

MR. TRENERRY, a St. Paul attorney, is vice president of the Minnesota Historical Society and has written numerous pieces for Minnesota History. He has in progress a book on historic Minnesota murders, of which the present article provides an example.

The BRAY-GOHEEN Murder Case

WALTER N. TRENERRY

ON MARCH 27, 1891, a young man sat in a farmhouse in eastern Otter Tail County, reading the *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal*. He had gone to several places trying to find it, but when he did obtain a copy, he glanced only at the first and last pages. Quickly reading an article on the last page, he laid the newspaper down and took a long breath that appeared to be a sigh of relief.

This young man was Adelbert Goheen and he was not quite twenty-one years old. Tall and slender, with a square face, ruddy complexion, fine white teeth, and clear eyes, he revealed his youthfulness by carefully stroking an almost imperceptible downy moustache.

The newspaper article which Goheen had found interesting dealt with a sad but not unusual happening in Minnesota's frigid winter weather. On March 23, the report stated, a railroad employee had found near the Great Northern tracks in Fergus Falls the frozen, snow-covered body of Rosetta Bray, a peculiar woman known in the community as an eccentric. Rosetta, the article continued, was short, plump, and about

thirty years old. After her husband had unceremoniously departed without leaving a forwarding address, she had become a sort of vagabond, wandering about the city, begging for food, and occasionally sleeping in barns and sheds. Stubbornly she had refused to accept shelter in the county poorhouse. Although queer, she was not insane, and was tolerated in Fergus Falls as a harmless local oddity. She had been wearing her usual tattered clothes and carried a ragged muff; her hands and face were grimy. It was believed that on one of her aimless wanderings she had fallen and frozen to death.¹

The woman's body had been taken to a local undertaking establishment and there placed on display until someone could make positive identification. The usual number of curious, ghoulishly minded people crowded the impromptu morgue to stare at the corpse, and one visitor showed extraordinary curiosity by turning the dead woman's head for a closer look. This chance move disclosed that Rosetta had a bullet hole behind her right ear.

A murder, obviously planned to look like a casual accident, was thus unmasked. The coroner promptly ordered an autopsy and summoned a jury for a formal inquest. The autopsy surgeons found that two .38 caliber revolver bullets had killed Rosetta. One had penetrated the right lung, and the other had

¹ *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal*, March 26, 1891. All further references are to the *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*. Material not otherwise identified may be found in the issue of October 23, 1891, a special oversize edition devoted to a complete account of the crime and including many articles which first appeared on earlier dates.



ROSETTA *Bray*

passed through the brain and lodged next to the skull. Either would have been fatal.

Testimony at the inquest brought out the surprising information that the peripatetic and eccentric Rosetta had recently been associating with a young man and that his name was Adelbert Goheen. Although he had left the town on Sunday, March 22, Goheen was believed to have met Rosetta the preceding evening. If this were true, he was the last person to see her alive. The doctors performing the autopsy and the man who found her all felt that the woman had been killed no later than Sunday morning. The most recent snow had fallen on Sunday and it must have been then that the white flakes softly covered Rosetta's small body.

The coroner's jury reported, "We believe that she came to her death by the effect of two bullet wounds, believed to be fired from a revolver held in the hands of an unknown person or persons." Sheriff John S. Billings found this unsatisfactory. His own suspicions were strengthened by having read "loving

missives from young Goheen . . . with a great many endearing epithets" addressed to Rosetta and brought forth from her effects as exhibits at the inquest. He hastened, therefore, to act on a time-tested maxim: look for a member of the opposite sex.²

Goheen had reportedly left for Fargo, and Billings betook himself there. Meanwhile it was learned that the youth had returned home. On Sunday morning, March 29, Deputy Sheriff Chris Johnson strode into the Goheen residence, climbed the stairs to Adelbert's room, and then and there arrested him in spite of all splutterings of innocence. It must be admitted that although the law officer had courage, he had very little evidence at that moment to support his action.

While Johnson was examining him, Adelbert made a curious quick movement which he tried to disguise by placing his hands on his hips. The deputy was no novice at this business; his keen eye caught the gesture and a thorough examination of the boy's clothing disclosed a small leather pocketbook lodged between Goheen's belt and his waist. This was found to contain five unused .38 caliber revolver cartridges. The young man was taken to the county jail where, charged with first degree murder, he awaited further proceedings.

