

Willie Russell **(- 8 Apr 1887)**

The Evening Star, April 8, 1887

Shot Dead By A Playmate Willie Russell Accidentally Killed By Harry Adams The Boys Were Examining a Pistol, When It Was Discharged And The Bullet Passed Through Young Russell's Heart

This morning, about 11 o'clock, in the house of Mrs. S. Sanders, No. 404 6th street southwest, W. Russell, and 14-year-old stepson of Gen. F. Wheaton of New Orleans, was shot through the heart and killed by a companion about the same age, named Harry Adams, the grandson of the Rev. Mr. Phillips of East Washington.

About 10 o'clock this morning young Adams called at Gen. Wheaton's office under the National Hotel, and asked him to allow Willie to go out and play with him. Gen. Wheaton consented, and the two boys played together until near 11 o'clock when they went to Mrs. Sanders house, where Mr. Wheaton and his stepson occupied a room. They entered the basement door and had walked upstairs to the first landing. They were examining a small "Rob Roy," 22-caliber revolver, when the weapon was accidentally discharged, the bullet passing through Willie Russell's heart. After the shot was fired, the injured boy picked up the weapon which his frightened playmate had dropped on the floor, and put it in his pocket. He started to the door, but returned and ran to Mrs. Riever's, who caught him in her arms. "I'm shot," said the little fellow, as he placed his hand on his breast over the heart, where the bullet had entered, and a minute or two later he expired. The boy who accidentally discharged the weapon ran to Gen. Wheaton's office, and told him that he had accidentally shot Willie. Gen. Wheaton hurried home and hastily sent for a physician. Drs. Chamberlin and Marsteller were summoned, but the wounded boy died before they reached the house.

Before he died, young Russell stated that the shooting was purely accidental. After notifying Russell's step-father Adams went to his home on New Jersey avenue southeast, where he was found by Officer Breen. He was terribly excited and overcome with grief. He handed to the officer a pearl-handled revolver, from which he said the fatal shot was fired. He said Adams and he got their revolvers and were going out in the country to shoot. When they entered Russell's house he (Adams) snapped his revolver while showing it to his companion, and did not know it was loaded. He was taken in charge by the police.

The revolver taken from Russell's pocket after he died was found to be loaded, but had not been fired. Coroner Patterson was notified, and Adams will be held until the case is investigated.

The Evening Star, April 9, 1887

Willie Russell's Death A Coroner's Jury Render a Verdict of Accidental Shooting--A Tearful Scene at the Inquest

Coroner Patterson this morning held an inquest at Lee's undertaking establishment, 332 Pennsylvania avenue, over the remains of Willie Russell, the 14 year old stepson of Gen. F. Wheaton, of New Orleans, who, as stated in yesterday's Star, was shot through the heart and killed by a companion, Harry Adams, eleven years old, the grandson of the Rev. Mr. Phillips, 401 New Jersey avenue southeast. The following jury were summoned: Robert Hoy, W.R. Bryant, W.C. Cox, Edward Flaherty, John Barnes, and Charles Polkinghorn.

The Testimony

The first witness was Miss Mary Smith, who resides at 404 6th street southeast, where the shooting occurred. She stated that about 11 o'clock yesterday morning she heard a pistol shot in the hallway; the door of her room was open and she stepped out and saw smoke and two little boys, both of whom were near the front hall door. One fell on his knee and said he was shot, and at the same time he put a pistol, which he held in his hand, in his pocket. To the question of what was the matter, the other boy said that they were playing with the pistols and one was accidentally discharged. At the same time he came toward her, and the boy who was shot rose from his knees and followed saying: "Yes, it was accidental." He then staggered, and the first boy caught him in his arms, and then he fell to the floor. He lived but a short time, his stepfather arriving just before his death.

Miss Josephine Winston, a colored girl, living in the house, testified that she was down stairs in the kitchen, and when she heard the pistol shot she ran upstairs and when she got in the hall she heard Willie Russell say "I'm shot." She also heard him say that he was shot accidentally. She was told to go out and get a police officer, and Harry Adams ran out to tell Willie's father. When Harry returned, some time afterwards, with an officer, he was crying, and said that the deceased was his best friend.

Harry Adams' Story

Harry Adams was then questioned, and although at times his voice was choked with emotion, he told his story in a straightforward, manly way. He is a bright-looking boy, and his mother, who stood by his side, with a handkerchief covering his eyes, while he told his story, said that he was only eleven years of age. Harry said: "Will and I were playing together, and Will went up to the house to see his pistol and I went along. When I got there I wanted to show my pistol to Will, and when I took it out of my pocket it went off. It must have become cocked in my pocket, I don't know how and it went off without my knowing it. When Will was shot I asked the ladies in the house if they wanted me to go after Mr. Wheaton, and I went to his office and told him, and then I said that I could not stand it and went home." In reply to a question, he said he meant that he felt so badly. He said that they did not intend to go out into the country. They went up to the house to see the pistols. His uncle had given him the pistol several weeks ago.

Mrs. Adams said that she never knew Harry to carry the pistol. His uncle had given it to him as a pretty toy some time ago, and she had the loads withdrawn and had laid it away. She did not know that Harry had taken it. In reply to a question Harry said that he had loaded the pistol himself that morning.

Miss Cleo Smith, who lives in the house where the shooting occurred, corroborated the facts of the shooting as given by the other witnesses.

No further witnesses were called. Gen. Wheaton accompanied by ex-Representative R. John Ellis and the father of Mrs. Adams, and others were present, but as they knew nothing further than the facts already before the jury they were not examined.

The Verdict.

The jury rendered the following verdict: "That the said Willie Russell came to his death from a pistol shot wound in the left chest inflicted with a pistol held in the hands of Harry Adams, aged 11 years. From the evidence we believe the shooting to have been purely accidental, and without malice or intent to do bodily harm."