

William M. Steele

(- 12 Jun 1905)

Steele. Suddenly, on Monday, June 12, 1905, William M. Steele, the beloved husband of Florence M. and eldest son of Mary E. and Henry F. Steele, in his twenty-eighth year.

My heart is sad and lonely,
My grief too deep to fell;
But time will come when we will meet
And all to you I'll tell.
By His Loving Wife

Dear Willie, could you speak to me
And could you live again.
My aching heart would then be healed,
But this I wish in vain.
By Mamma and Papa

Brother's languishing head is at rest,
Its thinking and aching are o'er;
This quiet unmovable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more.
By Brothers and Sisters

Funeral from his parents' residence, 1365 K street southeast, Wednesday, June 14, at 2 p.m., thence to Bradburn M.E. Church. Friends and relatives invited to attend. Formerly a member of Company I, 1st District of Columbia Volunteers; members respectfully invited to attend.

The Evening Star, June 12, 1905, p. 16

Killed His Guest

Old Naylor Mansion Scene of Homicide

Shotgun Used

Alleged Murderer Attempted to Make His Escape

Party of Four Said to Have Imbibed Freely of Beer and Some Became Quarrelsome

The old Naylor mansion in the woods some distance back of Overlook Inn was the scene of a homicide yesterday afternoon about 3 o'clock. William Pruitt, a tinner, who occupied the mansion, shot and fatally wounded William Steele, a guest, and was arrested by Policeman McCormick an hour later. His victim, who received a load of shot in his stomach, and whose right hand was almost shot off, died at the Washington Asylum Hospital this morning about 9 o'clock. Coroner Nevitt made a partial investigation of the affair and decided to hold an inquest at the morgue at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Steele accepted Pruitt's invitation to visit him yesterday afternoon and indulge in some liquid refreshments. A neighbor of Steele's named Chiseltine was also invited and was there at the time Pruitt used his shotgun to take the life of Steele. Mr. and Mrs. Pruitt, their son and the two guests composed the party. When the police reached the house they found what was left of a big keg of beer. About 100

years from the house they found the partly conspicuous form of Steele lying in the bushes, while Mrs. Pruitt, her son and Chiseltine were about the house.

Nobody was found who seemed to know or would tell where Pruitt had gone, and the police feared they would have some trouble in locating him. Sergeant Anderson, who had conducted a successful pursuit in a shooting case only a few days ago was upon the scene in a short time. He had just reached the Anacostia station when word was received that a man had been killed in the woods on the Naylor estate. Mounting his thoroughbred, he went off in the direction of the scene of the shooting as fast as the animal could carry him, and all the men at his command were summoned and sent in various directions. The sergeant also enlisted the services of a number of persons who were about the woods and made an offer of a reward of \$25 for his capture. In a remarkably short time he had nearly a hundred persons engaged in the pursuit. So dense was the undergrowth that the horses were unable to make their way through the woods in places, and the intense heat made it difficult for the footmen to stick to the work. Finally Policeman McCormick came upon him in a clump of bushes on the top of a gravel bank about 100 yards from the house. Policemen Dyer and Weber reached the top of the gravel bank about the time the slayer of Steele was found and assisted in escorting the prisoner to the house, where he was placed in the patrol wagon.

Used Much of the Beer

When the man had been arrested Sergt. Anderson spent some time making an investigation of the affair. He found that all the persons who had been at the house during the afternoon had patronized the contents of the beer keg, and said they showed the effects of what they had taken.

"He kicked up a disturbance in the house," was the explanation of the shooting as given to the sergeant.

Several statements were made as to the origin of the trouble, but the sergeant was unable to learn anything definite from those who were at the house. This morning when Pruitt reached police headquarters to be measured and photographed he told Sergt. Anderson that the trouble dated back to the time that he lived in Maryland, on the Wheeler road. At that time, he said, Steele and others came upon his place gunning and he had trouble with them. Yesterday, he stated, Steele recalled that affair and he went upstairs and got his gun. When he reached the foot of the stairs Steele grabbed the muzzle of the gun and was holding it when he (Pruitt) pulled the trigger.

Pruitt went to the woods to hide, and the wounded man started to make his way to the road, where he could get assistance. The latter lost so much blood and was so greatly weakened, however, that he soon fell and was unable to get up. Mrs. Pruitt made her way to the road near Twining City to summon assistance for the wounded man. She found a pedestrian, who communicated the information to Policeman Raedy, and it was in this way that the police learned of the shooting. The patrol wagon was sent to convey the wounded man to the hospital and the police lost no time in getting at work upon the case. When Pruitt was found he was considerably under the influence of the beer in which he had indulged, and was really not able to give a clear account of what had happened. He is a tinner by occupation and has been in the habit of doing odd jobs about the city. The police say they found every evidence of poverty about the old mansion in which the best people of the city were entertained many years ago.

"The keg of beer," remarked one of the policemen, "cost more than everything we saw in the house."

The kitchen table had been overturned, as if there had been a struggle of some kind in the room.. On the floor the police saw a piece of fat meat and some bread, the only articles of food found in the house.

