

Say the papers: "His pleas of self-defense and extreme youth of the prisoner probably saved him from the electrical chair. Fox is indeed lucky in getting out of this difficulty with such a light sentence."

1898, April 13: The *Superior City* is launched from the Lorain Yards of the Cleveland Ship Building Company. She is the first large steel-hulled cargo carrier to sail the Great Lakes and the biggest freshwater ship of her time (429 feet long, 50 feet wide, 25 feet high, and just over 4,785 gross tons), propeller driven, with a crew of 33.

At 10:00pm, August 20, 1920, in Whitefish Bay, Lake Superior, she is rammed on her port side, aft of amidships by the steamer *Willis L. King*. The stern of the *Superior City* blows to smithereens when her boilers contact the cold lake water. She sinks quickly, and all but four hands are lost.

One survivor is Walter Richter, of Lorain, stripped naked by the force of the blast that lifted him from his doomed ship. He is found floating to safety on a hatch cover.

1899: Camille Jenatzy is the first to officially drive faster than a mile a minute, reaching 65mph. It's an electric car. The Somalis rebel against Britain. The U.S. is involved in the Moro Rebellion (Philippines) in particular, and the Philippine-American War, in general. American Shipbuilding Co., Lorain. Lorain Harbor has a light-keeper. In the Docket: Selling Liquor to Minors. Fines are \$80 and less. 106 lynchings: 85 Blacks, 21 others.

1899, April 8, Saturday: Location: Lorain, Ward 3, "On the viaduct." Victim: George Rider (Reider, Bider) (38). Suspect: Anton(e) Sagi. "Both men are Hungarians."

Sagi and his wife, Katy, are married in Cleveland in August of 1895. They have a daughter, five-year-old Helen, and run a boarding house near the Lorain Steel Mill. Bad feeling have existed between the Sagi and Rider since before Sagi applied for divorce on the grounds of adultery, claiming Rider has ruined his family. The two men meet by chance on the Lorain Viaduct. An altercation follows. Sagi pulls his revolver, shoots Rider three times, and then immediately surrenders to police. Held by Lorain Mayor Babcock for shooting with intent to kill. Bail is set at \$1,000. Bail is revoked, and the charge upped to murder when medical treatment fails to save Rider's life. He is buried in the potter's field of Lorain's Elmwood Cemetery.

Sagi is placed in the county lockup because Lorain Jail officials are worried about a lynching. But, "Upon inquiry it was learned there was nothing to fear from this point, as all sympathy of the Hungarians were with the man that had done the shooting."

Sagi and his wife reconcile while he awaits trial.

His trial attorneys are E.G. Johnson and W.L. Hughes. Charge: Murder in the second degree. Plea: Not guilty. *Changed to:* Guilty of manslaughter. Sentence: Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, 5 years.

Week of June 15, 1899, after sentencing by Judge Nye, the papers say:

The circumstances of the case, and the fortitude with which Sagi bore his imprisonment have created for him no little sympathy and many would have been pleased had he received a lighter sentence. Sagi's wife and children visited him in the jail after he was sentenced, and he promised to return to them at the expiration of his term of imprisonment. *The Elyria Reporter, June 15, 1899.*

Mrs. Sagi, who runs the boarding house while her husband is imprisoned, continues to cater to a rough crowd.

1900, summer: Sagi is paroled. Shortly thereafter he sues for divorce from Katy, the woman for whom he killed. She gets their property. He gets custody of their daughter. Sagi and the girl move in with his elderly parents who also live in Lorain.

1900, late September: Katy countersues. Her attorney is Q.A. Gillmore. Non-support is one reason, that he's "in the penitentiary" is the other. In actuality, he's serving his sentence, but is on parole.

1902, May 22: Mr. Anton Sagi is granted a divorce on the ground of her unfaithfulness.

1902, June 26: Lorain dock hand Anton Sagi (41) files for a license to marry Mrs. Teresa Lacz(a) (18) of Lorain.

1902, June 26: Sagi is struck with a crane bucket while helping to load coal "at the Whirleys" (a high, spinning crane). His shoulder is injured and skull fractured. Recovery is "doubtful." I did not find a death notice.

1899, September 7, Thursday evening:

Thick-set, with graying black hair and mustache, Clevelander Franklin E. Wheeler has been in Lorain for about two months, doing a good business as a sales agent for the New Jersey Mutual Life Insurance Company. His unassuming and intelligent manner makes him seem about a decade older than his 43 years, but he is popular and has many friends—when sober.

Wheeler is no saint. He's divorced, is known to take a drink, or two, and is a frequent customer of Lorain native, 25-year-old Philip Meyers, of Livingston Avenue, who runs the bar adjacent to Lorain's Franklin Hotel, where Wheeler has a room.

The evening of Thursday, September 7, Wheeler and Meyers bump into each other in the hotel's dining room. Meyers takes the moment to publicly remind the older man that he owes a bar tab of \$4.00. Franklin strenuously denies the bill. The young, yet veteran barkeeper persists; he knows unpaid bills are bad for business. The two men exchange a few harsh words, then go their separate ways.

