

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Evans Store Robbery and Shootout"

Carroll County Times Article for 26 February 1995

by Jay A. Graybeal

Imagine an armed gang breaks into a store and takes a shot at the owner. Later a posse discovers the desperados in a vacant house and a shootout ensues. One of the robbers is wounded and captured but two others escape. If this sounds like a story from the Old West or a plot from an old movie, you may be interested to learn that it happened in Carroll County a century ago. The story of the Evans Store robbery can be found in the January 26, 1895 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper.

J. E. Evans' Store Robbed Again.

One of the Burglars Shot and Captured

The store of Mr. J. E. Evans, at Carrollton Station, which was robbed several months ago, was burglarized again on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning between midnight and daylight. Three men were engaged in the commission of the crime. Many stories are current concerning the robbery and the subsequent pursuit and capture of one of the burglars, but the following is believed to be substantially correct, without including minute details.

Mr. Evans' store is immediately at the station and the foundation stands against the embarkment of the railroad and forms a basement, and access to the building was gained through a door in this, which was secured by a heavy hasp and staple, locked with a padlock. The staple was forced out with a railroad crowbar. In the previous robbery, of which Charles Wells, who escaped from the county jail on December 15th, was accused, the entrance was made directly into the store through the door leading into it, which was forced open. On the present occasion this door was securely barred and the robbers found the basement more accessible.

The robbers, after gaining access to the store, deliberately culled over the stock of goods, and appropriated a lot of gloves, mufflers, underwear, pocket cutlery and other articles, selecting the best in the store from stock recently purchased by Mr. Evans. They also changed their stockings and some of their underwear, and left their cast-off garments lying in the store, and carried away, in addition to the goods referred to, a quantity of provisions. A small sum of money, amounting to \$1.50 to \$2.00 was taken from the money drawer.

After going through the store the robbers visited Mr. Evans' house and made an attempt to break into it. This was about 3 o'clock Wednesday morning. In this attempt an entire window sash was removed, the robbers using a pick, or mattock, stolen from the store, for the purpose. In the operation a pane of glass was broken, and the noise aroused Mr. Evans, whose bedchamber was just above. He raised his window and asked a question, to which a pistol-shot, which it is supposed was aimed at him, was the response. He immediately made an outcry, to arouse his neighbors, at which the robbers made off. There is a considerable settlement around Carrollton Station, and an alarm was sent from house to house, and a group of men speedily collected and resolved to pursue and make a search for the robbers. About nine o'clock Mr. John Valentine, one of the pursuing party, passed the house of Mr. Lewis Green, near Tannery, about three miles from this city, and was there informed that smoke had been seen issuing from the chimney of a vacant dwelling owned by Mr. Miles Long. Mr. Valentine, who is a son of Mr. Levi Valentine, formerly United States steamboat inspector at Baltimore, was armed with a sixteen-shot repeating rifle, and immediately laid siege to the house, in which he discovered that several men were hiding, as he heard their voices in conversation, and approached a window through which he saw them

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

inside. They also discovered him, and a young man named McGee who was with him. Valentine and McGee retired from the house, a short distance, to a clump of trees, the robbers firing at them as they did so. The shots were returned and for some time a fusillade was kept up without damage to either side. Other persons gathered in the vicinity in a short time and Mr. Valentine despatched a messenger to notify Sheriff Arnold of the situation, who immediately started for the place with a posse of men.

In the meantime the firing continued and finally one of the robbers appeared at the door for the purpose of getting a better shot at the besiegers. The act, however, resulted in his capture, as a bullet from Mr. Valentine's Winchester rifle entered his left leg above the knee, shattering the bone and making an ugly wound. Mr. Valentine had by that time nearly exhausted his ammunition and left other parties to watch the house while he went for a fresh supply. During his absence, and before the arrival of the sheriff and his party, two of the men in the house rushed out and made their escape, going in the direction of Houcksville. The wounded man was left behind, and called to the crowd of people who had by that time assembled. Begging them not to shoot at the house and kill him, but to come and help him as he was badly wounded. For a time they feared a ruse, but someone finally ventured in and ascertained that his condition was as has been stated. He had improvised a tourniquet with a handkerchief and a new curling iron, probably stolen out of Evans' store, and had staunched the flow of blood. Dr. Jos. T. Hering, of this city, was visiting a patient in the neighborhood, and gave the wounded man attention. The first thing he asked for was morphia. He is a young man, probably twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, but is not unlikely an old offender, although he says this is his first robbery. He says he met his companions in Harrisburg, Pa., and only knows them by the names of "Bill" and "Jim." He came with them to this locality at their suggestion, as they said they were well acquainted here. The young man gave his name as Wolfe. He was brought to Westminster, and is now in the county jail. He is reticent concerning the movements of himself and companions, but while under the influence of morphia dropped some expressions which give cause for the opinion that he was one of a gang of five robbers who perpetrated several burglaries in the vicinity of Pikesville on Sunday night. Mr. Asbury Watts, whose house was among those visited by the robbers, came here on Thursday and recognized Wolfe as the man who carried away a mandolin from his premises on that occasion.

It is suspected here that one of his companions was Charles Wells, the escaped robber. The fact that they came from Harrisburg is one of the reasons that lends color to his suspicion. Cost, who was Wells companion in escaping from the jail here, parted with him at Carlisle, Pa., on December 31st, showing that he was going in the direction of Harrisburg. But a much stronger ground for suspicion exists in a circumstance which occurred near this city. On Tuesday morning Mr. Harry Little, who resides on the farm of Mr. Jehu Royer, near Spring Mills, started to thresh wheat, and found two men who had slept in the straw at his barn during the previous night. The men asked for employment, and assisted him in threshing during the day. When night came they requested the privilege of sleeping in the straw again, to which he consented. He had recognized one of the men as Wells, but was unable to notify the authorities of the fact during the day. After nightfall he came to this city for that purpose, but when the officers arrived at this place the men had fled. They had evidently watched his movements and suspected the purpose of his errand to Westminster.

The men who escaped from the house in which they were besieged by Mr. Valentine and others, were hotly pursued, but have thus far eluded capture. Wolfe says they are desperate men and declared that they would not be taken alive.

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Dr. Hering found the ball which struck Wolf's leg. It has passed entirely through the bone, against which it was flattened. The wounded man passed a restless night, Wednesday, but was subsequently reported as resting easily. It will be a month or more, however, before he will be able to use his wounded limb at all.

Many wild rumors of the movements of the burglars before and after the robbery are current, and people are turning up in every direction with a resemblance to the desperado Charles Wells. A man was arrested in Middleburg district on Thursday, who was supposed to answer the description given of him, but when brought to jail here turned out to be a party who had registered at the Hotel Albion, a few days previously, as John Burkhart, of Shrewsbury, Pa.

Photo Caption: Dr. Joseph T. Hering removed the bullet from burglar Wolfe's leg after the shootout Carrollton Station in January 1895. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.