

"The Hanging of Solomon Sudler in April 1916"

Carroll County Times Article for April 20, 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

On Friday, April 14, 1916 Solomon Sudler went to the gallows at the Carroll County Jail in Westminster. Sudler had been convicted of the New Year's Day murder of William F. Brown of near Silver Run. It was the third execution to occur in Carroll County.

The details of Brown's murder and Sudler's trial, conviction and execution were, of course, covered in the local papers. The April 14, 1916 issue of the American Sentinel carried a front page story which read, in part:

The Court desiring to give to the accused the benefit of every legal safeguard, appointed J. Milton Reifsnider, Esq., a leading member of the Carroll county Bar, to defend him Monday January 24, was fixed as the day for the trial and a venire facias issued for the petit jury for that day. Mr. Reifsnider visited Sudler in the Baltimore City jail, and his client admitted the killing, declared that it was done with a stone, and disclaimed any intent to kill. Sudler and his friends insisted at first on the removal of the case from Carroll county to some other Court, but later agreed to try the case before the full bench. On Sunday afternoon, January 23rd, Sheriff Stoner went to Baltimore in his automobile and brought Sudler to Westminster. On the way, with the consent of the State's Attorney, he stopped at Springfield State Hospital, that Sudler might be examined by the alienists as to his mental capacity. Judge Forsythe held Court on the 24th but owing to the sickness of Judge Thomas it was necessary to postpone the trial. Sudler was brought into Court and arraigned. When the indictment was read by Chief Deputy Clerk Gloyd Diffendal, he pleaded "Not Guilty" and elected to be tried by the Court. It is to the credit of Carroll county that notwithstanding the intense feeling prevailing, the great crowd present made no demonstration either as the prisoner was brought through it to the Court room or upon his return to the jail. Sudler was not returned to Baltimore but has been in the jail here since January 24th, awaiting a convenient day for trial.

At the insistence of Mr. Theodore Kauffman, father of Mrs. Brown, an investigation was started on February 10. On Thursday night, February 10th, John Eline, undertaker of Littlestown, and his assistants exhumed the body, and an autopsy was performed by Dr. J. J. Stewart, of this city, which developed the fact that Mr. Brown had been shot, about a dozen shot having been found in his brain. In a later confession obtained from Sudler, he stated that he had shot Mr. Brown with a double barreled shot gun, having taken the gun from the storeroom in the Brown residence and secreted himself behind the stable door, shot Mr. Brown as he was emptying a pail of milk into a can.

The Sentinel also provided a graphic description of the execution:

The death sentence imposed by the Court of Solomon Sudler at his trial, which began on Monday, February 14, 1916, for the murder of William F. Brown, which occurred on the evening of January 1, near Silver Run, was carried out this morning in an orderly manner. The death procession was formed as follows: Sheriff James M. Stoner and Rev. Carleton Barnwell, Rector of Ascension Episcopal Church, officers John A. Stem and William F. Helm with the prisoner, Solomon Sudler, between them, followed by the deputy sheriff's and witnesses, left the jail at 6 o'clock and proceeded through a covered way to the scaffold, which had been entirely surrounded by a high board fence, but had been partly torn away during the early hours of the morning by the crowd which had assembled.

Sudler walked to the gallows between his guards without a tremor or sign of fear. He made no public statement.

Rev. Carleton Barnwell, his spiritual advisor, after a short prayer, was the last to leave the scaffold; Sheriff Stoner pulled the trap, and the end of the tragedy which occurred on New Year's Day, and the just sentence of the Court was accomplished.

The trap was sprung at 6:05 o'clock.

After a period of 15 minutes had elapsed the body was pronounced lifeless by Dr. Eugene Sullivan and was taken down and examined by the physicians who found that death was due to a broken neck. The doctors present were: Sullivan, Woodward and Foutz, of this city, and Lewis Wetzell, of near Silver Run.

The body was prepared for burial by James M. Stoner & Son, and, accompanied by his aged grandmother was sent to Baltimore to the home of Mrs. Mary Glasgow, a sister and later interred in Asbury Evergreen Cemetery.

Solomon Sudler was the son of the late Solomon and Alberta Sudler, of Baltimore, and is survived by one sister, Mrs. Glasgow, of Baltimore; one brother, Joseph Sudler, of Chicago, and his aged grandmother, Mrs. Frances Sudler, of Baltimore, who spent the night in this city.

There was an orderly crowd of about 400 people from all parts of the county, present.

The 1916 execution of Solomon Sudler was far different from earlier ones in America. The event took place behind a high board wall surrounding the jail yard and was witnessed by only a few men. Throughout the Colonial period and well into the nineteenth century, a hanging was a public event approaching a holiday. Historian Jack Larkin, who recently spoke at the Historical Society, wrote about a New Jersey hanging in the 1820s: "around the place in every direction were the assembled multitudes--some in tents, and by-wagons, engaged in gambling and other vices of the sort, in open day." When a stay of execution halted an 1824 execution in Pembroke, New Hampshire, the disappointed crowd rioted. By the mid-nineteenth century, changing social attitudes dictated that executions be held on the jail grounds behind a high wall and out of view of the crowds.

Photo caption: An admission ticket issued by Sheriff James M. Stoner to the April 14, 1916 execution of Solomon Sudler. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.