

## THE BOX SO-CALLED POISONING?? – NOT!!

### MALARIAL FEVER.

Malarial fever has broken out in the family of Capt. John Box, one and a half miles north of the city, and the entire family are prostrated. The disease is very stubborn in its resistance to medical skill, and is of the same type as that which caused so many deaths in Corydon and vicinity last fall and winter. There is apparently no local cause to produce the disease on Capt. Box's place. - New Albany Daily Ledger Standard 04 May 1880 p. 4 col. 1

Personals. Capt. John Box is still in a very precarious condition from the mysterious illness that has prostrated himself and family and his recovery is hardly possible. - New Albany Daily Ledger Standard 05-17-1880, p. 4 col. 1

Several of the citizens living in the neighborhood of the Box farm, publish a card in which they protest that the *LEDGER-STANDARD* should not have stated that "many years ago milk sickness existed on the Box farm." The *LEDGER-STANDARD* did not state this as a fact. It only stated the substance of a conversation its reporter had with Dr. Lemon, and gave no opinion of its own in relation to the sickness or its cause. It did, however, publish the statements of several of the oldest citizens hereabout, that no milk sickness had ever existed on the place. - New Albany Ledger Standard 17 May 1880, p. 4 col. 3

CAPT. JOHN BOX, his wife and nephew Sidney Box, are unimproved since Friday from the poisoning or other cause of their prostration. Capt. Box is slowly sinking under the disease, and it is said his recovery is impossible. - New Albany Ledger Standard 24 May 1880, p. 4 col. 5

Capt. John Box passed a night of great suffering, and it was hardly thought possible for him to survive until this morning. This forenoon he rallied somewhat and at 11 o'clock was resting more easily. He can not, however, possibly recover. Mrs. Box and her nephew remain much the same, the paralysis resulting from their poisoning continuing. All have suffered great tortures of both body and mind – the latter from the fact that a member of the family is suspected of the poisoning. – New Albany Ledger Standard 27 May 1880, p. 4 col. 3

#### Death of Capt. John Box.

At one o'clock this afternoon, Capt. John Box yielded to the mysterious disease that has so long prostrated himself and family, and passed peacefully away. It is stated a post mortem examination will be made. Capt. John Box was born in Humphries county, Tenn., in December, 1815, and was in his 66<sup>th</sup> year. He commenced learning the river as a pilot on the same boat with Capt. C. H. Meekin, many years ago. He was married September 14, 1847, to Miss Elizabeth Tellon, daughter of the late Capt. Peter Tellon. During his career on the river he commanded, and was part owner of the famed steamers *Dove* and *Peter Tellon*. During the war he was in the gunboat service of the government, and at its close settled on his farm in Arkansas; but so bitter was the rebel feeling against him there that he finally sold out and returned to this county, where he engaged in farming on the place where he closed his life this afternoon. He was a good man, a kind, indulgent husband, and had the respect of all who knew him. For many years he was a consistent member of Wesley Chapel church. His death will be sincerely mourned by a devoted wife and large circle of friends. His funeral takes place Wednesday afternoon at 3 o'clock, at his residence. [d: 06-07-1880] – New Albany Daily Ledger Standard 07 June 1880, p. 4 col. 2

BOX FAMILY POISONING. The Coroner's Investigation Commenced. Testimony of the Witnesses. Coroner Whitten today commenced taking the testimony in the now famous Box family poisoning – a case which promises to become famous in the criminal annals of Indiana. In all six members of the family fell victims to the mysterious poisoning, if poisoning it really proves to be, and is no reason for doubting that poison of some kind was the agency employed.

Capt. Box is dead of the poison. His wife and nephew are yet in great danger, the chances for recovery being against them. The others of the family stricken have recovered. A mystery surrounds this case which can only be cleared by the most thorough investigation and the shrewdest detective skill. Many people believe that, if Moses Box was a party to the poisoning, he was only the unskilled agent of shrewder villains. To get at the true inwardness of the mystery seems now to be the object.

It is to be borne in mind in reading the testimony that it is *ex parte*. Only one side of the case is examined by the coroner, and that is the side of the prosecution. The defense cannot be heard at a coroner's inquisition. It is therefore proper to say that the defendant in this case, Moses Box, enters a general denial of his guilt, and claims that when his side of the case is heard in the courts he will be able to fully vindicate his innocence. Therefore, no man should make up his judgment against the accused until the case is heard on its merits and in all its details. The following is the testimony:

Silas Tellon's Testimony: When we were manuring the field Moses Box asked me how much poison it would take to kill a person. I told him I thought it would take a few grains. I asked him, in a joking way, if he intended killing anyone, and he said no. He said that a druggist told him that a teaspoonful or a tablespoonful would kill a whole family, but if one person took that much they would throw it up. I think it was just about the time, or a little after the sickness.

