

Wednesday, August 19, 1942

Ancient Gun Unfired for 30 Years Brings Death to Child

A death-dealing charge of heavy duck-shot lay tamped away in a 118-year-old muzzle-loading musket in a cob-webbed attic for 30 years only to claim the life of a nine-year-old boy here Tuesday. This tragic story was uncovered today as Sheriff Walter A. Felger and Deputy Sheriff Walter (Dutch) Adams continued their investigation of the fatal shooting.

It was when the father, Frederick McClure, Sr., was himself still a child, that the charge of old-fashioned black powder and chilled shot was rammed into the ancient weapon to lie through the years unfired waiting for his little boy, Robert Lee McClure to become its victim three decades later.

Frederick Jr. and Robert Lee were playing in one of the four large upstairs bedrooms of the old house Tuesday when in boyish spirit of adventure they decided to explore the large attic adjoining the bedroom. What a storehouse of treasure it proved to be with its old spinning wheels, ancient candlestick holders and other relics of other days. The attic had become the storeroom of lifetime accumulations of old things from several generations of the family who had owned it for many years.

The prize find came when the boys came upon two "great big guns" as Frederick described them.

Fire Matchheads With Trigger

They dragged one of them out into the bedroom which Norma Aileen, 10, was lying with her seven-months-old sister, Roberta Ann McClure.

"Will it shoot?" asked Robert Lee in childish glee.

Sure it will, I'll show you, replied Frederick and ran downstairs to get a box of old-style matches.

Frederick sat down on the overstuffed chair in one corner of the room, lay the heavy old weapon across his knees, placed a match-head on the firing pin and pulling hard, snapped the heavy hammer.

"I go get other fun," said Robert Lee, bubbling over with excitement as he scampered back into the dusty old attic.

Dragging the other old weapon, Robert had just appeared in the doorway leading to the bedroom when Frederick pulled the trigger on the other ancient weapon again.

There was a deafening report and a shrill cry from Robert.

“A big bright light filled the room, then lots of black smoke” Frederick told Deputy Adams, tearfully and realistically re-enacting the tragedy.

“I went through smoke and ran downstairs and down the road for help,” the 12-year-old boy said.

Frederick ran three blocks to the home of Mrs. George Thieme residing around the corner on the Harris Road. She arrived at the McClure home in her automobile just as Mrs. McClure returned from a trip to a grocery in her car and the two women and Kissinger took the child to St. Joseph's Hospital. He was dead upon arrival there and after an investigation by Dr. Carey B. Parker, county coroner, the body was taken to the Julian Schone Funeral Home.

Adams County Historical Museum

Feb-Nov 1942 Scrapbook, image 28

Transcribed by Jim Cox