THIS WAS not the first occasion upon which Goheen had seen the inside of a jail. When he was only fifteen, he had been convicted of petty larceny and at eighteen he had again showed his inability to distinguish between mine and thine. Convicted this time of grand larceny, he had spent two years in the state prison at Stillwater, emerging in January, 1891, to become involved with Rosetta Bray.

The Goheen family consisted of the parents and eleven children, not all of whom lived at home. There were local rumors that other family members, including the mother, had been involved in a series of crimes taking place in the course of several moves which had brought them from Cerro Gordo, Iowa,

² May 26, 1891.

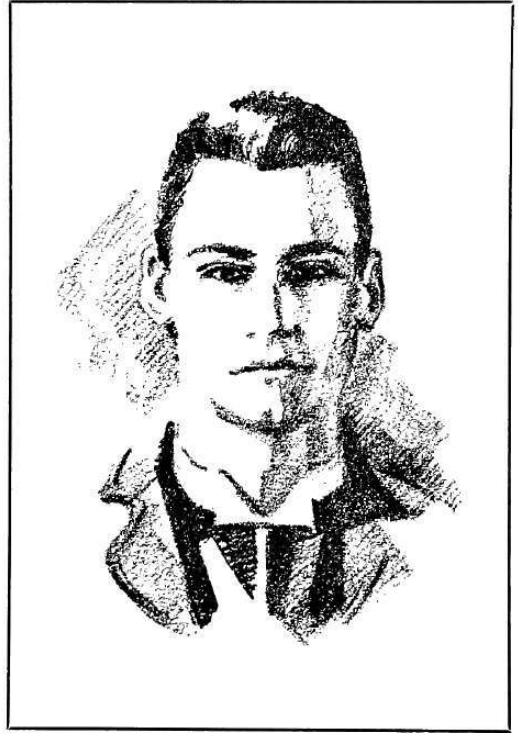
their original home, to Fergus Falls. Adelbert's own reputation, combined with that of his family, placed him at a serious disadvantage.

The young man continued to insist that he was innocent. He said he had not even seen Rosetta on Saturday, March 22; all he did that evening was tramp the streets of Fergus Falls until he felt sleepy, after which he went home and to bed. At the inquest his mother testified that he had come home no later than 9 P.M. The boy told a reporter from the *Fergus Falls Journal* that on Sunday morning he and his older brother, Anderson, had decided to walk to Wadena and there seek work as woodsmen. The lumberjack's calling, however, had proved disappointing at close hand, and they then determined to look for work in Dakota. This meant going home again to tell their parents. After tramping from Wadena to Alexandria, they had hopped a freight train to Fergus Falls and were preparing to go west when the sheriff arrived.

His relations with Rosetta, Adelbert declared, had been much exaggerated. "I liked her well enough," he admitted, "but if there was any infatuation it was on her side, not mine." He took her skating once and occasionally helped her fix things. In other company, he admitted to the sheriff, he had defended the woman against criticism; himself rather an outcast on returning from prison, the boy sympathized with a fellow sufferer and disliked seeing someone kicked when down. When he began to hear rumors that Rosetta was not a person of good moral character, he decided not to see her again. "I did not want to be laughed at for going with anybody like her," said this caste-conscious convict, "and you have got to be careful who you get in with."³

Mere denials were not enough, and Adelbert Goheen remained a captive while the police investigated further and the case moved inexorably through the ordinary course of criminal procedure. As soon as he

³ March 30, 1891.



ADELBERT Goheen

realized that his naked word could not accomplish his release, Goheen asked the district court to assign the law firm of Mason and Hilton to represent him. This was done.

DURING THE early part of the investigation young Goheen found himself in the uncomfortable position of sole suspect mainly because he seemed the only man who knew the poor wanderer. As evidence accumulated, however, it began to appear that Adelbert's conduct did, indeed, justify some suspicion.

His story of a trip to Wadena was an outright fabrication. When Goheen left Fergus Falls, he had told his mother that he was going to Fargo. When questioned by the reporter, he said that he went to Wadena and Alexandria. He was actually seen in the township of Woodside east of Fergus Falls during his whole week away from home.