Question: Did he ever have any family difficulty? Answer: No; only he wanted to marry Miss King and the family objected to it; he did not want the family dictating to him and he gave Capt. Box to understand he would go if he wanted to. After this conversation he said Capt. Box gave him a jawing. After this jawing he treated Capt. Box the same, only he would not go to his room only when they called him. I live at the house of Capt. Box – he is my uncle – last summer my aunt bought some poison, Capt. Box had been sick some eight or ten weeks. Julia Tellon and Lena Devenish found poison; Julia the second time she found the poison showed it to me. I have no means of knowing the cause of the sickness of Capt. Box. Drs. Wilcox, Lemon, and Steward all came. It was before the poison was found I had the conversation with Moses Box.

Miss Lena Devenish's Testimony: I reside with my father. I knew Capt. Box and visited the house, but can't tell exactly the last time he was sick. Question: Did you find any poison? Answer: I did not. Did you see any label

marked poison? I did, in Miss Julia Tellon's hands. I was with Miss Tellon when she found the poison in the barn. I saw the label. It was wrapped in a newspaper, and found in the stable part of the barn. It was in the pocket of an old vest. I don't know whose vest it was. The label was printed with skull and crossbones and labeled poison. This was after the sickness.

Miss Julia Tellon's Testimony: I have been living at Capt. Box's. Eight or ten weeks ago he was taken sick. It was on Tuesday. He was taken with vomiting. I prepared the food that day. I got the water from the well. Mrs. Box was taken sick. I was taken sick. Moses Box was not taken sick. Capt. Box and wife ate breakfast at 6 A.M. and were taken sick at 10 A.M. Moses Box was at work in the field. We had no water on the table. We all drank coffee. We drank out of the bucket containing well water; Moses Box drank out of a jug containing mineral spring water. I never talked to him about the poison. When the neighbors talked to him about the poison he said Julia Tellon put it there. I asked him afterwards, in presence of others, if I had done so, and he said no, he knew I did not, and if I would let it drop he would. I told him he was too willing. Witness then described the label. When I first found the package it had only one teaspoonful taken out. When I found it afterwards it contained only one teaspoonful.

George Devenish Testimony: I know nothing about the case except that it was a strange sickness.

Dr. S. C. Wilcox's Testimony: Visited the Tellon children. Found them with white tongues and sick at the stomach. Said they could not all be taken sick without some local cause and advised them not to use out of the well. I prescribed for dropsy for Mrs. Box.

Mrs. Smith's Testimony: I was at Capt. Box's and waited on the family. I thought the sickness bilious fever. Moses Box was obedient and kind. I cooked with the water and drank from the well before it was cleaned out. I went to the well. They all had the same kind of sickness.

Jesse J. Wright's Testimony: I and my wife frequently visited the Box family. I interviewed Moses Box at the barn and said you have been selling some of the stock. He answered yes. I accused him of carrying poison. He at first denied and then acknowledged he had bought poison for Mrs. Devenish. I talked to him until he cried. He asked me what he should do. I advised him to leave the neighborhood. He acknowledged he had poison on two occasions.

This afternoon the coroner is at the residence of the late Capt. Box taking the testimony of Mrs. Box and Sidney, who are unable to leave their beds. Tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock the investigation will be resumed at the U.S. court room in the court house.

CHARGED WITH MURDER. Conclusion of the Testimony in the Box Family Poisoning. Verdict Charging Moses Box with the Crime. Today coroner Whitten concluded the taking of the testimony in the inquisition upon Capt. John Box. A pretty full abstract of the evidence is given below. The investigation throughout makes a bad showing against Moses Box, and the coroner's verdict charges him with the murder of his uncle by arsenical poisoning.

While it is to be borne in mind that the testimony is all *ex parte*, the only side heard being that of the prosecution, it will have to be admitted that the evidence is very damaging to the accused. Much important testimony was purposely omitted in the investigation; such, for instance as related to the accused selling stock from the farm and attempting to sell other stock, and of his efforts to borrow money on Capt. Box's credit; the difficulties in the family growing out of the opposition of Capt. and Mrs. Box to the young man's marriage, and other important matters bearing on the case. The boy – for he is nothing more than a boy, though married – denies his guilt with the utmost persistence; but unfortunately for him he has been led through fear, or otherwise, to tell different stories in relation to the same fact; and this is against him. And yet all these may be satisfactorily explained. The LEDGER-STANDARD sincerely hopes that will be, for it is loth to believe him guilty. The following is to-day's testimony:

