

Murder Trial Articles for Sarah Ryder Earhart
(Mother-in-law of Martin Foutz)
and
Articles on the Suicide of Martin Foutz

Generation 1

1. **Sarah Ryder Ehrhart** daughter of Jacob Ryder and Mary Wortz Ryder was born about 1804 in PA.

Notes for Sarah Ryder Ehrhart:

General Notes:

I stumbled upon the following information while trying to find information on the parents of Martin Foutz from a genealogist at the West Alexandria, Ohio library. The genealogist faxed some newspaper articles she found concerning Martin's mother-in-law, Sarah Earhart, and her son Michael, who were arrested on attempted murder charges. The articles only went as far as saying what the accusations were. The genealogist couldn't find any newspaper articles on the trial or the fate of Sarah and Michael.

I researched this further on my own to find out what happened at the trial. I came across someone on a genealogy message board by the name of Earhart living in Dayton, Ohio. He was interested in my inquiry because he is an Earhart descendant of Henry, brother of William Earhart (William is the father of Michael Earhart; one of the persons on trial). He wanted to know the outcome too and persisted in reading newspaper microfilm at the Dayton Library, Montgomery County Archives and Wright State University Library and mailed copies of the articles to me.

The following Newspaper Articles on Sarah Earhart and her son Michael were sent to me from the West Alexandria Library. Eaton Democrat (ED) & the Eaton Register (ER):

"Mrs. Earhart, mother-in-law of Martin Foutz whose tragic death occurred last week, and her son were arrested a few days ago and taken to Germantown where they had a preliminary trial on a charge of poisoning. They were held for their appearance for the sum of \$1000. Both gave the required bond. Great excitement exists in and around Germantown and in the neighborhood of West Alex. Several bodies, relatives of Mrs. Earhart, are to be exhumed." ED May 22, 1873

"It will be remembered that some four or five weeks ago, a family named Hanna, the father, son and daughter, living near Germantown, were all more or less severely poisoned from drinking coffee in which arsenic had been introduced. Last week a warrant was sworn by John Hanna, the father, against Michael Earhart and his mother, the latter of Lanier Twp., as the guilty persons.

They were brought before Justice Frank on the 14th and gave bail in \$1000 each for their appearance at next term of court. The mother had little difficulty in finding bail.

It may be proper to add that the charge is that Mrs. Earhart's son had married one of Hanna's daughters, and that having bought a farm, and being unable to meet the payments, the mother concluded to help her son to some money by putting his wife's family out of the way so that she would come in for the estate, thus enabling her husband to meet his liabilities, and further, that the son sided in the wicked work which was only frustrated by their overdoing the matter in giving too much poison. Since this occurrence it is currently reported that the old lady poisoned a former wife of Michael, 17 months ago; that she poisoned a child of Martin Foutz some time since, which with her other crimes so prayed upon him that he shot himself, and that her life has been full of crime, poisoning stock, burning barns, etc. for years." ER May 22, 1873

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"Sarah Earhart and Michael Earhart, her son, were indicted last week by the Grand Jury of Montgomery Co. for poisoning the Hanna family." ER May 29, 1873

Letter to the Editor:

"In your issue of May 22, you have an article in reference to the Hannah poisoning case, in which you make some remarks which in my judgement are not sustained by any evidence offered in the case.

I am informed by parties that know, that Mr. Earhart's farm is worth from \$6000 to \$8000 and that his indebtedness on the same is but \$500 and that there is not a particle of evidence to sustain such a slanderous and wicked report. But it seems there must be a motive to sustain the charge against these parties; hence these wicked and dark insinuation to forestall and poison the public mind against these defendants and especially the old helpless woman who is now made the wicked instrument of causing the death of every member of the entire connection for the last twenty or thirty years, by these dark and damnable reports, and all seems to have but one object in view, to so prejudice the public mind against this helpless old woman of 70 years, and bring her to the gallows or to confine her within the walls of a gloomy prison, to take out a miserable remnant of a few years of shame and disgrace.

Oh, for shame! Stop and think if your article will not assist in the consummation of the punishment of this old and helpless woman, though she may be as innocent as the unborn babe. My idea is that when such awful charges are made against any fellow being, that the public should withhold its judgment until the charge is fully proven. This seems to me would be more in accordance with a Christian spirit and a sense of equal justice.

It seems to me that such articles as the one in the Register of the 22nd, participates in tone and spirit largely of the olden times and dark ages, when they would charge old helpless women with being witches, and bring them to the scaffold and ignominious death, and that too by the same kind of evidence that is charged against this helpless old woman. Your article as I understand it, assumes that these wild and damnable rumors are true, when there is not a single sentence or word in the evidence to sustain them. Would it not be more in keeping with Christian sympathy to withhold from the public gaze such dark rumors of crime until there is some proof to justify such publications?

