

CHESTER TIMES – October 7, 1908

**WIFE AND SISTER-IN-LAW ARRESTED FOR THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN ERB** – Women to be Given A Hearing in Chester This Evening When Inquest on the Death is Held – Mrs. Beisel Admits Doing the Shooting

What was no doubt the culmination of the family troubles of Captain J. Clayton Erb, of Village Green, who has figured to a great extent in the newspapers for some time, resulted in his death at “Red Gables,” his home, last night. That it is equally certain that his death was the result of a quarrel in which his sister-in-law, Mrs. Catherine Beisel, figured is also beyond question.

Dr. L.I. Kalbach of Village Green, was called from his bed last night about 10 o'clock and hurried to the Erb home, which is about four blocks from the village proper, and found the body of Erb lying on the floor in the hall in the second story, just outside the bedroom door, his face turned to one side and the body in a pool of blood.

Upon examination it was found that the man was past all human assistance – that life was extinct. What appeared to be a gunshot wound was seen on the right side of his head.

All was excitement in the house. Mrs. Catherine Beisel is said to have exclaimed that she had shot the captain and that she had shot him in self-defense. As there was absolutely nothing that Dr. Kalbach could do he immediately notified coroner's physician, H.F. Taylor of Ridley Park and Deputy Coroner E.F. White, who hurried to the scene of the tragedy. County Detective Berry was also on the scene within a short time, and a thorough examination was made of the house and all the occupants of the house. Coroner Barney Carr of Colwyn was soon at the scene of the grim tragedy. Later Mrs. Beisel was arrested and taken to Media and placed in the county jail.

After the shooting Mrs. Erb went out to the stable and said to the farm superintendent, William Nichols:

“You go get a constable. My sister just shot the Captain.”

Nichols at once drove to Leedale and secured Constable Tom Simpson, who remained there until the arrival of the authorities.

Detective Richard Doyle and Attorney Horwitz, counsel for Captain Erb, left Philadelphia in Phillip H. Johnson's automobile at 2 o'clock this morning.

Captain Erb had been in Philadelphia all day and left Philadelphia on the 55 train in the evening from Broad Street station. He was met at Glen Riddle at 6:26 by William Nichols, his superintendent. Eugene Poulson, the colored coachman, was also in Philadelphia and three servants were at home, including one colored girl.

The body of Captain Erb is now laid in his bedroom and arrangements will be made for the funeral after the inquest.

**MRS. ERB ARRESTED** – A conference was held late this morning at District Attorney MacDade's office in Media, at which County Detective Berry recited the facts in the case as he had found them, going over the ground, carefully describing the details of the crime, and the actions of the members of the household both before and after the tragedy. After considering the facts as laid before him, District Attorney Albert Dutton MacDade sprung the sensation of the morning by ordering the arrest of Mrs. Clayton Erb at her home, demanding her arrest at her residence, “Red Gables,” and ordering that she be kept under surveillance.

County Detective Berry hastened to Village Green in an automobile to execute the orders of the District Attorney's office, and tonight he will bring Mrs. Erb to Chester, who with Mrs. Beisel, will be taken before Alderman Robert Smith, of the Third Ward.

Before Alderman Smith a joint inquest and hearing will be held and the two women will have to face the serious charge of being responsible for the death of J. Clayton Erb.

Dr. H.F. Taylor, the coroner's physician, conducted a post mortem and found that three shots had been fired, one ball passing through the left hand, another directly through the chest and lodged in the wall, and the third in the head. The shot through the chest is the one that caused death, proving fatal in a very short time. The revolver, a six-shooter, was found in the room of the sister-in-law, Mrs. Beisel, who admitted that she fired the shots, but claims that she did so in self-defense.

