

“BE QUIET LET US REASON!” – that’s on my stone, until the end of time. It’s quite a stone for a man my age, a young man, whose life ended at age 23. More later about this stone-and what’s written here--but for now, about me.

Thomas J. Walsh, born in Chicago on November 11, 1876. The first born of Nicholas Walsh and Ann Carroll, from Ireland. They moved to Spaulding Township, and by 1894, owned their own farm and home. In the year of my death, we had a big family: Anna (18), Mary (18), Nicholas (16), James (11), Katie (9), Rose (7), Edward (5), Nellie (3), and Frank (1). The *Creston American* said I was “a young man who was rapidly rising to prominence.” Raised on a farm, they said, I “acquired habits of industry, thrift, and economy, which combined with (my) natural ability, (to bring me) to the front.” They said I was “a gentleman everywhere...a quiet and unassuming young man, always cheerful and pleasant.” Since making deputy sheriff, they said, I had “attended strictly to (my) duties, which (I) always performed in an inoffensive manner.” According to the *Gazette*, I was “one of the most popular men in the county.” After 11 months of service, they said, I gave “the best of satisfaction and regarded as an efficient officer and an excellent young man.” I was not “of a quarrelsome disposition but kind and obliging to all with whom I was associated.” A reporter called me “an affable and generous fellow, good natured, kindly, exceedingly well modeled in his habits and in every regard a gentleman.” He wrote I’d “be the last man to provoke a quarrel by an attempt at intimidation or by rough threats.” He said that “since I was appointed deputy by the Sheriff that I had performed considerable of the work of the office, and that my term would have expired at the end of the month,” in that December of 1899. I don’t know if all they said about me was true, but I was killed during my last month of service.

I was doing my duty as a sheriff’s deputy, and I can tell you how it all happened. That winter was one of the coldest on record, but at 8am on Monday morning--December 4, 1899--I set out from Creston with Constable J.B. Scofield, salesman J.W. Fuller, and Attorney Willis Brooks to a farm south of Graceland Cemetery to see a tenant - George A. Williams. At age 48, “Al” Williams faced a judgment finding him in arrears of his mortgage by \$119.

As we arrived, Williams and his hands loaded corn into wagons, which he meant to sell in town. I directed him to the south side of the barn where it was

warm, read the judgment, and he immediately protested. There was nothing there for us, he said. All the corn was covered by his current mortgage, and was rent to fulfill that agreement, he said. I ordered him to stop loading it, and he says “there’s a road, do you see it, (now) get off the farm!” I repeated my order to his hands, and he yelled, “no, be damned if you will, that’s my corn, go ahead boys and load her up!” I then threatened the hands with arrest, and after assuring Williams that his team of horses was exempt from the execution, he cooled down a little.

When I went to enter the barn, Williams crowded in ahead of me, and insisted that the I needed the mortgage before he could touch any property. I replied I did not, and that he had another ten days to take up the mortgage. He had “no such damned thing,” he shouted, and that he knew “a little law as well as you fellows.” I asked him if he meant to resist me from entering the barn, he said yes, and I dragged him by the arms out of the barn door and arrested him. He kept fighting, but his sons told him to “quit acting the damn fool, (and) to go to town and pay his debts.” I agreed to let him go settle up, and offered a ride, but he walked in alone.

In town, Sheriff E.W. Nichols and Attorney Brooks saw him dallying, and directed me and J.W. Fuller, now deputized, to go to the farm, post notices, and take charge of the property - at least until Williams secured a release from the judgment. We finally arrived at the farm about 10 am, and posted notices on hog pens, cow sheds, and corn cribs.