It also appeared that on Saturday, March 21, Rosetta had left a friend's house, saying that she was going to meet Adelbert at 7 P.M.

About that time a witness had seen Adelbert striding rapidly down the street. This information made less plausible Goheen's assertion that he had not seen Rosetta and that he walked alone until 9 P.M.

As a result of this evidence Goheen was indicted by the grand jury on May 11 for first degree murder. He entered a plea of not guilty, and his trial was set for May 18. The day was awaited with suspense in Fergus Falls, for, as the *Daily Journal* observed with a swelling of local pride, "whether Goheen is convicted or not the public may be sure of witnessing what one cold-blooded attorney terms 'the prettiest murder trial that has ever been seen in the state of Minnesota.'" ⁴

The network of evidence brought to the jury's attention by County Attorney M. J. Daly, assisted by Moses E. Clapp, attorney general of Minnesota, was far tighter than the defense anticipated. The railroad workman began by telling how he found Rosetta Bray's body lying in the snow. Two doctors followed, describing the wounds which the woman sustained, and adding that her body had bruises and scratches which indicated she had put up a struggle. In performing the autopsy the surgeons had sawed off the top of Rosetta's skull, and this grim bit of evidence, together with the bullet found in it, reposed in court as an exhibit throughout the trial.

Rosetta had become acquainted with the Goheen family when she rented a room in their house for a brief time the previous summer, and, according to witnesses, she met Adelbert shortly after his release from prison in January. By February 1 Goheen was interested enough to ask the lawyer who had represented him in the grand larceny charge — a man with the euphonious name of Prince Honeycutte — if he thought Rosetta would make a good wife. Honeycutte answered that he thought she would. Goheen was concerned about Rosetta's local reputation but was reassured when told that loose talk circulated about any woman. Curiously, Rosetta had earlier asked Honeycutte his opinion of Adelbert and also had received

a favorable reply. The lawyer admitted trying to act as a matchmaker.

The acquaintance had prospered. Rosetta gave Adelbert the keys to her room and he apparently used them. "I went to her door once and found the door locked," the building owner said, "and after she opened it I saw her and Goheen there." It was explained that the young man had called only to help Rosetta fix a stovepipe.⁵

Rosetta also visited Adelbert. Whenever his family went out, Adelbert would step outside the house, and on this signal Rosetta would appear. Thus the romance between these two people on society's fringes blossomed and flourished. During its progress no one saw either in the company of another. As events came to a climax Rosetta confided to Mrs. Honeycutte that "she had him all solid now and asked if the wedding could be held at my house."⁶

Something was troubling the woman, however. Perhaps her proposed spouse revealed signs of balkiness. The police chief reported that "On March 18 I got a note from her saying she wanted to see me on important business," but Rosetta never appeared. Three days later she was dead and the important business remains forever unknown.⁷

ON SATURDAY, March 21, her acquaintances found Rosetta depressed. She had had words with her fellow, she said; and turning abruptly to a friend, "she asked me what I would think if a man thought so much of me that he told me he would shoot me if I looked or spoke to another man; and that she told him, the last time he said that, that she would meet him at any place and see if he would do the shooting." The friend remembered the question vividly when it became known that Rosetta had been shot.⁸

That evening Rosetta had dined with Mrs. Honeycutte, who had observed that her

⁴ May 19, 1891.

⁵ March 26, 30, April 2, 1891.

⁶ April 3, 1891.

⁷ March 26, 1891.

⁸ April 2, 1891.

guest was uneasy. At 7 P.M. she left the Honeycutte residence and "seemed to regret having to leave; she said she had to meet this party at 7." She then added, "You know who I mean by a party." Mrs. Honeycutte explained to the jury that Goheen was usually referred to as "this party" because he disliked having his real name mentioned. As Rosetta left the house, she said she would probably return at 8:30 or 9 P.M.⁹

A few moments later a witness saw Rosetta walking down the street, obviously in a state of agitation. At about the same time another person saw Adelbert Goheen walking briskly on a different street, wearing a black suit and a derby hat but no overcoat.

