

Minnie McLeod Helmsen

(- 20 Aug 1888)

Helmsen. Minnie McLeod, wife of Charles J. Helmsen, suddenly on August 20, 1888 of heart disease. Funeral from Eastern Presbyterian church on Wednesday, the 22nd at 4 o'clock p.m.

The Evening Star, August 23, 1888

Mrs. Helmsen's Death

Investigated by a Coroner's Jury

No Testimony to Sustain the Charge of Criminal Malpractice

Mrs. Minnie McLeod Helmsen, wife of Mr. Charles Helmsen, who sometime ago kept a drug store corner of 8th and H streets northeast, died suddenly Monday night, and her funeral was announced to take place at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon from the Eastern Presbyterian church. At the appointed hour the church was filled with friends of the deceased, but the funeral procession did not arrive. The delay was caused by Coroner Patterson, who had been called in to investigate the suspicious circumstances attending the death, which occurred, it was reported to him, about 9 o'clock Monday night, at the house of Joanna Powalky Monikheim, a midwife, whose residence is No. 1405 H street northeast, just three squares from the former home of the deceased -- No. 1023 H street. The body was removed, it was alleged, from the place where she died, in a grocery wagon, to her late home. Such a removal of the body would be in violation of law, as no permit for such removal had been issued from the health office. The certificate filed at the health office gave the facts of the death as follows: Name of deceased, Minnie McLeod Helmsen; date of death, August 20, 1888; age of deceased, 28 years, 6 months, 17 days; social condition and occupation, white, married; birthplace Pr. E. island, B.A.; how long a resident in District of Columbia, 12 years; duration of last sickness, a few months; cause of death, disease of heart; place of death, No. 1023 H st. n.e.; place of burial, Congressional cemetery; medical attendant, R.D. Del. French, M.D.; undertaker, John R. Wright.

Death Caused By Abortion

The coroner arrived at the house of the deceased some minutes before the funeral was to take place and with the assistance of Drs. Hartigan, French and Tyler, made an autopsy. The examination revealed the fact that death had been caused by an abortion performed probably on the night of her death, and it was decided to hold an inquest. Officer George R.F. Smith was then ordered to summon a jury of inquest. He summoned the following citizens: Neil Reagan, Alie Brooks, James Nally, Thomas Betts, Floyd Hunter, and Norman F. Hines. The jury was then escorted to the house of the deceased, where they viewed the body and it was then turned over to the family for burial.

The Funeral Services

It was nearly 5 o'clock when the remains reached the Eastern Presbyterian church. The services were conducted by the Rev. Mr. Bradford, assisted by the Rev. Mr. Smith. The latter spoke in flattering terms of the life of the deceased and of her sad history. After the services were concluded the body was interred in the Congressional Cemetery. The deceased was well and favorably known in East Washington. Seven years ago she was married to Charles Helmsen and has given birth to three children, all of whom are living. She married him in Baltimore against the protest of her parents. Some months ago she separated from her husband, but he has since visited her at her mother's house, where she lived with her children.

The Inquest

This morning at 11:30 o'clock the jury assembled in the sixth precinct station to hear the testimony of witnesses.

Dr. Hartigan testified that he was present at the autopsy yesterday afternoon, and stated that the result of the examination of the body showed that there had been an abortion or miscarriage which had been the probable cause of death. There was a flabby appearance of the heart, but witness did not think that that contributed to cause death, but was the result of the loss of considerable blood. Dr. R.D. Del. French gave similar testimony.

Mrs. Joanna Powalky Monitheim, No. 1405 H street northeast, testified that about a week ago, Tuesday, Mrs. Helmsen came to her house about 9 o'clock in the evening. Witness was sick at that time, and had retired. Witness told her that she (witness) was sick and could see no one. Mrs. Helmsen then begged her to hear her story, and she consented to do so. Mrs. Helmsen then told her how mean her husband treated her, and she seemed very much excited. Witness told her to come in the day time. She called to see witness the next evening, and told her that she (Mrs. Helmsen) felt very sick; that she was not pregnant. Witness told her to take something to act on her bowels, but witness did not tell her what to get, nor did she give her anything. Witness gave her an injection of ten drops of carbolic acid in a quart of water. She repeated this four or five evenings. Monday night when Mrs. Helmsen called at her house she (witness) did not treat her. She was not in her house more than five minutes before she complained of feeling bad. She said she thought she was about to faint, and she died in three or four minutes. Mrs. Helmsen's mother was in the room and witness told her to go for a doctor.

When questioned by the coroner witness said that Mrs. McLeod, the mother of the deceased, was with her until her daughter complained of feeling faint, and then witness told her (Mrs. Helmsen) to go into the back room and sit on the sofa. She did not remember whether Mrs. Helmsen's mother was ever with her before Monday night or not.

Charles J. Helmsen, husband of the deceased, was called as a witness. He knew nothing of the circumstances attending the death of his wife.

James M. Jarvis, corner 15th and Gales streets northeast, testified that the deceased was in his drug store about half an hour before her death, and he gave her some powders for a baby which she carried in her arms. He gave her no medicine for herself.

Mrs. McLeod, mother of the deceased, was summoned as a witness, but as she was very nervous and did not feel well, Dr. Patterson took her deposition, which was substantially the same as the evidence given by the midwife, Mrs. Monikheim.

The Verdict

The jury, after half an hour's deliberation, returned the following verdict: "That the said Minnie McLeod Helmsen came to her death about 8 o'clock August 20, 1888 from a miscarriage, but whether it was the result of criminal malpractice or not we are unable to say."