Williams, though, was not in a hurry to get home. At about 10:30am, outside H.D. Smith’s Clothing House on Adams Street, he was overheard boasting, “I will shoot him as sure as God Almighty put him on the world.” Another man later testified that he saw Williams drinking whisky at Edd Derr’s Saloon on N. Pine. Unbeknownst to me, Williams did finally secure a release on the execution from Attorney Brooks, and headed home. He was still angry, and told a passerby that “I will see you tonight in town or you will find me in jail. If there is a certain man at my house when I get there, there will be a corpse there in half an hour.”

“Al” Williams, said the *Creston Gazette*, was “a burly looking fellow forty-eight years of age.” He, too, had a family of nine, and according to the papers, “a reputation of being a hard-working fellow but rather quarrelsome.” Reaching the

farm, Williams entered his house and came out with a shotgun. He says: “Tom what the hell are you doing here? What the god-darn nation do you want advancing toward us?” I said I was “simply acting in the capacity of an officer and simply doing my duty.” With the shotgun in hand, he pulled his watch from his pocket as if to mark time until we left. I did not cower, and he said “Don’t come any closer, Tom.” I urged him to “be quiet and reason the matter; I was only doing my official duty.” He then shot me, killing me instantly. Fuller and Williams’ oldest boy saw it all.

Some said Williams fetched my revolver from my pocket and placed it next to my body. I do know he went to town and told Sheriff Nichols: “I have killed your deputy.” Nichols jailed Williams in and called undertaker Charles Emerson. The news spread fast and “large, angry crowds” gathered at the jail. They wrote that at Charles Emerson’s, where my body lay, “Strong men looked upon (me) and trembled, many shedding tears.” As soon as Williams was jailed, he sat for an interview. He said that I first drew on him, and that he’d only grabbed his shotgun because he’d seen quail on his return trip to the farm. He said it was self-defense, and was defiant, saying “I hit him right where he lived. I never miss.”

That afternoon the Emerson’s had to lock out crowds that had gathered in hopes of viewing my body. The city marshals saw trouble, and hustled Williams out of the jail into a carriage bound for Afton, where an eastbound freight took him to Osceola. That night the sheriff searched Williams at the Clarke jail, and found a release from the debt execution, directed to the sheriff and his deputy, and signed by Attorney Brooks. Back in Creston, talk of lynching continued, but the crowds eventually dispersed.

The next day, my service was announced for 10am, December 7th at St. Malachy’s church. Folks across the county gave to my memorial. A hundred men gave between .50 cents and two dollars each, with the *Advertiser*, the *Gazette*, the *American*, Creston Transportation Company, and three lodges each contributing \$5 dollars. The community provided for what you see here today.

Williams had his trial in 1900, and jurors found him guilty. They sentenced him to life in prison at hard labor. In 1933 the parole board recommended his discharge and in 1935, at age 84, Williams got his discharge and a pardon from the

governor. There were no mentions in the Creston or Afton newspapers, and where his body lies I know not.

But I'm more interested in my family. My brothers, Edward and James, married Chicago girls. My sisters stayed closer to home, starting families of their own, and some folks you may remember, or even know today: Sister Anna married Charles Klingensmith, and their union produced Bernard, Carl, Eugene, and Rita. Sister Rose married Vern Klingensmith, and their union produced James, Mary, Bill, and Harry, who operated H&R Tire Shop until 1996. Rose and Vern's daughter, Mary, wed Rudy Ehm and their union produced Bill, Carolyn, Greg, and Marilyn.

Had Williams accepted my advice--to be quiet and reason calmly—who knows what I'd have done in the course of my life? That he never showed me his release papers tells me he was spoiling for trouble come what may. I'm just glad the men of Creston ultimately understood value of quiet reasoning, and stopped short of a lynching. Some folks might have done more to prevent my murder. Sheriff Nichols might have known that Williams' return to his farm was a threat to public safety, and taken action to change the outcome. Williams' drinking buddies or his family might have convinced him that reasoning and cooperation was the way to go. So, **“Be Quiet Let Us Reason”** – that's the moral of my story. At age 23, I understood that. As I stand here today, I hope my example helps others do the same.