Now Mr. Editor, I am informed by the brother of Martin Foutz that Mrs. Earhart was staying or living with him at the time the child referred to was taken sick and that she was not present and did not know that the child was sick until she was sent for only a few hours before the child died, and that he is satisfied from a conversation he had with his brother the day before he committed the rash act, that this circumstance had nothing whatever to do in bringing about his melancholy affair, and it happens that the old lady was hundreds of miles away when some of these things transpired that rumor says she was guilty of, unless, indeed, she is a witch and can be visible and invisible hundreds of miles away and commit a crime and be back the next instant and no one have seen her. If she is guilty of all that rumor charges her with, she must be one of the presto change kind.

I hope you will have an article in your next issue charging her with being a witch and so shaping public opinion and have her indicted as a witch. "With malice toward none and charity for all" is your motto. Then for the sake of charity do justice to this old broken-hearted woman. I am no apologist for the testimony before Esquire Frank of Germantown, to invite such charges as alleged in your

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article. Now our laws hold all persons innocent until they are proven guilty; and I hold that all such articles as the one referred to are very painful and insulting to a very large and respectable circle of friends of the accused and very unjust to the defendants themselves, because it tends to prejudice public opinion against them before their trial and tends to manufacture evidence with a view to convict and consequently are cruelly unjust, cowardly and mean to the accused parties.

These defendants are now undergoing a judicial investigation. I therefore ask in the name of the accused parties and in the name of humanity and common justice to all, a suspension of public judgment until this case has been heard by the proper authorities."

West Alexandria

"Remark - Perhaps the writer of the above is a relative of the accused, which will explain the warmth with which he writes. For ourselves, we can truly say that while we gave the reports that we had seen and heard, and only these, we most earnestly hope there may not be a word of truth in them. Far be it from us to injure Mrs. Earhart, or anyone else." ER June 5, 1873

"Mrs. Earhart is now in a far way to be prosecuted for poisoning her son's second wife, a daughter of Mr. McLane of Farmersville. An inquest was to be held yesterday and the stomach was to be submitted to chemical analysis." ER June 26, 1873

"The trial of Sarah and Michael Earhart takes place this week at Dayton. A dispatch from Dayton says of the case: "In an interview with Sarah Earhart a few days since at her home near West Alexandria, Preble County, she asserted her entire innocence of ever dreaming of poisoning the Hanna family, or anybody else. She cannot conceive whatever put such a thing into anybody's head as to charge her with poisoning them. She asserts that when the case comes before a jury, everybody will wonder why such a charge was ever thought of or made. She asserts that there are others who had a thousand times more reason to poison the Hanna family than she had, and that it will probably transpire on the trial that some folks had better let this poisoning affair alone."

ER Nov 20, 1873

Trial articles Ron Earhart found at the Dayton Library and/or the Wright State University Library in Ohio: The first 2 articles are only summarized, the 3rd article is typed in its entirety.

Dayton Daily Journal: Thursday January 29, 1874

EARHART POISONING CASE - The Trial in the Court of Common Pleas Today

"The trial of Mrs Sarah Earhart and her son, Michael, is set down for today, in the Court of Common Pleas, on a charge of poisoning the Hanna family, near Germantown, last spring. When the charge was first brought, it excited an unusual degree of interest, which will be revived by the trial now about to take place. The defendants are respectably connected, and the advanced age (seventy) of Mrs. Earhart, together with the fact that it was her son's wife's family that she is charged with poisoning, interests the case with an interest that it would not otherwise possess.

The readers of the Journal will recollect that the Hanna family, whose lives were

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attempted, consists of three persons - John Hanna, sen. and his son John and daughter Catherine. They live a mile and a half from Germantown on the Farmersville pike, and are well to do, but very simple and ignorant people. One of Hanna's daughters, Mary, is the wife of Michael Earhart, one of the parties charged with the crime, and the son of Mrs. Earhart, the other defendant. So, this unhappy woman is placed in the painful position of seeing her husband and mother-in-law prosecuted by her father, brother and sister on a charge of attempting to take their lives..."

Dayton Daily Journal: Friday January 30, 1874

This article presents the evidence in the case and testimony from witnesses. It basically goes into detail about how the two families ate dinner together and drank coffee afterwards. The coffee pot was found to have a small amount of arsenic granules.

Dayton Daily Journal: Saturday January 31, 1874

EARHART POISONING CASE

The Defendants Acquitted - - The Affair Still a Mystery

"The Earhart poisoning case came to a rather sudden termination in the Court of Common Pleas yesterday, by the abandonment of their prosecution on the part of the State. Mrs. Sarah Earhart and her son Michael have been pronounced not guilty of the offense with which they were charged, and this leaves the violent sickness of the Hanna family on the 23d of last April, when they had every symptom of having been poisoned, a greater mystery than it was before the trial.

