

The Strange Case of John Shannon and Miss Bertha Wynn

John Shannon, an Irish immigrant, arrived in Ontario around 1858. Upon his arrival, he attended normal school and earned his teaching qualifications. After a brief teaching stint, he relocated to the southern states to open a jewelry business, encouraged by his affluent brother. He served on the Confederate side during the American Civil War, which resulted in a wounded knee and the seizure of his assets. The exact date of his return to Canada is unclear; however, a newspaper article about his background states that he supported Louis Riel and was present in the Northwest during the unrest of the early 1870s.

Following his time in the Northwest, he returned to Ontario and secured a teaching position in Battersea, later moving on to teach in Plainfield in Hastings County and then to Ameliasburgh. Finally, in January 1878, 44 year old, John Shannon was appointed to be the newest Teacher in Campbellford.

In April of 1878 he acquired a revolver with the intention of shooting squirrels, as he told the shopkeeper. On April 11, the day of the shooting, Miss Bertha Wynn, a student school, overheard that Shannon had made a remark about her, which led her to go home. When Bertha did not show up at school, he went to her house, where her mother informed him that she was upstairs. He then went upstairs and shot her twice. Once in the cheek and once in the breast.

At the time of the crime John Shannon admitted that he shot, 15-year-old Bertha Wynn, because he felt fondly towards her. However, he could not marry her as he was already married to someone else. His plan was to kill her then himself.

Despite her life threatening injuries, in 1883 Bertha married Cyrus Pakenham and raised a family. She is buried next to her husband in Norwood. No further information on the fate of John Shannon or his wife could easily be found.

Despite this story being buried on the second or third page of our local paper, the story was reported in the Manitoba and Quebec papers.

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The Queen vs. John Shannon – shooting with intent to commit murder. This Campbellford shooting case with particulars of which our readers are already familiar. The prisoner defended himself. He was indicted for shooting Miss Bertha Wynn, one of the pupils of his school at the village of Meyersburg, on the 11th of April last. For the Crown, Mrs. Wynn, Miss Wynn, and Mr. Wynn, Dr Bogart, and several other witness were examined; the offence being clearly proved. The prisoner cross-examined the witness at great length, and addressed the Jury with considerable ability. He set up the strange defence that he did not intend to do more than disfigure the girl. And that if he had intended to kill her he would have fired more than two shots. He seemed to think that he deserved considerable credit for his act of mercy in firing only twice when he might have fired five times. The jury found him guilty and he was sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor in the penitentiary for ten years.

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The Queen vs. John Gray.—Assault