

**THE MURDER OF MISS OVA DAVIS
BY A REJECTED LOVER
AND THE TRIALS AND SUBSEQUENT
LIFE OF HER SLAYER**

By Judge Ernest H. Boyd
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Ova Davis, b. 29 April 1869 – d. 18 June 1887, TN, d/o **William G. Davis** (1842-1910) & **Caroline Johnston** (1775-1800). Ova Davis is buried in the Davis Graveyard, located in 'Little Putnam' not far from Bethel Baptist Church. Ova Davis was killed by John W. Green, a rejected suitor, while ironing. After shooting her, he went to a spring near the house and shot himself. However, he did not die and Henry Snodgrass got him off as crazy.

For many years, Judge William G. Davis was an active and widely known citizen of Putnam County. He owned and lived upon a good farm on Falling Water Creek in the South end of the Companies of Stokes' Federal Regiment during the Civil War and, although that Federal outfit was particularly detested by the Confederates and their families and sympathizers in this section of the State, Davis was a genial and kindly man of splendid native ability and good clerical qualifications and was a good citizen, and he had many personal friends who did not agree with him with reference to the Civil War issues and politics. He served for many years as a Justice of the Peace of the Eighth Civil District and was an influential member of the County Court. He served as County Judge of this county from 1892 to 1894. During most of his life after the Civil War, he held a position in the Federal Internal Revenue service, serving in the position then known as "Store Keeper and Gauger" at different distilleries. From the Civil War until his death, he was one of the most influential leaders of the Republican party in this section of the State. He was a near relative of Aaron G. Davis, of the 8th Civil District, who was Chairman of the County Court of Putnam County at the outbreak of the Civil War and who joined the Federal Army soon after the commencement of hostilities and was killed in one of the early Civil War battles in Virginia. The only G. A. R. post ever organized in this section of the State was organized under the leadership of Judge Davis, at Bloomington Springs, and at his instance the Post was named "Aaron G. Davis Post", for his kinsman.

The family of Hick Green lived on their farm, in the neighborhood in which Judge Davis lived. Green was a Federal soldier and was killed in a Civil War skirmish at Buffalo Valley. The Davis family and the Green family were neighbors and friends.

John W. Green, a son of the widow Green, was a young man of good character who enjoyed the confidence and esteem of his neighbors. He had been the accepted lover of Miss Ova Davis, a beautiful, attractive and innocent eighteen year old daughter of Judge and Mrs. Davis, but he had ceased to visit her for a few months and another young gentleman became engaged to her.

The fact that John W. Green had been supplanted in the young lady's affections, and that she was soon to be married to another young man, seems to have been known and commented upon rather generally in the neighborhood in which the Davis and Green families lived; and several persons, John W. Green's brothers among them, had joked John W. Green about his rejection by the young lady and her preference for another. Green was desperately in love with the young lady and he was apparently unable to take his rejection in a philosophical manner, and on Saturday, June 18 1887, he shot and killed the young lady in one of the most sensational murders in the history of this section of the State. Green was about twenty-five years old when he killed the young lady and attempted to kill himself. The killing occurred at the Davis home.

Only Miss Ova Davis and a sister two years younger were at the Davis home when the killing occurred. At the subsequent trial of Green, this sister testified that she was upstairs at the time and that her sister Ova was in the open hall downstairs ironing. That she heard her sister say "Don't you come in" and that Green replied, "I generally go where I d---d please", and that she heard five shots, and that when she heard the shots she ran down stairs and out at the back door, and went over to Albert Austin's and she further testified that after her sister told Green not to come in that she heard her sister say, "Lord have mercy."

John C. York, one of the first witnesses to arrive on the scene, testified that no one was there but John W. Green and the deceased and that both were lying on the porch, that the young lady was shot through the head, and was lying on her back. That Green was about two feet from her and that he thought that she was dead. That he saw a pistol lying there. That two or three barrels were empty, and two of three cartridges in it, and the some cartridges and empty hulls were lying on the porch. That the young lady was left lying there until help came. That Green was lying rather between the young lady and the pistol, and that the pistol was in two or three feet of her head. That after awhile Green commenced groaning, and rolled off the porch, and lay there until his folks came.

The young lady was shot at about 8:30 o'clock in the morning, and she died at about 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock that afternoon.