On the assembling of the Court yesterday morning, counsel for defendants recalled John Hanna, sen., who made some additional explanations of his statements in his previous examination. On Thursday he had been understood to say that on the 23rd of April he had seen his son vomiting while he was sick. Yesterday he said that his statement was incorrect if he had made it. He had heard John complaining of being sick, but did not recollect to have seen him vomiting.

The State re????ed and introduced Constable Young, of Germantown. His testimony related to the arrest of the defendants and his custody of the coffee pot, in which it was supposed the poison was deposited. His statements had no material bearing on the case either one way or the other.

Mr. Schaeffer, the Germantown drug clerk who it was alleged had sold arsenic to Mike Earhart on the 2d of April, was also introduced, but he was unable to identify Earhart as the man to whom he had sold it. Somebody had bought arsenic at the store that day, but he could not say that it was the defendant. With the failure to establish this material fact, the prosecution broke down, whereupon Prosecuting Attorney Young consented that the jury should return a verdict of not guilty as to Sarah Earhart, and he entered a nolle* as to Michael. The defendants received the announcement of the result with the same imperturbable composure that has marked them throughout the trial."

* I looked up the legal term nolle and the closest match to this is nolle prosequi, which means "we shall no longer prosecute." Essentially, it is an admission on the part of the prosecution that some aspect of its case against the defendant has fallen apart.

Articles/Announcements of the death of Martin Foutz

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Preble County, Probate Court mailed a listing of death announcements for Preble County which contained a brief notice on Martin Foutz. It reads, "Foutz, Martin, of Lanier twp. shot himself May 10, 1873". The clerk also included a copy of a publication called, "Abstracts from The Eaton Democrat-Preble County Ohio 1872 - 1877 Vol 1". This document reads, "Martin Fouts of Lanier Twp, Suicide, died May 10, 1873, age 47. Leaves wife and 8 children. Owner of Fulling mill on Banta Creek."

Excerpt from the Eaton Register Newspaper:

"The people of Lanier Twp. and around West Alex were shocked on Friday last by the suicide of Martin Foutz, a citizen widely known throughout this county and universally respected. He was starting on a squirrel hunt with a nephew, a son of Elijah Foutz, and after proceeding some ways from the house, said to his nephew that he would end his troubles, whereupon he put the muzzle of his gun against his forehead and touching the trigger with a stick, discharged the gun, inflicting a wound that terminated his life at 4 on Saturday morning.

The source of his deep trouble seems to have been a son whom he loved dearly and who has been deeply afflicted with a cancerous affliction for years and which now threatens his life, and perhaps, other troubles of which even his family was not advised. On Thursday night, the poor man walked the floor the whole night without a moments sleep, declaring at times that his trouble was more than he could stand. He leaves a worthy but sad and deeply afflicted family." Eaton Register, May 15, 1873.

Dayton Journal, Monday, May 12, 1873, p. 4 col. 4.

Copy provided by: The Dayton & Montgomery County Public Library, 215 E. Third St., Dayton, OH, www.dayton.lib.oh.us

Article headline:

SUICIDE - A Prominent Citizen of West Alexandria Blows His Brains Out.

The citizens of West Alexandria and vicinity were thrown into a terrible state of excitement last Friday afternoon by the announcement that Martin Foutz, of the firm of M. & E. Foutz, proprietors of the woolen mills near that village, had committed suicide by blowing out his brains with a shot-gun.

About 1 o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Foutz, in company with a nephew of his, went to a grove near his residence for the purpose of shooting a squirrel that had just been seen by some member of the family on a tree. On their arrival in the grove he said to his nephew, "Tell them to bury me as they like, I'll trouble myself no more," and before the young man could realize what his uncle meant, the unhappy man placed the muzzle of the gun to his forehead, and moving the trigger with the ramrod, the contents were discharged into his head, inflicting a terrible wound, through which the brain instantly commenced oozing out. He was conveyed to the house, where he lingered until next morning at 4 o'clock, when he died.

Mr. Foutz was a most estimable man, successful in business, and it is not to be wondered at that the story of the tragedy created a profound sensation in his neighborhood. He was a married man, about 40 or 45 years of age, with a family of several children, was a member of the Reformed Church and of the Masonic Order. His oldest son, a promising young man to whom his father was much attached, has a tumor growing upon his neck, which, the physicians say, will soon end his days, and it is thought by some of his neighbors that this had a tendency to produce the melancholy which resulted in the suicide.

Recently, he has been much depressed, but at the dinner table, just before he took his life, he was in excellent spirits. There are causes assigned by some of his neighbors for the rash act, which we do not deem it proper to give publicity to, until we are more fully advised on the subject.

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The funeral took place yesterday, the ceremonies being conducted by the Masonic order, and was largely attended.

William Ehrhart son of John Ehrhart and Elizabeth Ehrhart was born in PA. He died in 1847 in Preble Co., OH.

William Ehrhart and Sarah Ryder Ehrhart married. They had 7 children.

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