The dead man was 42 years old and leaves a widow and one child. They live on the farm of James E. Thompson, in Prince George county. Steele was employed in the navy yard. Today the body of the

victim was removed from the hospital to the morgue and will be held until it has been viewed by the coroner's jury tomorrow. No arrangements for the funeral have yet been made.

The Evening Star, June 13, 1905

Must Face a Jury

William Pruitt Held by Coroner's Jury

Held Responsible for Death of William Steele--

Result of Investigation

Coroner Nevitt conducted an investigation this morning at 11 o'clock into the circumstances attending the shooting of William Steele, who died yesterday afternoon of wounds inflicted by William Pruitt at Twining City last Sunday afternoon.

The prisoner arrived at the morgue handcuffed to Officer McCormick. To a reporter of The Star Pruitt said he had no fear of the outcome of the trial. It was a case of self-defense. Steele, he said, came into his house and attacked him. He exhibited a cut over the left eye, and said he was badly hurt about the head.

Officer Raedy testified to finding Steele in a pool of blood at the old Naylor mansion. He asked him who had shot him and he said Pruitt. Asked why he did it Steele replied, "He done it for nothing." That was all he said except to urge me to hurry him to the hospital.

Officer McCormick, who with Officer Dyer caught the fugitive, was the next witness. He was off duty Sunday, and the lieutenant sent for him. He immediately started a search, and with Officers Dyer and Weber found Pruitt hiding in some bushes feigning sleep. He was promptly placed under arrest.

At the station, defendant referred to a statement made by him, in which he said:

"About 11 or 12 o'clock Sunday morning I was going over to my son's house to get a music box and on my way over I met my son Will, accompanied by William Steele, Charles Cheseldine and Robert Brown. They had a quart of whisky and asked me to have a drink. Then I told them I had a keg of beer at my house and to come and have some; so we all went to my house. We had been drinking for a while when Cheseldine said he was hungry, so I gave him something to eat. While he was eating Steele came in the door and started to fight me. I don't know whether he hit me with something or not. Then I ran up stairs into my room and got my gun and came down and shot him. He then ran out of the house and I put the gun away and went out into the woods where they found me."

He Was Very Drunk

Charles Cheseldine stated he went to the home of Pruitt very drunk and knew nothing of the affair. "When I get drunk," said the witness, "I go right to sleep and hear nothing." The sound of the gun roused him.

Mrs. Pruitt, wife of the defendant, gave some of the details of the affair. She testified to the visit of the men, one of whom was drunk and asleep in the wagon. She saw it was a hard crowd. Her son volunteered to get them away. They took Cheseldine out of the wagon and laid him under the tree. Steele objected to the playing of the music box, and said he was going to stop it. He called to her husband and said he was going to beat him. Her husband, hearing her remonstrate with Steele, came down stairs and told him he had better go away from there or he would make him. Steele then ran away. She thought the trouble was all over. He came back in a little while and burst open the door and attacked her husband, hitting him on the side of the head. He had something in his hand, Cheseldine joined the fracas, and during the scrimmage she saw the gun, but did not know where it came from or who fired it. She admitted having had a glass of beer herself, but was not drunk. The only trouble she ever heard of her husband and Steele ever having took place some months previous, when her husband ordered Steele off some property he was hunting over.

Had Been Drinking

In answer to a question from Assistant District Attorney Bingham, the witness stated Steele had been drinking, but was sober enough to know what he was doing. She rehearsed the scene in the house, how Steele burst open the door and made for her husband, and was beating him when she interfered and tried to separate them.

Robert Brown of 1401 K street northeast testified he was with Steele on the day of the shooting. They were on the way to Washington when Pruitt stopped them. They picked up Cheseldine

Removal to Hospital

Sergeant Anderson of Anacostia testified to the finding of Steele and his removal to the hospital. He also told of the finding of Pruitt. He said Mrs. Pruitt was in an intoxicated condition and could not give intelligent answers to any of his questions. Pruitt when interrogated said Steele came into his house and made a disturbance and he shot him. He would shoot any man under similar circumstances, he said. He would come out of heaven to do it and would take his chances with any twelve men on earth, he said.

Dr. David C. Coleman of the Washington Asylum Hospital testified to the treatment of Steele at the hospital last Sunday. He sent for the senior surgeon, who responded, and after operating upon the wrist which he removed the surgeon made an incision through the abdomen and carefully searched for a perforation of the stomach or intestines. He found none and the wound was closed.

Deputy Coroner Glazebrook testified to performing the autopsy. Upon opening the abdomen he found two felt wads, a piece of cloth, a number of shot and a mass of debris near the entrance of the wound near the liver. There were between three and half and four quarts of coagulated blood. He saw evidence of an operation having been performed. The man died from gunshot wound of the abdomen and hemorrhage.

Coroner Nevitt invited the accused to make a statement, but his counsel. Joseph A. Burkart, declined. The jury then retired and after a short discussion held the defendant for the action of the grand jury.