It was a family dispute, Captain Erb and his wife getting into an argument over their domestic difficulties and the sister-in-law finally became involved in the argument and the shooting followed. The only witnesses to the tragedy, as far as can be ascertained were Mrs. Erb and the sister-in-law, as the servants were all downstairs in their quarters, none able to come upstairs until summoned by members of the household or given permission to be there.

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED – County Detective Berry and Detective O'Neill visited Mrs. Beisel at the jail in Media this morning and had a lengthy talk up to 11 o'clock with her. It is evident that she gave forth some important information as it was decided at once to remove the surveillances of Mrs. Erb, at her home and to transfer her to jail. The two officials left Media with that purpose in view. When asked if Mrs. Beisel admitted shooting, County Detective Berry said, "not to me."

Mrs. Beiser became very ill after being confined in jail and retired to bed. She pleaded for her husband and he was summoned. Her husband is an engineer on the Reading road.

THE FAMILY TROUBLES – The trouble which ended the life of Captain J. Clayton Erb was not by any means the first to engage the attention of the public, but was the climax to a series of events which have been brewing toward wrecking the domestic felicities of the pair. Among the first of the troubles to be aired was that which is alleged to have become known shortly after the captain returned from the maneuverers at Pine Plains, New York, with the Third Regiment. Erb alleged that during his absence there and again while he was at the Chicago National Republican convention, Mrs. Erb showed too great friendliness for a physician in the vicinity of "Red Gables" and for other men who were entertained frequently at his home.

It is alleged that when the captain called for an explanation that he was beaten by his wife with crockery and with heavy silverware and lacerations on his head were put in evidence of this fact, it is stated. Erb is alleged to have charged that his home difficulties were brought about through his sister-in-law, Mrs. Catherine Beisel of 1626 South Sixteenth Street, Philadelphia, who frequently visited "Red Gables." Erb had some feeling against her and refused the use of his horses to her. This is said to have incensed his wife. But a treaty of peace was about to be signed in the office of Squire William E. Griffith, of Rockdale, a few weeks ago, but this was not consummated and later Erb was held in bail for an alleged hissing of dogs upon his wife. Prior to this Eugene Poulson, Erb's colored coachman, was arrested for alleged assault on Mrs. Erb, but was defended by the captain. This case was deferred to the next court at the present sessions. Before her marriage to

Erb, the wife was a Mrs. Rothermel, wife of a retired broker, who died by suicide about two years ago. Shortly after that she lived at Atlantic City in comparative ease and was thrown into contact with Erb through their mutual love of horses.

ERB'S CAREER – Captain Erb was an expert in the State Insurance office under Insurance Commissioner Israel W. Durham. He was for years private secretary to Mr. Durham and was still connected with his office. He was one of the best-known figures in Philadelphia politics, entering political life in the 29<sup>th</sup> ward, under Hamilton Disston, and was later associated with the leadership of James McManes. When Mr. Durham became Insurance Commissioner he made Captain Erb his expert and actuary. In addition to being active politically Captain Erb had engaged in the brokerage business and was for a time in the oil trade.

Three years ago when the Insurance Department was under investigation by the Legislature Erb was the chief witness. He testified that the enormous fees, amounting to more than \$100,000, which was supposed to have gone to Mr. Durham, were paid to him as actuary. During Durham's incumbency Erb virtually managed the office.

Of late years Captain Erb had confined his political activity to the Seventh Ward, Philadelphia. For many years he had been a leading figure in the military life of the State. At the time of his death he was captain in the Third Regiment and appeared with his regiment in the military parade Monday. Through Captain Erb's influence the Third Regiment was aboard ship ready to sail from Tampa for Cuba during the Spanish war.

This was accomplished through political influence, but the War Department discovered the trick before the transport sailed and the regiment was ordered to disembark, and it never saw active duty.

Erb lived, until his marriage several years ago, in South Thirteenth Street, near Pine Street, Philadelphia. He was more than 50 years of age, and is survived by an unmarried sister, who lives in Tioga.

KEITH LOCKHART COLLECTION