

Cynthia Kay Newman McGuffey, Member #544

Armstead William "Will" Willoughby

b. 1879, Allen County, KY

d. 1923, Allen County, KY

"Murder at the Public Spring"

My maternal great grandfather was a poor farmer living with his wife and 5 young children in rural Kentucky in 1923. My great grandparents names were William "Will" and Lucy Taylor Willoughby. Their daughter, Lilly Willoughby (my maternal grandmother) married my grandfather, Orla Landers in 1922.

One Spring day in 1923 Will Willoughby and his young son (about 12 yrs) were going by wagon pulled by his team of horses to deliver some logs to sell to a lumber company. They stopped at the Public Spring to water his team of horses.

There were 2 men there in their early 30's (reportedly drunk) at the Public Spring and they told Will that he needed to pay them to water his horses there. He refused and they beat him with a wooden club and rocks. His son carried him home in the wagon.

The people in the community were so outraged that the 2 accused men were taken to a nearby town for holding. Will Willoughby died a few days later of a Fractured Skull.

One of the murderers was the son of a former Sheriff and the other was also from a prominent family. I am sure that they hired a good attorney and Mrs. Willoughby was appointed an attorney by the state. A few hundred farmers and their families attended the initial hearing. The men were sentenced in the trial but later it was declared a Mistrial and the murderers went free.

Someone whose family has lived in that rural area for decades told me that both men did meet their tragic demise years later. One of the men was shot and killed and the other I forgot what happened but supposedly he met with a tragic, untimely death also.

My great grandparents are both buried in unmarked graves in a church graveyard near where they lived then.

There were several newspaper articles written about this tragic event and the trials following it.