Mrs. Frances Sanderson's Testimony: I think it was on the first day of April I went to Capt. Box's. The Thursday before I found Capt. Box, his wife, and Sidney Box all sick. I ate dinner. Mrs. Box and Sidney vomited that evening. I was taken sick with vomiting and pain in my back next day. I felt very sick. Friday night Carrie Telson was taken very sick. Julia vomited Saturday night. At that time five of us were down sick. I went home on Monday and took Carrie with me. Next day Moses Box came in and told me they were all very sick. The next time I went to Box's I was taken very sick again. My feet were so much swollen I could not lace my shoes. Monday a week from my first visit I took Carrie out again, when she was again taken sick, with frequent vomiting. Every time Silas took a drink at Box's he vomited, but when he drank the water in town he did not vomit, nor did it make him sick. Every time they ate at the table at Box's they vomited. The last time we vomited was about five weeks ago. Moses ate of the first jar of pickles that was opened and placed on the table. But when a second jar was put on the table he refused to eat of them. He never used sugar in his coffee. (There was poison found in the sugar.) Moses ate the other victuals the same as the others, except of the pickles. I drank of the water and it produced nausea. In pouring the water out of the tea kettle I saw small particles of white chrystals floating on the top of the water, and I did not drink of the tea made from it.

Dr. Lemon's Evidence: I visited Capt. Box on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. He was quite sick, complaining of numbness of feet and hands. He had symptoms

of malarial fever, for which I treated him, and under this treatment, at first, the disease yielded; but afterwards grew worse. I consider Capt. Box died from nervous prostration, caused by some mineral poison as to what kind of poison, or how administered, there is nothing in the symptoms exposed to determine them as of arsenical poisoning, except the condition of paralysis.

Dr. E. W. King's Testimony: I went to see Capt. Box through the courtesy of Dr. Stewart, and made a medical examination. He was very low and I noticed paralysis. He could use his limbs. The history of the early sickness, as learned from the family, and the paralysis more closely coincides with the symptoms generally laid down by the authors as those of acute arsenical poison. There was one of the indications in the post-mortem examination that was rather marked, and that was in the fluid condition of the blood, more so than any I ever before observed, and this is one point of indication spoken of by the authors.

Dr. Easley's Testimony: I was present at the post mortem examination. We did not expect to find any poison. Our object was to remove a certain organ of the body for future analysis. I have conversed about the case with Drs. Lemon and Stewart, as it has been one of more than ordinary interest. The only striking feature of the post mortem examination was the unusual fluidity of the blood. The flesh was of a pinkish color, as though produced by saltpeter.

Dr. George Cannon's Testimony: I was present at the post mortem examination held on the body of Capt. Box. From the examination I could not tell if any poison had been used. I have attended cases of poisonings. The symptoms of arsenical poisoning are vomiting, purging and great thirst. These are the most conspicuous.

Dr. John L. Stewart's Testimony: I attended Capt. John Box and his family. I was called late in the case, not until the 18<sup>th</sup> of May. I found three of the family suffering from great prostration, with local paralysis of the muscles and of the extremities, except in the case of Capt. Box, shoulders and muscles of the neck. Diagnosis obscure, but from the symptoms, indicating some mineral poison, these symptoms not being common to ordinary diseases. The local paralysis affected all the extremities; the skin was dry and pallid; pulse ranging from 94 to 110, and very feeble; the finger nails and toe nails presenting the appearance of shedding, with a well marked line between the new and old growth. The stomach was very much enfeebled, and seemed partially paralysed. The agent that produced these symptoms was the agent that caused his death.

CORONER'S VERDICT: After hearing the evidence in the investigation as to the cause of the death of Capt. John Box, I find that said Box came to his death from arsenical poison, at the hands of Moses Box. E. Whitten, C.F.C.

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION – Moses Box, against whom the above verdict was rendered, is now in jail. He will have a preliminary hearing at

such time as he may designate his readiness therefore. His wife called to see him several times at the jail.

WILL NOT TRY THE CASE – this afternoon an effort was made to get a preliminary examination of Moses Box on the verdict found by the coroner. Esquire Williams, before whom it was sought to bring the case, decided that under the law of the state a hearing could not be had on the coroner's verdict, and in order to have a preliminary examination a complaint charging the crime upon Moses Box must be sworn to.

