

Sadie Bloomer's Strange Disappearance

On August 10, 1889, twenty-eight-year-old Robert Snyder, in a rage of intoxication and jealousy, went to his mother-in-law's home in El Dorado, Butler County, Kansas, and when not admitted broke the door down and entered with his pistol in hand. His estranged wife and mother-in-law, Sarah Collins, were cowering in a corner of the bedroom. His first shot struck his wife in the chest, she screamed and died immediately. The next shot struck his mother-in-law in the abdomen.

Snyder attempted escape but neighbors and law enforcement had heard the shots and arrested him immediately. Sarah Collins died later that day. Snyder expressed no remorse for the terrible crime.

Snyder attempted to escape, but the shots had attracted the attention of the neighbors and police officers were able to apprehend him immediately. Snyder was held in the El Dorado jail when an angry mob assembled outside and expressed intentions of lynching the murderer. Officers could see that they were not going to be able to hold the mob at bay, so they dropped Snyder out of a back window and Sheriff Charles Schram, along with another officer drove him in a buggy to Augusta, then to Wichita, where he would be secured in jail. When the El Dorado people learned of his whereabouts, they threatened to send a committee of 100 to Wichita to lynch Snyder. A month later when guards arrived with Snyder at the Butler County Courthouse for his court appearance, a mob formed and made a rush for the prisoner, once again shouting, "lynch him!"

A fight ensued between deputies and the would-be lynchers. No one was killed but Snyder was severely injured, being struck in the shoulder with a bullet. Four members of the mob were injured, two seriously.

Lynching was a way of life in the Old West and often considered a necessary evil. A violent senseless crime could easily incite law abiding citizens to form an outraged mob intent on hanging the alleged criminal without benefit of a trial. One Old West author said that "an accused thief or murderer, guilty or not, did not waste time or money consulting a fortune teller about his uncertain future." It is not known how many innocent men, and women, were strung up by lynch mobs.

Just over a month after the double murder in El Dorado there would be another lynch mob organized in Butler County. On the morning of September 17, 1889, another frightening event would take place on the farm of George Dudley near the town of Rosalia.

Early that morning Dudley rode into Rosalia looking to hire some help with the harvesting of his broom corn, a sorghum like plant used for brooms and brushes. It had been a real good year and the crop was standing tall and golden and in need of being harvested. Availability of working men was scarce and Dudley contracted with a lanky, poverty-stricken wanderer name Alonzo Edwards and his wife Martha Jane. The couple were accompanied by ten-year-old May Ackins, Mrs. Edwards' daughter by a previous marriage. On the return trip to the Dudley farm they stopped at the home of Elias Bloomer and invited Bloomer and his wife to join them and help in the harvesting. When Dudley agreed to return the favor the deal was made.

The Bloomers had a two-year-old daughter named Sadie who accompanied them to the Dudley home. Immediately upon arrival the men went to the field to begin the work of harvesting.

Mrs. Edwards was described as her husband's senior, a course, blubbery woman who was mentally retarded. She was fit only for housework and childcare. Mrs. Dudley and Mrs. Bloomer left Mrs. Edwards with the chore of fixing supper and watching Sadie while they went to gather potatoes from a field a mile away.

When the ladies returned about two hours later they discovered that Sadie was missing. Mrs. Edwards stated the child had started crying and followed the women toward the potato patch. They searched the barnyard and the cornfield—but Sadie was nowhere to be found.

Shortly the men arrived for supper but instead had to go out in search of the missing child. They also returned empty-handed. Now everyone was suspecting that something terrible had happened to Sadie. Neighbors were summoned and they searched through the night with no luck.

A frantic Mrs. Bloomer searched throughout the night. She was running through the cornfields, screaming and hollering. On Wednesday morning she had to be carried to the Dudley home.

People arrive from as far as 20 – 30 miles away to join in the search for Sadie. The crowd was estimated at 1,000 men, women and children. A nearby creek was dragged with nothing found. Farmers with pitch forks lined up stretching across the creek and pushed through the water.

The fields were searched row by row. The crop was trampled and destroyed. Dudley's hopes for a good crop and better future were trampled like the corn. The search went through the day and at night they used lanterns.

Meanwhile, everyone was shocked and angry at the complacency of the Edwardses, especially Martha. The couple made no attempt to find the child. In fact they seemed to be completely indifferent to everything that was happening. The muttering and anger against the couple was growing steadily. One farmer made a bet that the Edwards knew more than they were letting on and many agreed.

By early Friday morning the searchers had resigned themselves to the fact that Sadie might never be found. They were also certain that if the Edwardses had told them what they knew she would have been found. Possibly thinking that all was lost and there was nothing else to lose the crowd decided to rush the Dudley home and capture the Edwardses. The Constable Smith at Rosalia had been warned that the searchers were now a lynch mob. He raced his horse toward the Dudley farm and arrived just as the party reached the house. The Edwardses had bolted the doors and locked the windows.

The Edwardses' daughter was out on the porch and was taken aside by some of the women. Without realizing she was condemning her mother she said, "Mamma hit it on the head!"

