

Ameer Ben Ali and an Actor's Tale

By NINA and HOWARD BROWN

On 24th April Nina and I decided to look into newspapers for articles in commemoration of the 129th anniversary of the murder of Carrie Brown at the East River Hotel down in the bowels of the Lower East Side of New York City. There's a considerable amount of newspaper coverage of her murder during 1891 and the following years already on JTR Forums and on Casebook, and the thought of finding something new was not at the forefront of our expectations. As fate would have it, we did just that.

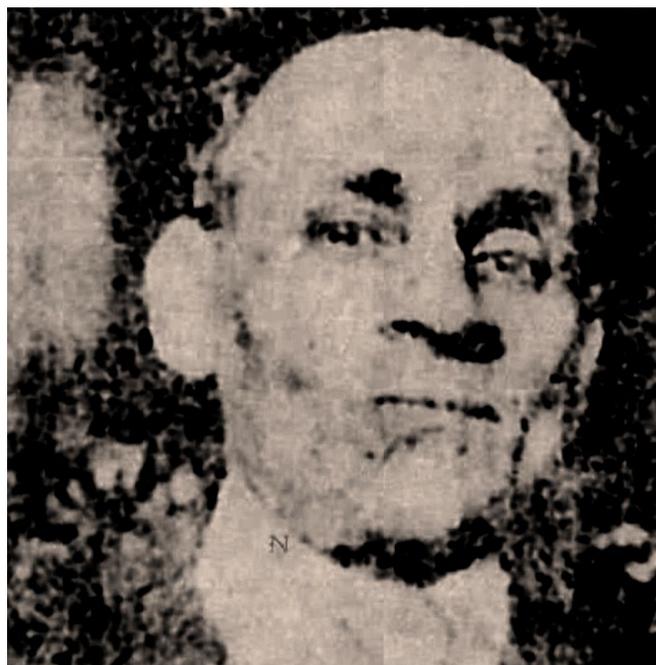
I came across the following article in the *Buffalo Courier*, containing the bold headline exclaiming that the Glaswegian-born thespian William H. Thompson expressed his understanding that the court interpreter for Ameer Ben Ali actually revealed to him that he *had* killed Carrie Brown.

I wasn't able to find another article in which a confession in any form by Ali is made to the murder in Room 31, and obviously none that refute the charges made within it. That doesn't mean one doesn't exist, or that if it does it won't be found.

By the time of the *Buffalo Courier* article, Ameer Ben Ali had been a free man for some six weeks.

After locating that article, and not to be outdone, Nina was able to locate, in the *New York Evening World* of 23rd April 1902, the first known (or at least, first shared) photograph of Ameer Ben Ali after his 1902 release, 118 years ago.

It's a shame that the photo and the accompanying article are of such inferior quality; the version included in this article has been enhanced as best possible by the Rip's Adam Wood.



Top: 'Frenchy' sketched during his trial

Bottom: The first known photograph of Ameer Ben Ali

ACTOR TELLS A STRANGE STORY

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Wm. H. Thompson of the Mannering-Belew Co. says
"Frenchy" Confessed Brutal Murder Of "Old Shakespeare"

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"Ripper" Case Which Stirred New York

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Ameer Ben Ali, or "Frenchy" Convicted of the Crime on
Circumstantial Evidence. Sent to Prison and Pardoned
Two Months Ago

Buffalo Courier

June 12, 1902

William H. Thompson, a member of the May Mannering-Belew theatrical company, which appears in this city at the Star Theater tonight, states that Ameer Ben Ali, alias "Frenchy", who was pardoned by Gov. Odell, confessed to a cell mate, to Emilio Sultan, the court reporter, and to others that he murdered 'Old Shakespeare'¹ in an East Side hotel in New York City several years ago. Mr. Thompson's² statement has created something of a stir in metropolitan police circles.



Carrie Brown: 'Shakespeare'

When "Old Shakespeare's" horribly mutilated corpse was found in a cheap lodging house, the discovery created a sensation not only in New York, but throughout the country. It was about this time that 'Jack The Ripper' was startling London by his fiendish crimes. It was about a nightly occurrence in London for the police to find the mutilated body of one of London's unfortunate women. A few days prior to the murder of 'Old Shakespeare' Thomas Byrnes, who was then superintendent of police in New York, was quoted in several of the newspapers to the effect that it would be impossible for anyone to emulate 'Jack the Ripper's' crimes in New York.

MUST MAKE GOOD HIS BOAST

Supt. Byrne had scarcely given his interview when New York woke up one morning to be shocked by the news that an old, dissipated character, who had been nicknamed 'Shakespeare', had been found mutilated exactly similar to the bodies in London. At once almost the entire detective force of New York was put on the case. Supt. Byrnes was on his mettle. He declared that he would have the



William H Thompson

- 1 Brown, as has been pointed out in other modern articles on her, was known as 'Shakespeare' and not, as often mistakenly labeled, as 'Old Shakespeare'.
- 2 According to the film trade magazine *Motography* of 5th February 1916, Thompson was known as the 'Dean of the American Stage'.

