

# Reno's First Double Homicide - April 12, 1870

Reno was all of 23 months old before there was a homicide committed in a downtown saloon and to make matters worse, it was a double murder. The murder appeared to be brought on by a business disagreement. The killer was George Roth who killed J. H. Miller by intent and Henry Phibbs by accident on April 12, 1870 during a argument.

Reno's baptism of blood occurred at Hammond's Saloon, a pioneer establishment of the town which was being run by the brothers Henry C. and John Q. Phibbs. They kept a pleasant bar on the east side of Virginia Street. not far from Commercial Row and right next to the constable's office.

Roth was a shoemaker and Miller owned a shoe shop and they seem to have been in some sort of business partnership concerning Miller's shoe shop. George Roth was reported to be the aggressor. As he approached the peaceable Miller, who

was having a few quiet drinks, Roth began to speak harshly toward Miller. Miller maintained his calm until Roth's language took a turn for the worse. "You can't call me that," cried Miller, as he stalked towards Roth. Obviously Miller disliked having his family name enter the picture. Roth drew his gun and demanded that Miller shoot it out with him as the whole affair took on a "Wild West" atmosphere.

As Roth cocked the hammer of his six-shooter, saloon proprietor Henry Phibbs intervened, requesting that Roth take himself and gun elsewhere. Phibbs chose a bad moment to step in front of Roth, as the gun discharged and Plibbs got the first bullet in what was loosely termed a "gut Shot." Miller turned to flee, and Roth shot him coldly in the back.

Reno Constable W. S. Edwards heard the commotion and gun shots and rushed from of his office which just happen to be next door to Hammond's Saloon and arrested Roth. As Roth turned over the pistol to Edwards, he remarked that it was Miller's gun anyway which he had apparently stolen from Miller's shoe shop several days before.

Roth was taken to the county jail in Washoe City which was still the county seat. The Washoe County Grand Jury returned two murder Indictments, and some Months later in December, Roth was found guilty of Manslaughter in connection with Phibbs' demise, and of second degree murder in the case of Miler. He was sentenced to 35 years for Miller's murder, and 8 years for the killing of Phlbbs.



**George Roth**  
Reno's First Convicted Killer



Washoe County Courthouse - Washoe City

## **Murder George Roth Escapes Prison**

In September 1871, less than a year after being sent to prison, Reno's double murder and 28 other dangerous Nevada State prisoners escaped the walls of the prison in Carson City and scattered in several directions.

Some ultimately found their way near Bishop California and engaged in a deadly firefight with lawmen near a lake which would be renamed "Convict Lake" to mark the bloody historical event.

Reno's man "Roth" and three other prisoners were caught near Walker Lake Road by a rancher named Burgess. They were returned to Carson City by their captor