Mrs. Edwards screamed out that if the crowd promised not to harm them she would tell them what happened to the child. Constable Smith assured them that no harm would come to them if they surrendered peacefully. The couple stepped out of the house and Constable Smith read a warrant charging both of them with murder. After some extensive questions Mrs. Edwards confessed to killing Sadie. She said the child's crying irritated her and she hit her with a piece of stovewood harder than she intended to. The constable asked her to repeat her story. This time it was totally different. She said she had thrown the firewood at a rat and it bounced up and hit Sadie. She said she had buried the body in the mud at the edge of the creek. But when she led the party to the spot, nobody was found. So she changed her story again and she claimed her husband had moved the body and she didn't know where it was. Edwards insisted he had not cooperated with his wife in any way. Then he broke down and told that he had thrown the body in the creek. He took them to the spot and again the creek was dragged and no body was found.

The couple were questioned over and over and her story changed with every telling. The only story she stuck to was that she had killed the child with a piece of stovewood. It became apparent they were not going to reveal the location of the body.

The constable arrested both of them and appointed several men as guards to escort them to the hotel he owned in Rosalia. The small town had no jail. They would be kept in the hotel until Sheriff Charles Schram could arrive from El Dorado. Some of the searchers followed the prisoners to the hotel while the remainder continued the search.

A crowd of around 300 gathered in the street outside of the hotel. The guards were farmers, not lawmen or gunslingers. They stood aside when the mob rushed them. In the meantime the prisoners had been hustled out of the hotel and to a schoolhouse near the Dudley farm where they spent the night. After a farmer gave them breakfast, they were taken back to the Dudley farm.

At the house they were again grilled endlessly and they stubbornly refused to give the location. The crowd became angrier and angrier as the refusal to tell the location went on. Then they

learned that the sheriff hadn't even left El Dorado yet. Up to this point the couple had only been questioned endlessly. They had not suffered any violence. But the crowd became convinced that torture was the only way they were going to get an answer.

About a dozen of the hottest tempered men were chosen and divided into two teams. With two ropes they took the two prisoners down to the creek. The couple was again given an intensive interrogation that yielded nothing. The mob decided that was enough and placed a noose around each neck. The ropes were thrown over different tree limbs. Mrs. Edwards was the first to be jerked off the ground after she had been permitted to get down on her knees for a short prayer. As her heavy body threatened to decapitate her she kicked and jerked in a violent but useless attempt to free herself.

When their faces turned black they were lowered to the ground unconscious. After the pair revived, Mrs. Edwards was again questioned and told if she didn't talk she would be hanged again, this time till she died and her husband burned at the stake. When no answer was forthcoming, perhaps because she was too frightened to speak, the couple was jerked into the air again. This time they were suspended for an even longer period of time and were nearly dead when they were cut down.

Just as they were about to string the couple up for the third time, the Bloomers and Dudley arrived on the scene. Dudley and Bloomer declared that they did not care what happened to the Edwards, but the child's body should be found first. Mrs. Bloomer saved the lives of the couple when she pleaded with the mob to calm down and give the couple another chance to tell the truth. "Dead or alive I want to see my baby once more!" she pleaded. "If you lynch these people, I'll never know where she is."

The more conservative farmers rushed the couple to the Butler County Jail in El Dorado. For the next few days 500 to 1,500 people, men, women and children, surrounded the county jail and called for the death of the couple.

On Sunday evening, September 22, six days after the disappearance, a young farmer named Val Piper was tired, gave up the hunt and returned to his home just 1 1/2 miles from where Sadie disappeared. When he stepped upon his porch he discovered a crying Sadie trying to push his door open. She was sunburned and deathly thirsty, but the clothes she wore were clean and untoned.



Sadie and Piper a few days after her discovery

Piper quickly sent word to the sheriff which quieted the mob. The mob also thought it might be a trick of the sheriff to save the Edwards' life. Not until the Bloomers brought Sadie to the El Dorado did the mob actually believe that she had been found safe and sound.

It was not until two weeks later that the Edwards were released. Their horrible nightmares were tattooed on their wounded necks and in their soul. There was a feeble effort to punish the members of the mob, but nothing came of it. In 4,000 verified lynchings occurring after this incident, less than one percent of the cases ended with some punishment for the perpetrators. The Edwardses sued the members of the mob for \$250,000 and settled out of court when a \$1,000 purse had been collected for the couple. It was said their lawyer kept the greater share of that.

Rumors began to spread as to what happened to Sadie during her disappearance. Some believed she had been held in a vacant house by a man. Some believed that she had wandered away and been picked up by either a stranger or a local citizen who had been become frightened of his future after seeing the treatment dished out to the Edwardses.

Two things have never become known, why the Edwards were so insistent on their guilt and what actually happened to Sadie. At only two years old she was not capable of telling anything about her ordeal. And no one ever came forth with the actual facts.

Some short-lived good did come out of the Bloomer affair. The almost miscarriage of justice worked on the minds of the folks involved. But they were only "down" for a short period of time. A cowboy rapist in a nearby town had poured carbolic acid down the throat of his victim. The newspapers reported that the citizens were unhappy and would probably take the law into their own hands.

Old man Judge Lynch quickly organized another mob and led his howling posse on another mad gallop across the rolling plains.

References: *The Sadie Bloomer Affair* in the Spring, 1966 edition of *Old West Magazine*, by Gene D. Matlock

The Dodge Globe Article Tales of Butler County: The strange disappearance of Sadie Bloom by Belinda Larsen, Posted Mar 28, 2015