Nearly two hours later, at 9 P.M., a family living near the Great Northern railroad tracks saw a tall man, wearing a high-crowned hat but without an overcoat, strolling with a short woman. The man seemed to be persuading the woman to walk along the tracks, and the two finally turned in that direction. It was a bright, moonlit night.

Two pistol shots broke the stillness. A short time afterward another witness heard someone running and in a moment saw a slender young man in dark clothes, a dark hat, and without an overcoat, coming rapidly along the tracks.

Rosetta did not return to the Honeycutte house.

On Tuesday, March 24, Adelbert Goheen stopped at a farmhouse for breakfast. When he departed, he gave one of his hosts a yellow handkerchief which a witness at the trial identified as the property of Rosetta Bray. Later the same day Goheen was observed in the vicinity of Woodside, where he stayed until Friday, March 27. On March 25 he tried to get rid of a .38 caliber revolver by trading it for something else. The person with whom Goheen stayed on the night of the 26th remembered that the boy was nervous and upset and stated that he went outside, fired a

revolver, came inside, and tossed and turned all night, muttering in his sleep, "I am sorry for you, but I can't help it now." In the morning he asked if his host had heard anything about a girl being frozen to death at Fergus Falls, and later that day he managed to find the *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal*. A witness who recalled how avidly the young man read the newspaper re-enacted that scene for the jury: "he turned it hastily, glancing at the first and last pages; on the last page he read an article, drew a long breath, and made as if to go out-of-doors."¹⁰

Had Goheen examined the paper more carefully he might have noticed an eight-line item inserted at the last minute on an inside page. It stated that a bullet found in the woman's body "may have been the cause of death instead of freezing as at first supposed." Perhaps this would have caused him to think twice before returning home on March 29.

Probably the most insulting blow, in Goheen's eyes, was the calling as a witness for the prosecution of one William Bowmaster, who had served time with Adelbert at Stillwater. Bowmaster had visited Goheen in the county jail, where Goheen told his old associate that "he was out with a girl and got caught at it; and the same night the girl was killed." Then, Bowmaster testified, "he asked Goheen if he had killed the girl, and Goheen looked around to see if the jailer was looking, but said nothing. All he did was to wink his eye." At this young Goheen made his only demonstration in court. Leaping to his feet, he raised his fist and snarled at the witness, "You are a lying cur, Bowmaster!"¹¹

Other witnesses concluded the state's case by showing that Goheen owned a five-shot .38 caliber revolver, and that throughout Sunday, March 22, and Monday, March 23, no footprints had appeared in the snow leading in or out of the building in which Rosetta Bray lived. The building owner had gone to her room when he heard of her death and found no evidence that she had ever returned to it; a small oil lamp, apparently lighted before she left, was still burning.

⁹ April 3, May 20, 1891.

¹⁰ May 20, 1891.

¹¹ May 20, 1891.

THE DEFENSE offered little evidence to counter that introduced by the prosecution. Adelbert did not testify in his own behalf. His mother and his brother, Anderson, said that Adelbert was in bed by 8:30 P.M. on the night that Rosetta was killed, while his father insisted that as her former landlord, he knew Rosetta entertained many men in her room. She could, he suggested, have been involved with any one of them. A friend of Adelbert testified that his departure on Sunday, March 22, was not abrupt, but planned, since on the morning of March 21 he said that he expected to go away soon. This statement, however, was of doubtful value to the defense, since it could also be used by the prosecution to show premeditation.

In conclusion, counsel for Goheen tried to argue that since Rosetta's lamp was still burning on Monday, and snow was still blowing, although not falling, some other person could easily have killed the woman after Adelbert left the city. The county attorney contented himself with outlining the reasonable chain of circumstantial evidence developed through prosecution testimony and pointing out that no one had even hinted at another possible murderer. The state had uncovered no motive, but motive is not essential in proving the crime of murder.

