

Execution of Countryman

Countryman was indicted and tried for the murder of Sheriff Taylor at the February term of the circuit court in 1857. The prosecution was conducted by U.D. Meacham, the state's attorney, assisted by William Brown. The council for the defense was Orrin Miller and T.J. Turner. The following gentlemen constituted the jury: Levi Trunks, Phil C. Watson, Anthony M. Felmlly, Silas G. Tyler, Jacob B Place, G.R. Ames, Allen Rice, Charles Works, J.E. Jenks, Edward Peppers, J.W. Knapp, S.P. Coller.

The trial began on Monday, February 23rd. The case was given to the jury on Thursday, and Friday morning they returned a verdict of guilty. Judge Sheldon pronounce the sentence of death upon Countryman. One of his counsel, Mr. Miller, tried to obtain a stay of proceedings, so as to bring the case before the supreme court. But Judge Caton refused to grant a writ of error.

On Friday, March 27th, Countryman was executed on the farm of Sheriff Church, a short distance from the city. The execution was witnessed by eight thousand people. In the absence of a military company, the two fire companies, armed with sabres and carbines, formed a hollow square at the jail, into the center of which the carriages which were to form the procession, were driven, and as the procession moved to the place of execution the fire companies formed a strong guard.

Upon arriving at the scaffold, Rev. Hooper Crews offered an earnest prayer. The prisoner made a short speech and professed repentance and forgiveness for his crime. At seventeen minutes past two the bolt was withdrawn, and Countryman was swung into eternity. His father, sister and one brother witness the execution.

Before the body was taken down, Sheriff Church address the crowd as follows: "These painful proceedings being now concluded, and the sword of justice about to be returned to its sheath, I hope never again to be drawn into so much severity. I would thank you all for the good order you have maintained. Your conduct does credit to the city, and I hope you will observe the same decorum in retiring."

---from Past and Present of City of Rockford and Winnebago County Illinois, Charles A Church and H.H. Waldo, 1905