Bartender Meyers takes a seat and orders dinner. Wheeler leaves the hotel and walks across the street to Chapman and Hill's general store. He tells the clerk he wants to "kill a cat" and purchases an Ivers Johnson, double-acting, .38 caliber, 5-shot revolver. Wheeler asks the salesman to load the weapon and then buys five extra cartridges, paying a dollar in total and promising to return to pay the balance.

Pocketing the revolver, Wheeler returns to the hotel and takes a seat in the dining room where he displays "unusually loud and boisterous" behavior, including singing and otherwise disturbing his fellow customers.

The waiter refuses to serve him and leaves the room to report the matter to the hotel owner, Mrs. McElroy. When she arrives to admonish Wheeler, he is gone, following Meyers, who left his seat at another table to return to his work.

Meyers enters his saloon, he takes a seat at the far end of the otherwise empty bar, and reopens the book he's been reading, *Captains Courageous*, by Rudyard Kipling. Wheeler strolls in a few moments later. Without a word, he walks about half-way across the room, takes quick aim with his brand new revolver, and fires two shots at Meyers. The first goes wide. The second flattens itself against the brick wall near the seated barkeep who, recovering his senses, leaps to his feet and dashes to the closest door, the one that leads outside.

Wheeler shoots three more times and Meyers is struck in the left arm, halfway between the elbow and shoulder; in the back through the left shoulder blade where it strikes a rib and stops near the breast bone; and through the back below the shoulder blade near the spine where it pierces the heart.

Those outside hear gunshots in rapid succession. The saloon door bursts open and out reels Philip Meyers, blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

Lorain's Dr. Kiplinger and Chester O'Neil almost collide with the dying man who collapses to the sidewalk and with a loud groan, dies. They carry him to a back room of the bar, summon doctors Mean and Van Tilberg, and alert the police.

Franklin Wheeler is no place to be found. He has wandered a few blocks to the home of Lorain's Dr. Garver. When told the doctor is not in, Wheeler says to the person answering the door, "I have just shot a man and I want to sit down here and wait for the police." When the doctor arrives, Wheeler is sitting, twirling the revolver in his hand. He appears neither excited, nor intoxicated. He is arrested and placed in the Lorain City Jail.

Lorain Police Chief Meister examines the revolver and finds all five chambers discharged. Wheeler exhibits "absolutely no emotion when questioned." When asked why he did it he says, "I intended to get even with him, but I guess I got a little too even."

A noisy crowd forms at the Franklin Hotel and begins making threats against Wheeler. Two or three hundred angry men gather at the Lorain City

Jail where they are told that the shooter has been taken Wheeler by buggy to Elyria. This is a lie meant to mislead, as shortly after, Wheeler is taken down the alley behind the city jail to Bank Street and then on the electric street car to the county seat. His escort, Chief Meister and five uniformed police, are happy to arrive safe and sound. For his part, Wheeler tells those protecting him that, if the mob finds them, to let them have him so that life and property would not be put at risk on his account because, "perhaps a man might be killed whose life is worth ten such as mine."

"Unprovoked and cold-blooded murder" is what the papers call it, "For cold blooded deliberation, [this crime has] never had an equal in the criminal history of the county."

During his first few days in jail Wheeler stays in his cot with a blanket hung in front of the door to keep out the light. He refuses all visitors and finally asks the sheriff not to admit them.

When arraigned, Wheeler is the coolest man in the room as he waives a hearing and pleads not guilty to murder in the first degree. He makes no arrangement for counsel, saying his friends will take care of him. It's as if he either doesn't know or doesn't care about the consequences of his actions.

Wheeler is indicted on charges of murder in the second by the Lorain County Grand Jury. It's something of a surprise, considering the circumstances of the case.

As his criminal trial grows near, Wheeler maintains his lack of fear over the consequences of his actions. "I am not afraid. I have but one life to live and when that is gone all will be over with me. I am not sure but the sooner it ends, the better."

His sentence is life in the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus.

1901, May 23: The *Elyria Republican* reports that Wheeler has been appointed superintendent of Ohio Penitentiary schools and, though he's "still a prisoner," feels his treatment in the pen has been good. "To those who know of Wheeler's educational advantages as brought out in the evidence at his trial, his success in teaching is no surprise."

1902, January 8: Wheeler is given a watch as a Christmas present by his companions and teachers in the penitentiary school.

1905, February 1905: A petition is circulated, endorsing a pardon for Wheeler. He is a model of behavior and said to be "one of the most intelligent and trusted prisoners there."

The people who have charge of his case claim there are a number of circumstances which make it proper for the pardon board to exercise leniency. On the other hand, Meyers was popular and not considered a person of a quarrelsome disposition. *Elyria Reporter, February 9, 1905.*

1907, February: Outgoing Ohio Governor Herrick does not pardon Wheeler but cites his exemplary behavior in prison when commuting his sen-

tence from life to 15 years. A half-dozen years "is not sufficient punishment" for a man who took another's life, says the Governor.

1907, April: Wheeler's lawyer, L.B. Fauver, applies for a full pardon.

1907, May: Less than 8 years after committing murder, Franklin Wheeler is freed from the Columbus prison as long as he makes a monthly report there for the next two years.

Wheeler's victim, young Philip Meyers, remains dead.