On May 21, two months after Rosetta Bray's death, the jury brought in its verdict: "guilty as charged in the indictment." Goheen was the least affected of those present. To the jailkeeper he only muttered, "I don't give a damn."¹²

Two days later, however, when he appeared in court for sentencing, the young man had lost his bravado. He had a desperate, hunted look, as if he at last realized what had happened to him. When asked the usual question before sentence was pronounced, he sullenly replied, "I have nothing to say that would do me any good." In the ancient formula of British law the judge accordingly sentenced young Adelbert Goheen to "be hanged by the neck until you are dead — and may God have mercy on your soul."¹³

THE PRISONER now paced his narrow quarters, raged at his captors and at his family, whom he accused of being niggardly in providing money for his defense and in not getting him a good enough lawyer, and waited impatiently for deliverance by any means — by appeal, argument, plot, or force.

When not causing a disturbance in the jail, the boy turned to writing verse of a sort. One day he unexpectedly presented the following lyrics to Sheriff Billings:

Oh, my poor Rose Bray
They have murdered you, they say,
And again on earth we'll meet no more.
They have taken her out to Maine
Buried her on her brother's claim,
Where she rests, free from care and woe.

And as she sleeps beneath the sod,
Her murderer goes free,
Probably haunted by his bloody act
And suspected not by weak humanity.

An innocent man is doomed to suffer,
For this villain's bloody work.
Oh, God, how long will it be, I wonder,
Before the truth comes out?

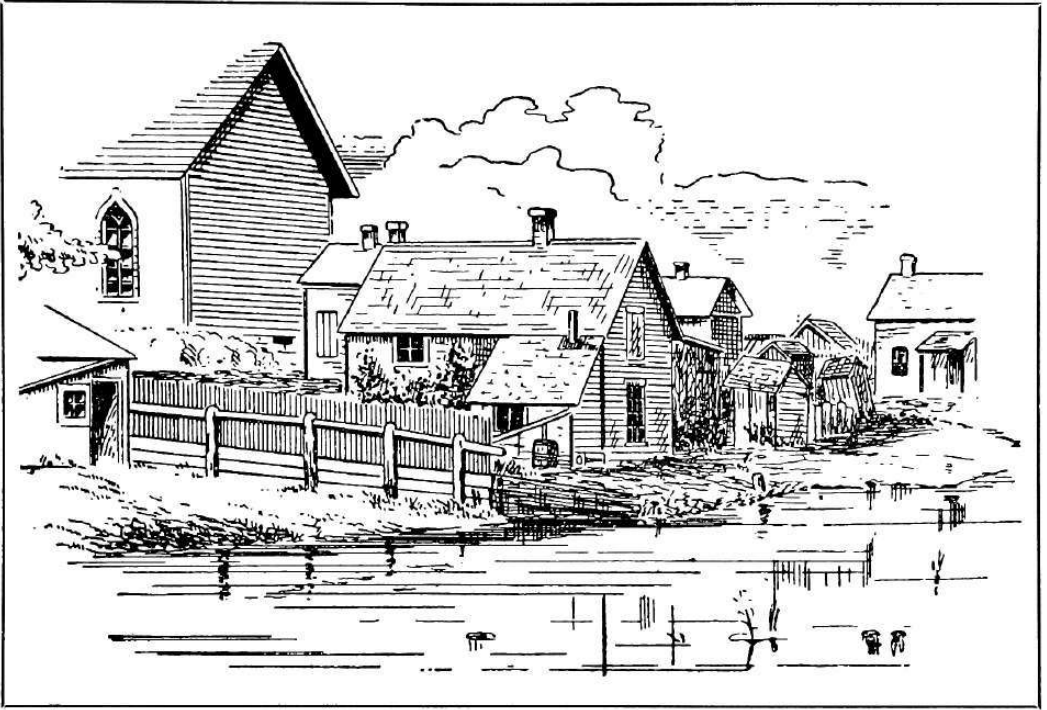
Until the assassin who fired the bullets
That sent her to an untimely grave
Confesses of his awful guilt
And the doomed one — the lost — is saved.¹⁴

But Goheen's ingenuity soon found a more forceful outlet than verses declaiming his innocence. One day — when a petition to commute his sentence had already reached Governor William R. Merriam — the prisoner dramatically called together his lawyers, Sheriff Billings, and County Attorney Daly and told them in confidence that he could no longer withhold a revelation: Anderson Goheen, his brother, was the real murderer of Rosetta Bray. Anderson, Adelbert said, had wanted the latter to go away with him and when Adelbert refused had said that he supposed Rosetta, whom he called worthless, was the reason. Adelbert

¹² May 21, 1891.

