

Carthage-Smith County, TN Newspapers
Vol. 1: 1809-1913
Transcribed by Betty C. Meadows Scott
Published by Betty C. Meadows Scott & Ridge Runner Publications: 2004
pgs. 129 - 131

Rev. J. R. McGowan, Dead, but Killed Himself – Silver Point, TN – 6 November 1888.

Having seen an article published in your worthy paper concerning the narrow escape of the Rev. J. R. McGowan, which states that he came so near being assassinated in the Buffalo Valley in the part better known as the Mine Lick part, a boy and a pin the cause, we the citizens of this community are desirous of explaining this matter, just as it is, to which we are willing to give our sworn statements.

It is true that J. R. McGowan had been engaged in a protracted meeting at Silver Point, Tennessee, which is located at the head of the Buffalo Valley, Putnam County, Tennessee, about the time alleged, and there was a disturbance made by a young man about 15 or 16 years of age. The young man has been raised up without the aid of a father and lives in this immediate neighborhood and has many sympathizing friends.

It is true that this young man was arrested and brought before Messrs. R. S. Alcorn and N. C. Crowel, J.P.'s to answer the charge of having disturbed public worship, and after the proof was taken, the magistrates, believing that there was probable cause of deft's guilt, he was bound over to answer at the next term of Circuit Court to be held at Cookeville, Tennessee. But, Mr. McGowan and the brethren, as charged in the article, did not take hold of the young man and in a very unceremonious way put the young man out of the house.

It is true that J. R. McGowan was summoned as a witness in the case, and he failing to appear for some unknown cause, at the time said case should have been tried, the case was continued until another time for appearance as state witness, in company with James Finn and Daniel White from Elmwood on Snow Creek where we suppose their native home is. These three gentlemen were seen coming to the trial on Monday, around the Indian Creek road by F. P. Oaks, Const., a short distance from the head of the Buffalo Valley where the trial was to be had, and each of their horses was under full speed and J. R. McGowan was saying, Go on.

This was the last seen of these gentlemen by Mr. Oaks until they arrived where the trial was to be had, when McGowan rode up before the court. McGowan exclaimed, Here are your men, dismounted and shook hands with several of the brethren and some of them, through the extreme love he had or through mistake, accident or otherwise, 2 or 3 times.

The court was sitting on the front of Messrs, Tucker and Mitchells' storehouse, ready to hear and determine, according to law as the proof might bring about. The state announced ready by L. F. Puckett, the prosecuting attorney, and the young man said he

was not ready because his attorney was not present, and insisted that he should have the benefit of counsel, when Mr. Finn very hastily spoke up and told the young man that he had had three weeks to get counsel, and no further time should be allowed him. Mr. White then spoke up and used about the same words. Then Rev. J. R. McGowan interrupted the young man and said that he, the young man, was as guilty as he could be, and that the young man knew it, and that he, McGowan, was never worse disturbed in his life, and the next bond that the young man gave, to give a good one. The continuance had not as yet been reached, but Mr. Puckett said that notwithstanding he was employed to prosecute the young man, that it was proper and right that the young man should have a fair and impartial trial, and that the court was bound to grant the continuance for a reasonable time, as it would be better than the proceed --- *cannot read...* the prosecutor said that he guessed that someone had got the young man's attorney to go off to prolong the time, and the young man said to Wallace the (Wallace) had better let him alone, and Finn spoke up and said the he (thereby meaning Wallace) asked the young man no difference on any part of the ground.

We speak of this to show the courtesy toward this poor fatherless young man that was given to him by J. R. McGowan and his comrades. During this conversation, McGowan disappeared and the case was not as yet continued over to the next morning, when someone said that the case had as well go over, as Rev. J. R. McGowan was drunk and had sent after more whisky. This was denied by his comrades Finn and White. Then the court continued the case until Tuesday morning. When the case was tried and the young man bound over without the aid of the Rev. J. R. McGowan, as he had fled, or being notified by Mr. Wade Wallace, prosecutor, that he (McGowan) would be prosecuted for public drunkenness at the residence of Mr. R. Prentice, Tuesday morning after breakfast, that is McGowan was notified at the residence of Prentice on the next morning after the case was continued on Monday evening.

Here we will give the sworn statements of the parties, to wit:

M.T. Sybert, am acquainted with Rev. J. R. McGowan pastor of the Methodist church at this place, and saw him at the trial before R. S. Alcorn and N. C. Crowel, J.P's at Silver Point, which is at the head of the Buffalo Valley, Tennessee. Said trial was concerning a young man disturbing public worship, which came off in October. McGowan invites me to go to the barn of Tucker and Mitchell before the case was continued, and there he gave me a dram of what he called cherry pectoral, out of a bottle. He also had a bottle of cider in his pocket. By this time James Finn came into the barn, and McGowan asked me if I could get some whisky for Finn, and asked Finn, if a quart would do and laughed.

M.T. Sybert

Joseph Holley, am a member of the Baptist church at Center Hill, saw Rev. McGowan at the trial at Silver Point as stated in this article, and I considered him drinking when he first came and saw him at R. Prentice's house on Monday night and he was drunk.

J. F. Holley

Jesse Holley, am acquainted with Rev. J. R. McGowan and saw him on Monday at Silver Point, Tennessee at the trial designated, before Messrs. Alcorn and Crowel, J.P's, and he was drinking, or I took him to be considerable intoxicated. I saw him that night at R. Prentice's and he was drunk. I am a member of the Methodist church of this place.

J.H. Holley

Robert Prentice, state that I am acquainted with said J. R. McGowan. I am a member of the aforesaid named church. I saw said McGowan at the trial, I considered him then drinking considerably. He asked me if I had room at my house and if I could take care of him that night. I told him I did. He came to my house that night and had a bottle of brandy about one half full. He was then about drunk. After he drank the brandy that he had in the bottle, McGowan asked my son, George to go and get him more. He refused to go. He asked me to loan him some money to buy brandy with, which I refused to do. I told my son, George, if he went and got more brandy for McGowan that I would drive him and McGowan both off.

There was no such thing as four bad looking men coming in the night. He came very near falling out of bed. I asked Joe Holly to catch him and not let him fall. He asked for salty water to make him vomit. The men who came in were Jesse and Joe Holly and M. T. Syert, who are all nice gentlemen. In regard to the lick in the head, McGowan told me next morning that he went into the stable to catch his horse, when the mare that was in the same stable kicked and knocked him up against the stable and hurt his head. The two Holleys and M.T. Sypert were the only men who came there that night. I slept in the same room. I never was during the night out of the room with McGowan.

Robert Prentice

James Prentice, am a member of the church at this place for 17 years. I know J. R. McGowan. I saw him drinking and am perfectly satisfied he was drinking. Can further state that I never in my life knew or head of a preacher being in anyway molested by anybody in this part of the country; further the following Ex Circuit Riders can state that they have been as well treated here as anywhere on their travels: Thomas Dodson, W.R. Prason, Henck Clark, A.W. Byers, and others. And we now and have always cordially invited all good citizens in our midst, and we guarantee that they will be well treated. If McGowan will come and stand his trial he will find many good people here who will see that he has a fair trail. James Finn has the appearance of a man who was drinking, too.

James Prentice

Came before me the above and forenamed parties with whom I am personally acquainted and make oath in due form of law and state that the stated are correct and true. They are all good citizens who are fully credible. The aforesaid facts are generally believed by all good citizens in this part.

This November 8th 1888 - - John Tucker, J.P. and Cham. Of Putnam County Court.