- New Albany Daily Ledger Standard 11 June 1880, p. 4 col. 2

SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. Some Singular Cases, Illustrating How Easily People May be Mistaken. Common Rumor Generally Common Falsehood. Nothing is more easy of accomplishment than to talk up a crushing public sentiment against one accused of crime. It generally makes little difference how fair in character the accused may have previously been regarded by the public, busy-bodies and thoughtless people, by putting together little bits of bad report, or distorting actions that may appear at first glance as not susceptible of explanation, have often created such public prejudice against one accused of crime as to condemn him before trial. Such things are common in this country, and especially are they common in the west. That they are so is certainly to be deplored, for evil reports, devoid of real truth, have often been so magnified as to render it impossible for accused persons to secure a fair, unprejudiced trial.

A few years ago a widow lady and her unmarried daughter resided near Bowling Green, in Clay county. The old lady was known to have a considerable sum of money. At a certain time she was engaged in making a rag carpet, and running out of carpet-rags, went to a neighbor, Mrs. Tracey, and borrowed several balls of rags. The widow finished her carpet, and in a short time thereafter returned to Mrs. Tracey the number of carpet-rag balls she had borrowed of her. A few days after returning the rags the widow died very suddenly. After her death search was made for the woman's money, but all efforts to discover it proved vain. Then some idle, thoughtless person put into circulation a suspicion that the widow's daughter had poisoned her mother and got possession of and secreted the money. The suspicion grew in strength as it was daily reported, until finally the charge of murdering and robbing her mother was boldly made against the unfortunate daughter. A hundred or more "suspicious circumstances" were dug up; the girl, in her simplicity and fear, made contradictory statements, and these were woven into a web by the gossips until it looked to all like the girl's guilt was established beyond all cavil and she would have to pay the penalty with her life.

About this time, and when the dark cloud of circumstantial evidence seemed to envelope the wretched daughter, Mrs. Tracey, of whom the widow had borrowed the carpet rags, had a singular dream. She dreamt that she had opened one of the balls of carpet-rags returned to her by the widow and found therein a large sum of money. Next morning she told this dream to her husband and family at the breakfast table, remarking that it was very singular she should have such a curious revelation in her sleep; but the husband and children laughed at her. During the day Mrs. Tracey's singular dream was ever present with her; and in the afternoon she went to the carpet-rag balls returned to her by the widow and selected the one that was indicated by its color in her dream, and unwrapped it. She found therein the missing money of the widow, and thus saved the unhappy and innocent daughter from the gallows or penitentiary.



In 1840 a family named Anderson resided in Jackson township, Shelby county. There were seven persons in the family, Anderson and his wife and their four children, and Anderson's mother. The family resided on a farm in a neighborhood celebrated for health. On a certain night Anderson, his wife, mother and the three youngest children were stricken with sudden illness. The oldest child, a boy of 12 years, escaped. The symptoms were vomiting, great nervous prostration, almost total paralysis of the limbs in some and partial paralysis with the others. But all had "drop-joint," some more, others less. They all died in the course of three or four weeks. The opinion was prevalent they died of milk sickness, but this was combated with the fact that the two cows on the farm betrayed no symptoms of the disease. Finally experts from Louisville and Cincinnati visited the farm. The season was spring, and the weather had been rainy at frequent intervals. The family used water from a spring. After a hard rain a water vein burst out of the ground some little distance up the hillside above the spring from which the family used, a little stream trickled forth and dropped itself into the spring. This stream was so small that no attention was paid to its deposit in the spring. After the family had all died, except the 12-year-old boy, who had not been affected, the opinion became general that they had been poisoned, and it was thought the poisoner had used the boy as his instrument. Much effort was made to get at the real facts. When the Cincinnati and Louisville medical experts got through with their examination, they gave it as their opinion that the little stream that dropped itself into the spring had taken up some poison in the ground and deposited it in the spring. This saved a worthy neighbor of the family and the 12-year-old boy from a prosecution for murder.

Near Lanesville, Harrison county, several years ago, an entire family, with the exception of one member, was stricken down suddenly and died. Poisoning was suspected as partial paralysis supervened in each case. Investigation led to two or three theories, one of these being milk sickness, though that disease had never been known in the neighborhood. Finally experts pronounced the disease pernicious malarial fever. In these cases the malarial poisoning was so severe as to greatly fluidize the blood. Only a few years ago a family was similarly stricken in Estill county, Ky., and all but two died. In this instance poisoning was charged and a suspected party was arrested. The medical experts pronounced the disease malarial poisoning, and the accused party was discharged from arrest.