¹³ May 23, 1891.

¹⁴ August 7, 1891. Maine is a rural township near Fergus Falls.



THE Goheen family residence in Fergus Falls

retorted that she was hardly worthless, inasmuch as she had money and carried it with her. This seemed to arouse Anderson. On Saturday night, March 21, Adelbert pretended to fall asleep and saw his brother rise quietly, dress, and go out. Adelbert followed. Anderson went to Rosetta's room and induced her to walk to the railroad tracks with him. There, as Adelbert watched, Anderson drew his revolver and fired twice at the woman, who fell immediately. Anderson then took her money, dragged the body from the tracks to a nearby spot, and kicked snow over it. Adelbert ran home and was in bed when his brother returned.

The sheriff acted swiftly on this astonishing information. Anderson Goheen was arrested at Moorhead on August 7, as he sat in a barber's chair being shaved. Telling the barber to continue, he quietly listened to the razor scrape as Sheriff Billings read him the warrant for his arrest.

¹⁵ August 7, August 26, 1891.

¹⁶ October 23, 1891.

Anderson showed no temper, did not speak harshly of Adelbert, and made no counter-accusations. Of Rosetta he said contemptuously that "she was an abandoned woman and that he would not have soiled his pistol bullets by shooting at her, even if he wanted to kill anybody." Soon he was lodged in the same jail with Adelbert, and the brothers' reunion may have been somewhat frigid.¹⁵

After exploding this bomb, Adelbert dissipated its effect by refusing to testify, and when on interrogation he could corroborate nothing, could remember no names, and could show no instance of Anderson's having associated with Rosetta, it was obvious that the accusation was false and only a desperate ruse for delay. Anderson was released. When Adelbert was asked if he would like to see his brother, he could only growl, "Not unless I can have a revolver to shoot the ——,"¹⁶

A few days after Anderson's release Mrs. Goheen visited Adelbert at the jail. Seeing her put a fifty-cent piece down and then pick it up, the authorities suspected that she had

palmed a message, and, as she left the jail, found this to be true and confiscated a note. It was long, involved, and curious. Adelbert asked his mother and his brother, Anderson, to arm themselves, come to the jail, and set him free. The note read further, "I never harmed a hair of Rose Bray's head, and you know it too well. . . . Anderson killed her, and I believe you told him to do it. That is why I said you was the cause of it all that Sunday night just before I started off."¹⁷

IT IS impossible to say whether Adelbert Goheen meant these accusations or had any basis for them. His two attempts to implicate his brother, however, proved disastrous to him. At the very moment when it looked as if the governor would agree to commute the death sentence, following the recommendations of both the attorney general and the county attorney, news came of Adelbert's efforts to involve apparently innocent people. Instead of exercising clemency, therefore, Merriam abruptly ordered the sheriff to carry out the sentence on Friday, October 23. When he heard this, Goheen's presumably unprintable comment was, "The —— republican ——. He's going to hang me, is he?"¹⁸

As his execution day came closer, Goheen never lost hope that he could either escape or succeed in fixing responsibility for the crime upon Anderson. His brother's supposed guilt had become an obsession. Adelbert went so far as to disguise his handwriting and try to send to the chief of police a confession signed with Anderson's name. When this was found and confiscated like the other notes, it only alienated persons otherwise sympathetic.

Goheen continued to exercise his literary talents on the subject closest to him, and the following ballad, entitled by its author "The Finding of Rose Bray," is one of the fruits of his latter-day solitude:

The moon shone down on the Great Northern
 track
 Where the body of a woman lay on her back,
 Upon the white snow, cold in death,
 And the bullets in her body told the rest.

A man passing by on the Great Northern track
 To finish some work once delayed
 Chanced to look o'er the snow-white ground
 And there this pale corpse he espied.

Into the town the body was brought
 The news it faster and faster did spread
 "Who is she?" "Who shot her?" was on every
 tongue
 And the cry went up, "A woman found dead."

A post mortem examination upon her was held
 And a crowd viewed the remains all the day
 Until someone more observing than the rest
 Informed us it was that of Rose Bray.