Green had shot himself in the head several times, and was for hours expected to die at any moment. When his mother and other members of his family arrived, they took him to a spring near by, washed and bathed his wounds, and otherwise administered to his wants until near night, and then removed him home. While at the spring he was asked "Why he had done this," and he replied, "That is the question;" and after some further conversation he said, "A man could always see after it was too late."

At home that night Green gave a full account of the tragic occurrence in its minutest details. He commenced by asking his brother where Ova Davis was, and on being told that she was dead, said: "I told her well of it." A neighbor who claimed to have heard that part of the conversation, as well as what followed, testified that Green said that there were two more he wanted to kill, stating their names, and that he wished he had waited until Sunday, as he intended to do; that he could have killed them at Sunday School; that they had been in his way with the young lady. That the young lady was in the porch ironing, and said, "Don't come in," and that he replied, "I will be d---d if I don't show you whether I don't come in or not," and that he went in, and she fell on her knees and commenced crying, and that he shot her. That he looked at her, turned her over, and saw the ball had gone straight through and come out on the other side of her head, and that her brains were coming out, and that he saw her gape, and knew she was dead. And that he said that he then shot himself twice in the same place, in the back of the head, and that his pistol snapped several times, and that he took the loads out and reloaded it and shot himself again in the same place, and that he said that he had been watching for a chance for some time to kill her; that he had watched the Davis spring to kill her on Friday, a week before the killing, but that she sang so pretty he could not kill her, and on the day before, but that her sister Sallie was with her, and he couldn't have a chance to kill her. That he said that he was up in the field, on the morning of the killing, pulling grass for his horse, and that he saw the young lady's parents going from their home, and that he thought that would be his time to kill her, and that he said that he had made up his mind that he had rather kill her and kill himself than see her marry another man.

About eleven days afterwards, Green was removed from his mother's house, and confined in the Putnam County jail on a charge of murder in the first degree. The jailor, who had him in charge, was called as a witness by the State in the trial of the defendant and he testified that he had a conversation with the defendant and that the defendant said that he killed Ova Davis; that they had been engaged to be married, and had a agreement that if either went back on the other, that the one gone back on should kill the other. That he understood she and another fellow were to get married on the next Sunday. That he aimed at first to go to church and kill her and two men, whose names the witness stated. That he heard that the young lady's parents had gone from home and crossed the river and that he went over to the Davis home and found the deceased ironing in the hall and that he told her that he had come to do what he said he would. That she fell on her knees and threw up her hands, and that he shot her in the head and that she fell over. That he examined her wound, and found that the ball had gone in on one side of her head and passed straight through and come out on the other side. That he then put the pistol to the back of his head and fired twice, and that the second shot knocked him down, and that he then sapped the pistol a time or two, but that it failed to fire, and that he reloaded it and put it to the back of his head to the same place and fired again, and that he said that he thought that he would kill her at the spring once, but that his heart failed him. She looked so nice and pretty and he thought so much of her. And that he said that he thought that he would kill her and himself, and both go to hell together.

When Green shot the young lady and himself, he placed a lengthy written statement on the floor near their bodies, the substance of which was a fervent declaration of his love for her and that he could not bear to see her marry another, and he concluded the statement with a request to her parents to permit him to be buried beside her in the Davis family cemetery. She was buried in that cemetery and her grave is marked by a nice tombstone, but he was not buried in that cemetery.

Three pistol balls remained in Green's head until after his commitment to jail. Two of them were extracted by Dr. J. F. Dyer and the other one by Dr. S. B. Fowler.

Green was tried twice in the Circuit Court of Putnam County and found guilty of murder in the first degree each time. The trial judge set aside the first verdict, and awarded a new trial, but pronounced judgment on the second one.

In these two trials, the great body of the testimony on both sides was directed at the single question of the defendant's mental condition. Though a general plea of not guilty was interposed, the commission of the homicide by the defendant was virtually admitted, and the real defense was that he was insane when the act was done.

The proof clearly established the fact that the defendant had a severe and protracted attack of typho-malarial fever about five years prior to the killing, which made him delirious at times while the disease was on him. His mother, brothers and numerous other witnesses testified that they had heard him complain of un-natural feeling in his head and that he had asked them if they could not "hear water slush in his head" when he would move or shake it. His mother, a good woman of excellent reputation testified that he had a severe spell of fever about four years before the killing, that he was sick for several months and that he was never right afterwards, that he had what she called "foolish spells" afterwards, and that when he had one of those spells, or was about to have one, that he would ask her if she could not hear the water slosh in his head and that he would have nothing.....story continues.

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>