In the case of the Box family, near this city, there are no stronger circumstances, nor as strong, pointing to arsenical poisoning than in the three last instances given above; and there is no stronger circumstantial evidence against Moses Box than in these three last named cases. There was more circumstantial evidence against the girl of the widow near Bowling Green, Indiana, than there is against Moses Box, for she might have had an incentive in getting possession of her mother's money, when Moses

Box well knew that he would not gain a single dollar if his uncle's family were all dead. He knew the farm and property were not owned by Capt. Box, and that it would absorb all he had to meet his obligations, leaving nothing for any one but the creditors. He knew these facts, for he was familiar with Capt. Box's business. As to his marriage with Miss King, which was opposed by Captain Box and his family, no one knew better than Moses Box that he could marry when he pleased and who he pleased, no matter how the family might oppose. His sale of some of the cattle on the farm was acknowledged to be for the purpose of raising money to defray his marriage expenses. He maintained that he had a moral, if not a legal right to the cattle, as his labor helped earn them and all the other stock on the farm. Of course he had no legal right to sell the cattle; but his sale of them is no sort of evidence that he poisoned the family. And so all, or nearly all, the acts of the boy after and immediately before the family were attacked by the illness that has prostrated them – even the threatening that brought an acknowledgement from him at the barn that he had purchased some poison – a fact he never denied – for his aunt had sent him on a certain time to purchase arsenic, as she herself states – all these amount to no proof at all that Moses Box poisoned the family. It is time enough for the public to charge upon this simple-minded, friendless orphan boy – for he is but a boy in mind and experience – the awful crime of poisoning an entire family that he had always loved with an affection that was commented on by the family and all acquainted with them, when the fact that he is guilty is proved. Till then let pity – the sweetest attribute of our nature – throw over the “circumstances” that are being dragged out, piecemeal, and distorted to convict him, the mantle of charitable construction. No right-minded man would have Moses Box escape punishment if he is guilty; but till he is so proved no right-hearted man will try to fan up a flame of persecution against him. - New Albany Daily Ledger Standard 12 June 1880, p. 4 col. 2

The preliminary hearing in the case of the State vs. Moses Box, charged with the poisoning of the Box family, comes off on Thursday next before esquire Williams. The trial will be held at the court house. - New Albany Ledger Standard 12 June 1880, p. 4 col. 3

Mrs. Box and Sydney Box were much improved yesterday, and it is hoped they will speedily recover. It is possible, however that the paralysis that afflicts them will be permanent. - New Albany Ledger Standard 12 June 1880, p. 4 col. 3

THE BOX CASE. The discharge of Moses Box by 'Squire Collins on the investigation of the poisoning charge, was a most proper thing. It will yet transpire that there was not just ground for even suspecting this young man. The whole warfare upon him has borne the feature of a persecution rather than of an unprejudiced investigation in search of truth. The arrest of the young man on the charge of stealing cattle after his discharge in the poisoning case, on a par with all the other persecuting features of the war that has been made upon him. At its worst the sale of the cattle is only a breach of trust in the law, as he was of the family and had the cattle in charge. There is not a man nor woman in Floyd County who knows Moses Box that believes he would run away to avoid a legal investigation. At the very start in this wretched poisoning charge against him, as one of the witnesses testified, an effort was made to drive him out of the county, which he resisted. He will no doubt remain to have the case thoroughly investigated, for above all this is what he desires. When he has vindicated himself he will make it pretty hot in the courts against those who have been so active in charging murder upon him and in causing his arrest. - New Albany Ledger Standard 18 June 1880, p. 4 col. 2

The Box So-Called Poisoning. Dr. Kastenbine, of Louisville, who was paid one hundred and twenty-five dollars by the county commissioners for an analysis of the liver, kidneys and abdominal viscera of the late Capt. John Box, filed his report in the auditor's office Saturday evening. To sum up the report briefly Dr. Kastenbine says he found no arsenic in the remains and no indications of arsenical poisoning, the results being negative. He states that he discovered a small particle of arsenic in the analysis made of the pocket of the old vest of Moses Box. It will be remembered in connection with this, however, that Moses Box has stated from the first that he bought arsenic for his aunt, the wife of Capt. Box, and Mrs. Box corroborates his statement. It would be easy enough in carrying the arsenic from the city to the farm in the vest pocket for particles of it to work out of the package into the pocket, and as the arsenic purchased was to be used in killing muskrats and mice, the arsenic may have been carried in the pocket of Moses Box while he assisted his uncle in the muskrat poisoning. The cause of the peculiar illness of the family must now be sought in some other direction. The analysis of Dr. Kastenbine certainly explodes the arsenical poisoning theory. – New Albany Ledger Standard 28 June 1880, p. 4 col. 3

See VF BOX and See Family History Files under "WHO'S YOUR HOOSIER ANCESTOR" on this website for additional information regarding the Box Family.