With a marble slab at her head and feet,
 They buried her decent, without slack,
 And this is the end of the woman killed
 Who was found by the Great Northern track.¹⁹

In making the townspeople ask "Who shot her?" somewhat prematurely, the author must have forgotten that Rosetta's bullet wounds were discovered by accident and were not meant to be discovered at all.

TIME NOW sped by. The *Journal* regaled Fergus Falls citizens with every detail of the preparations for the hanging. On October 14 carpenters began to build the trap; two ropes with already tied hangman's knots arrived from Chicago; and Sheriff Billings, who although an experienced law enforcement officer was a novice as a hangman, left for Redwood Falls to watch a hanging scheduled there on October 16.²⁰

The sheriff's visit did not bring him the enlightenment he hoped; in fact, the execution was scandalously bungled. As the *Fergus Falls Journal* reported it grimly, on October 17: "The trap was sprung. There was a dull crash and the rope parted square in two[,] three feet above the neck of the condemned man." Although the drop did

¹⁷ October 22, 1891.

¹⁸ October 23, 1891.

¹⁹ October 19, 1891.

²⁰ October 19, 1891. The law at that time required the sheriff to conduct hangings. This was only the second legal execution to take place in Otter Tail County, the first having occurred in 1888. See John W. Mason, ed., *History of Otter Tail County*, 1:148 (Indianapolis, 1916).

break the victim's neck, it was necessary to get another rope and hang him again. Goheen, who knew that Sheriff Billings had attended the execution, was eager for all details, and the sheriff, concerned about his own preparations and his prisoner's morale, must have had difficulty editing his account.

October 22, the day before his execution, was a busy one for young Adelbert. He began by making a statement accusing his mother and his brother, Anderson, of a long list of crimes. This account may have had some substance, since it knowingly discussed a number of unsolved crimes.

Later, his mother and another brother visited him. Mrs. Goheen, saying, "So you say I'm to blame for it all," admitted that she had not brought up her eight sons as she should have, but asked Adelbert to understand.²¹ When she left the jail, Goheen threw himself on his bed and sobbed. Before the day ended he made another statement in which he expressed sorrow that he had continually attacked his mother and Anderson; but he did not admit that he had killed Rosetta Bray.

A few days earlier Sheriff Billings had allowed Goheen his accordion, for this prisoner of literary tastes also had musical longings and in asking for the instrument had said, "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, and it's music we want now."²² The accordion was the companion of his last hours.

The law required executions to take place between midnight and morning, in order to avoid daytime crowds and scenes, and the prisoner himself had requested that the time be set early. From dinner until midnight, interrupted only by an 11 P.M. snack of oysters, Goheen sat with his jailers awaiting the hour of his death, smoking cigars, saying nothing, lost in who knows what speculations on the unknown which he was so soon to face. Quietly he played "Rock of Ages," "Sweet Bye and Bye," and other religious tunes. There was no other sound.

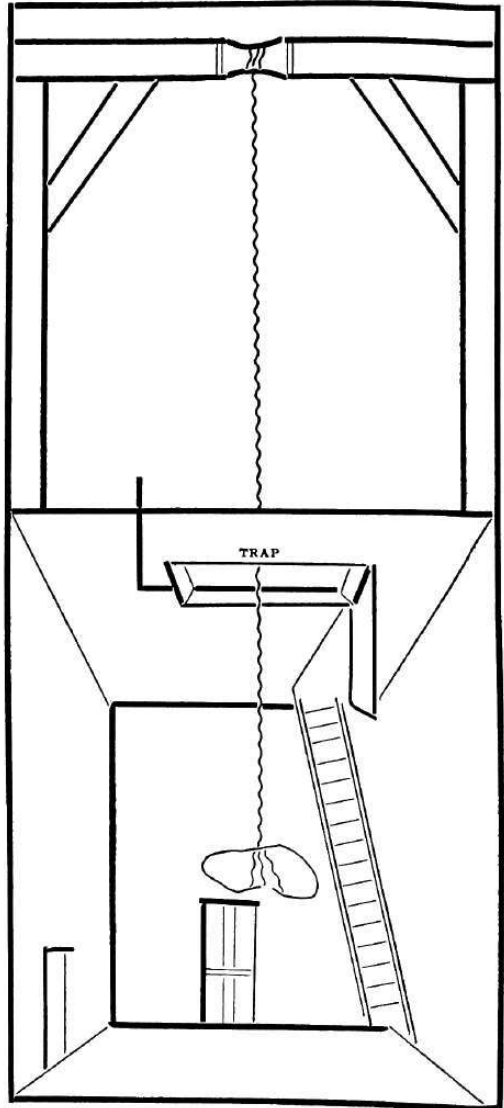
²¹ October 22, 1891.

