

Victims of Unfortunate Circumstances - Clarno Edition

Most of you can probably tell that I always enjoy the stories that make you laugh, make you cry, or make you thankful that we live in the time that we do because of the technology available. I'm going to share two stories today about men who lived in Clarno township who may touch the emotions of some of you. Both of the victims in these incidents were simply victims of unfortunate circumstances - one deliberate and one an accident.

The first incident took place on Monday evening, December 27, 1909 at the Illinois Central Depot in Clarno. Charles Ault, who was "deaf and dumb" and 26 years old, happened to be at the depot two days after Christmas. Walter Smith, who was intoxicated, also happened to be there at 6 o'clock with a Bowie knife with a 6-inch blade that was as sharp as a razor. Ault was stabbed above the heart by Smith. Fortunately, he was not seriously injured because of his coat and the fact that the knife struck the edge of a rib.

Dr. J. N. Daly, of Orangeville, was called to do the examination, which showed that the knife blade was in direct line with the point of the heart. Dr. Daly stated that an expert could not have made a more perfect aim for the heart's point. At that time, he felt that Ault had good chances for a recovery.

Deputy Sheriff M. C. Durst reached Clarno about 9 o'clock that evening where Smith had been held prisoner at the depot since the stabbing. About 50 men were gathered there to see that Smith was delivered over to the officer. Smith, who would be charged with assault with intent to do great bodily harm, was taken to Monroe on the evening train, which was late.

Smith had been drinking and conducting himself in a reckless manner before committing the assault, which happened without the slightest provocation. The depot agent had two revolvers and the Bowie knife hanging on the wall. Smith first took down a revolver and shoved it under Ed Frautschy's nose; Frautschy was there from Monticello to visit his brother, Jacob. Smith then struck Ault and grabbed the knife and stabbed him. Ault, who lived a half mile west of the Clarno station, had done nothing to provoke the assault.



This photo from the collection of Lorraine Herbert McMurray shows the Illinois Central depot at Clarno where Charles Ault was assaulted by a drunk with a Bowie knife in 1909. The Clarno store can also be seen to the southeast of the depot.

Smith, 19, was originally from Orangeville, but had lived in Clarno with Frank Brunkow since Smith's parents moved to Idaho two years earlier. A Clarno character named Anderson, who had been

mixed up with Smith, was blamed for furnishing Smith with alcohol. Ren Ault, Charles' brother, was in Monroe the following day to make complaint against Smith, who was to be arraigned before Justice W. T. Saucerman.

Walter Smith, waived examination when he appeared before Saucerman on Tuesday afternoon. Bail was set at \$750 and the case was bound over to the March term. A. S. Douglas represented Smith. Smith was known as "Chicken" Smith in the Clarno area and had an unsavory reputation there. I found nothing more about this case in the newspapers. Ault passed away in 1969 at the age of 86 at 713 20th Avenue, the home of his sister, Etta Bender.

The second story involves Joseph Aebly. County Clerk I. M. Stauffacher and poor commissioner J. Clark Baker had gone to Clarno township on November 6, 1908 to obtain affidavits from Joseph Aebly, who was blind. At that time each blind resident of the county who had a limited income was entitled to receive \$100 a year from the county.

It is unknown if they had to apply each year for the aid, but Mrs. Aebly went to Monroe three years later on October 4 to secure the aid for her husband. She left her husband alone at the house that morning; their home, which was near Clarno, caught fire because of a defective chimney. Fortunately, he was able to get out, but was not able to save any of the household furnishings. Neighbors, who arrived several minutes after the fire started, were able to carry out a few jars of canned fruit and some bedding.

Mr. Aebly became aware of the fire when he smelled the smoke and went to the yard where he yelled for help. The nearby farmers did not hear him because they were working in their cornfields, but saw the flames a bit later. When they arrived at the house, Mr. Aebly had evidently gone back into the smokey house to get something. They cautioned him to leave, which he did just in time.

"The calamity is deplorable as Mr. and Mrs. Aebly were in straightened circumstances and could ill afford to lose their home with winter coming on."

The Aebly's temporarily lived in an old structure on the Frank Matzke place while a new home was being erected for them. The home was to have only two or three rooms and was expected to be available by winter. The residents of Clarno generously donated bed clothing, provisions, and pieces of furniture to the couple. Carpenters also donated their work.

Mr. Aebly was born in Canton Glarus, Switzerland in 1850 and died at his home in Clarno on June 20, 1921 after he contracted pneumonia. They had three children, a daughter in North Dakota, and two sons, one in California and another in Clarno, at the time of Joseph's death. His wife was born in Pennsylvania in 1855 and died in 1929.