

## The Life and Untimely Death of Johnny Mulhern

The information in this column came from the Monroe Sentinel, a weekly paper published from September 20, 1854 through November 12, 1912, which is available at the Monroe Public Library. All of this information came from three consecutive weeks in October 1880. The first issue had five articles about this incident and if you were to read the paper from top to bottom and left to right, you'd probably have to read some of it a second time as there were brief tidbits about the episode before you knew what had happened.

On Friday night, the 8<sup>th</sup>, a charivari party visited the house of John Burgi northwest of the depot with the music beginning about 9 o'clock. A 15-year-old son of a Mr. Mulhern was in the crowd and killed by a pistol ball fired from a 32-caliber revolver in the hands of Sam Burgi. The serenade was for the newly married couple in that house, Mr. and Mrs. John Burgi. There were many conflicting reports concerning the affair, but none were printed in the paper.

Sounding more like an editorial than a news story, the article continued, "a charivari is an unpardonable nuisance, and the laws to prevent such disturbances should be more rigidly enforced." It also stated, "it is a rash and unpardonable act to discharge a gun or revolver at random into a crowd of human beings. . . . As a rule the most innocent person in the crowd is likely to be the greatest sufferer. Sometimes charivari parties have resorted to very vulgar and rowdyish tricks and destruction of property to carry their point – to get a treat for the crowd!"

"Every good citizen will regret this occurrence, and every law abiding citizen will discountenance a repetition of Turkish serenading, for it inevitably crops out in just lamentable incidents [sic] as that which took place last Friday night."

Johnny Mulhern was born in Shullsburg and moved to Monroe with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Mulhern, when he was quite young. He was a student of Miss VanWagenen at the time of his death. His obituary continued, "Those with whom he was associated in his school work felt such a shock at his sudden death that they could scarcely realize that he would never return to his daily tasks. His brief work is finished but his quiet unassuming manner and close attention to work will long be remembered by teachers and mates. His playmates have lost an honest, earnest, and kind companion; his teacher an industrious and obedient pupil; his parents a dutiful and affectionate son."

Burgi waived the preliminary examination and was remanded for trial by Justice Abbott before whom the unfortunate young man was brought on Monday. As his trial was to take place, "we refrain from giving any particulars reported of the shooting. Burgi feels terribly over the affair and says he would gladly die if he could give back life to his unfortunate victim."

The funeral was held at 10 a.m. on Monday with a large attendance and "a good deal of sympathy manifested for the afflicted family. It is hard to realize that this boy, who was in school on Friday, is now in his grave. This is the second death from [a] charivari in this vicinity within a few years."

The coroner held an inquest on the same day as the funeral in the office of S. W. Abbott, a Justice of the Peace. After examining the body, he and his jurors, L. Davenport, A. White, C. Noble, O. H. P. Clarno, N. Churchill, F. Streiff, determined that John Mulhern came to his death "from the effects of a leaden bullet, fired from a revolver by Samuel Burgi."

All of the above information was scattered throughout one page in a single issue. One week later on Wednesday, the paper reported that the jury in the Burgi case had been empaneled on Tuesday forenoon and that the trial had begun. They predicted that it would probably be concluded on Thursday. The next issue noted that Burgi "was found guilty of manslaughter in the third degree and was sentenced to two years and a half imprisonment at Waupun." I found no other mention of Mr. Burgi in the newspapers after that.

Reading the old newspapers is so interesting to me because of the way they worded the stories. So many of the articles from those times contain opinions instead of news

stories more suited to editorial comments than news reporting. Maybe I am just used to the very old Dragnet series when Sgt. Joe Friday would say, "Just the facts, ma'am."