

Law and Disorder - Constable Barlow Shot in a Drunken Brawl

Friday evening, November 7, 1878 about 7 o'clock in the evening, Constable H. W. Barlow was shot by a bad character named Richard Robertson. The shooting occurred in Joe Crews' saloon at the corner of Commercial Row and Virginia street. The circumstances which led to the shooting were not very clear but from a number of persons, including the shooter himself, it seems that there has been bad blood between the two men for a few weeks.

Robertson had been appointed as a deputy sheriff during fair week, and after serving just two days was fired by the sheriff. Robertson claims that Constable Barlow had gone to Sheriff Lamb and accused Robertson of having robbed a drunken man and that caused Sheriff Lamb to discharge him.

The evening prior to the shooting, the two met in Morris Ash's saloon. Constable Barlow said something to Robertson and Robertson called him a liar with the usual amplifications. Bartow raised his cane and struck at Robertson who blocked the blow with his arm which reportedly was swollen and discolored by the blow from the cane. Sheriff Lamb and others separated the men. Barlow was restrained by the crowd and the sheriff led Robertson to the door. As Robertson left he turned and "If you ever strike me with that cane again I'll kill you."

Shortly after this, Robertson went to a gunsmith and procured a five-shot pistol saying that he would only want it for a day or so and would pay for the use of it. Robertson left the price of the pistol as security until its return. A little later Robertson was standing in front of Crews' saloon on Commercial Row in conversation with some friends when Constable Barlow came up behind him and struck Robertson with a blow from his cane on the back of his head knocking him to the sidewalk. The Reno Gazette reporter apparently obtained statements from a number of eye-witnesses of the assault.

Constable Barlow was seized by a number of citizens, among them Mr. Crews, who jumped through the open window of his cigar stand and succeeded in depriving Barlow of his cane. When Mr. Crews took the cane into the saloon, Barlow followed him in, demanding his cane.

All this time Robertson was lying insensible upon the sidewalk. When he recovered consciousness his first question was whether he had been shot and when told he had been knocked out from a blow to the head and then he demanded to know who had struck him and was told that it was Constable Barlow.

Robertson, like Barlow, was considerably under the influence of liquor and with the whisky and the effect of the blow, he was hardly able to keep his feet. He reeled down Virginia street and into Crews Saloon, saw Barlow standing at the bar talking to Mr. Crews.

Barlow, saw Robertson as he entered and rushed toward him raising the pistol to and began shooting. Barlow dodged the first shot by stepping behind the stove, an affair with a large drum above it, and kept ducking up and down. The second shot went through the drum and then the shooter went out on the sidewalk. Constable Barlow came out from behind the stove when Robertson stepped back into the doorway and fired again. This time the bullet struck Constable Barlow in the chin.

A big crowd gathered and Robertson was taken into custody. Constable Barlow was conveyed to Dr. Dawson's office. The ball had glanced downward, and the doctor informed the Reno Gazette reporter that he had probed the wound as far down as it was safe to do so and had not found the bullet, showing that the wound was a very dangerous one, as the bullet might have fallen into the cavity of the check or lodged in the neighborhood of the large arteries of the neck, where it could not be safely extracted. Constable Barlow was taken to his home to recover.

A search of Crews' produced three bullets which were found in the saloon after the shooting. One was imbedded in the counter and the other two lying on the floor. As the pistol was a five-shooter and had two chambers loaded when taken from Robertson, it would seem that the bullet did not lodge in Barlow at all. However, it is possible that one of the bullets found did not come from Robertson's pistol, or that the ball penetrated the wind-pipe and was coughed out, although Dr. Dawson states that he failed to find any indications of this.

While Constable Barlow apparently started the fray, it appears that Robertson's record is ever bit of what Constable Barlow was reporting to Sheriff Lamb. About two years prior Robertson shot and seriously wounded a man named Lewis in Gold Hill and was sent to the penitentiary for it. He was released from prison a few months prior to his problem with Constable Barlow.

More recently Robertson had been working at the Emma mine and making himself active in labor politics, delivering speeches at the Workingmen's meetings and otherwise building up a reputation as a "worker." However, he was also busy building a reputation as a vicious man if you dare to cross him.

Shortly after the shooting of Constable Barlow a Mr. J. J. Anshitz or Anshutz came to Reno from the Emma mine and swore out a Warrant for the arrest of Robertson, along with Joseph Williams and Michael McRafferty, for an assault to kill. He stated that within the past few days Williams and McRafferty had held him while Robertson attempted to disembowel him with a dirk, but that the point had struck his belt and his life was thus saved.

In his defense, Richard Robertson stated to a Reno Gazette reporter that his trouble with Anshitz was grossly exaggerated. According to Robertson the two men were not on friendly terms and night of the incident all had been drinking "candidates' whiskey". Robertson says Anshitz had been talking about him and he grabbed Anshitz by the collar and pushed him back some distance in the hoisting works and drew back his hand in which he held a short stick which served for a stopper for an election demijohn, which is a narrow-necked bottle. Robertson claims he was holding the stick as he threatened to thrash Anshitz if he repeated his libels. Robertson claims that was the only thing about the incident that could possibly have been mistaken for a knife. He said no one held Anshitz, and the two men had parted on good terms that night.

On November 12 1878 a jury failed to believe Richard Robertson's version of the ruckus at Emma mine and he was convicted in Judge Richardson's court of assault of Anshitz. He was sentenced to pay a fine of \$80 or go to jail for forty days. No record was found of any criminal action taken against Robertson for the shooting of Constable Barlow.

Constable Barlow recovered from his wound and while still healing became adventurous. On December 11, 1878 the Reno Gazette reported that Constable Barlow had gone to Arizona on a secret mission after some mysterious evil doers who are wanted in the East. It is believed that he was seeking a reward for the return of the missing body of deceased millionaire Alexander Turney Stewart of New York.

Shortly after Christmas it was reported that Constable Barlow was on another extended trip to Southern California traveling as far south as San Bernardino. For what reason he was traveling is not known. Maybe just to get out of town. Just a month prior to being shot his bid for the Republican nomination for reelection as constable was rejected when J. Peers was nominated. Peers would lose the general election and Barlow would be replaced as the Reno Township constable in 1879 by Democratic George Avery.

Richard Robertson continued a troubled life and in February 1879, Robertson was sentenced to 75 days in the Storey County jail for drawing a deadly weapon.