²² October 19, 1891.

²³ October 23, 1891.

When the last strains of music died away, the young man, who had reached the age of twenty-one in the prison which he was never to leave, put down his accordion, rose, climbed the stairs to the second floor, calmly put on the black robe and cap, and took his place on the drop. Asked if he had anything to say, he replied, "No; but I'll show these gentlemen how a man can die." In a moment he called to the sheriff from under the black cap, "Let her go, Jack; good bye."²³ The trap

THE gallows on which Goheen was hung as pictured in the Fergus Falls newspaper



was sprung. Goheen fell six feet. He twitched slightly and was still. After forty-five minutes his body was cut down and placed in a coffin. Observers noted that his features were natural and peaceful. Later that day he was buried in the Catholic churchyard.

YOUNG GOHEEN'S conviction was based on circumstantial evidence, as are convictions of most murderers, since few are obliging enough to perform in view of an audience. The law requires such evidence to point unerringly to the defendant's guilt and to exclude any reasonable hypothesis of innocence. Goheen's attorneys apparently did not even recommend an appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court. This is one of the rare murder convictions in which such an appeal was not taken as a matter of course. The defendant himself ruined all efforts to secure a commutation of his sentence. As determined through customary judicial process, his guilt is unquestioned. The case is not, however, without its elements of mystery. What were Rosetta Bray's relations with the Goheen family? Why should Adelbert accuse his mother of wanting Rosetta killed? Why did Anderson Goheen perjure himself at Adelbert's trial? Did he really know all the particulars of the crime? What important information did Rosetta want to give the police? What was the meaning of Rosetta's curious question on the afternoon of her death? Why did she set out for her rendezvous with trepidation? Had she dared Adelbert to kill her for relations with some other man? Was she in fact leading a promiscuous life and oppressed with guilt feelings as she set out to meet the man she wished to marry?

These questions will never be answered, but they inevitably lead anyone who reads about this crime to wonder what lay behind it. The Bray murder is a "whydoit" and not a "whodunit." The investigation never brought out a motive, and this is a curiosity of the case, for it normally takes long acquaintance and extraordinary pressure to produce an urge to kill which cannot be resisted.

Despite the shades of doubt, however,

speculation eventually ceased, and the case was forgotten, in Fergus Falls as elsewhere. The only account now available of the events that made Adelbert Goheen and Rosetta Bray so well known to their contemporaries is to be found in the pages of old newspapers and in the dusty files of district court records.²⁴

Historians have dealt apologetically, if at all, with occurrences of this kind, as though they had no claim to be called history. The Bray murder was but one among many such violent episodes in Minnesota's past, which is as rich in annals of crime as in chronicles of gentility. History tends to stress reason and control in society, but experience shows that unreason and impulse are equally powerful forces in moving humanity. The crime of Adelbert Goheen furnishes an example of that darker side of human character which seldom finds its way into accounts of Minnesota life.

²⁴ Also a complete transcript of the trial was preserved among Governor Merriam's official papers and may be found in file no. 617, Governor's Collection, in the Minnesota State Archives.

ALL PICTURES are from the *Fergus Falls Daily Journal* of October 23, 1891. The portraits on pages 12 and 13 were sketched by Celine Charpentier from photographs reproduced in the newspaper.

Memorials

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY has a Memorial Fund to which contributions can be made upon the loss of a relative or friend. Such gifts not only serve as appropriate expressions of sympathy and condolence, but they help to support work that is a fitting memorial to any Minnesotan.

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Send your contribution to the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul 1, Minnesota, along with your name, the name of the person to receive the card, and the name of the person in whose memory the contribution is given.



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