, is about twenty years of age. He is rather heavily built, weighs possibly 160 lbs. He has the reputation of being a tough citizen for one of his age. He drinks at times and is considered a rowdy, don't-care fellow.

It seems to be the general opinion that the whole family is fully aware of the facts of the death of the father and have done all they can to cover up the death and burial in the field. At the inquest every member of the family disclaimed any knowledge of the death and burial and undertook to account for the plowing by saying that Mr. Lawson had told the boys that they must plow the field before Christmas, and if they did not get the work done before Christmas they had to plow it during the holidays.

They had already turned some of the land and they claim that they desired to finish the plowing on the day before Christmas and thus have no trouble with their father about it during the holidays. They say that they went out early in the morning and would have finished the land if the rain had not prevented.

There is no positive proof of the guilt of any one, but the above chain of circumstantial evidence has caused most people to lay the crime at the door of the family, and the general opinion of the people seems to be that some one of the family struck the blow that caused the death. If this blow was made in the house then it is reasoned that the older members of the family are knowing to the burial of the body in the field.

Mr. Hillery Jessup repeatedly told how he had seen Lawson pass his home on the afternoon of Christmas eve, the day the plowing was done in the morning, has brought him under suspicion as knowing something of the death and burial, and that he was giving out this information about Lawson passing his house with the intention of misleading those who might hunt for his body.

All of the above story is gathered from various sources and is given as the current rumors that come from that section. We have been told that Mr. Hillery Jessup, since the body has been found, denies that he ever gave out a statement that Lawson was seen to pass his home on the afternoon of Christmas eve. Jessup is 60 years old and a man of good property.

There is another version of the sad affair. There are those who think that Mr. Lawson went to buy liquor as he is said to have promised some of his friends that he would do. It is said that a load of liquor was brought into the neighborhood the night that he was killed. The supposition of some is that Lawson went to buy the liquor and let it be known that he had money. He was drinking and a row might have been brought on that resulted in his death. Or he might have been murdered in cold blood and robbed. After his death, if it was brought about at the liquor wagon, the men who murdered him took advantage of their knowledge of the difference between him and his family and brought his body and buried it on his own land, thinking thus to lay the burden on his own people should the grave be found.

It is contended that Charly Lawson went to see his sweetheart on the day after the death and burial of his father. He rode several miles in the country to her home and spent the day there. Now it is admitted that a man might come to town or go to a store or a still place after committing murder, but that he would ever go to see his best girl the next day after putting a man away in the dead hours of night is not probable.

It is said that the report that Charly and Sam Lawson did the plowing is not correct, but that the plowing was done by their

two smaller brothers. No effort is made to explain why the little boys were allowed to go out and plow land that was soaking wet, and at a time when it was raining. They are said to have plowed the land because their father told them it must be plowed before the holidays.

It is further contended that all the talk that brings Mr. Hillery Jessup into the affair is due to a confusion of dates as to when he said Lawson passed his home.

There is this about it: if the Lawson family is not guilty of the crime it is very unfortunate for them that so many things are pointing to their guilt. It is unfortunate that the oldest son had made threats against his father. It is unfortunate that blood was found in the home at the time of the inquest. It is unfortunate that the little boys plowed over the new grave the morning after their father was buried. It is unfortunate that the wife was so unwell that she could display no more interest in the finding of her husband. All of which has a bearing on the case and yet proves no one guilty. It is a time when the Lawson family could well afford to spend a few hundred dollars and get a detective to come there and unravel the tangle and place the guilt where it belongs. It is a fact that many good citizens are not inclined to think that the Lawson family is responsible for the death.

The next term of court at Stuart is some time in next month at which term the case is supposed to be heard.

## Prof. Turlington Honored.

Smithfield, Jan. 17.—Ira T. Turlington, now superintendent at Mount Airy Schools, who for 25 years was the leading educator of Johnston County, was paid a beautiful tribute by his former

colleague to the Turlington graded School of this place today. Mr. S. S. Holt, a prominent lawyer, made the presentation speech. He spoke of the wide influence of Mr. Turlington as the founder of Turlington Institute, which was for a number of years one of the best preparatory schools in this part of the State but was a few years ago supplanted by a graded school named in his honor, and his work as county superintendent of schools.

Little Misses Rose and Nellie Grantham, nieces of Mr. Turlington, unveiled the portrait. Superintendent Avermont accepted the portrait for the school. Trustee T. R. Holt added his appreciation of what had been done, and County Supt. L. T. Royall made a few remarks.

The audience then called for Mr. Turlington, who expressed his appreciation of the honor shown him.

The portrait was painted by Miss Matt Dowd of Charlotte, and will be hung on the walls of the school auditorium, opposite that of Charles B. Aycock.

## Tired of the Game.

Recently a man blew his brains out at Evansville, Ind. He was "just tired of the game."

He was 45 years old and a bachelor. He was a high liver. He had traveled extensively and knew people and customs, history and points of interest, and was still traveling.

Was he tired of the game? Why, he wasn't in the game. He lived for himself and had nothing more to live for.

The real game of life consists in living as part of a community and doing your share of the social service.

This man had ready money and lived about as he pleased. His health was fair, yet he was tired of life.

He had come to believe that the game consisted of a selfish life, and he naturally grew tired.

He hadn't taken the trouble to establish a home or play with children, making their hearts merry. His own selfishness made life a failure.—Winston-Salem Sentinel.