

Feb. 9 1986 Feb 9 1986 DForum

# Legends of the Talbotts

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Maryville

On Sept. 18, 1880, Dr. Perry H. Talbott was shot at his home seven miles south of Maryville. He was born in Fairfield County, Ohio, 1849, and the following year came west to seek his fortune. In 1852, he crossed the plains to California where it is rumored he hit it big in the gold fields, finally settling in this county.

He was a typical border doctor, one possessed of much ability and a good education. A student of the classics, his home was patterned after Nathaniel Hawthorne's ill fated, "House of Seven Gables." He named the town of Arkoe for a city in Spain from Jules Verne's "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea". An avid firearms collector, his home became an arsenal; his two sons were both familiar with their use. Dr. Talbott represented this district in the Legislative in 1856-57. During the Civil War, he served in the Union Army as a surgeon in the Twenty-Fifth Missouri Regiment. Married, his wife Belle, bore him two sons, Albert and Charles. They were 19 and 21 years old at this time.

Shot with an ounce and a half ball through the window at 9 o'clock in the evening, he succumbed at 2 p.m. the following day. The two sons were arrested by Sheriff Henry Toel upon evidence furnished by Jonas V. Brighten, a Kansas City detective, who claimed he had won the boys' confidence and they had admitted their guilt to him.

Tried before John C. Howell, the two sons were convicted and sentenced to die by hanging. The first date of execution was set for March 25, 1881—an appeal was made to the Supreme Court, but a like judgment was rendered. An attempt to gain executive clemency failed.

Mrs. Belle Talbott was friends with a Mrs. Lewis of Ray County, Mo., who was widowed and lived with her 15-year-old son two miles south and east of the present town of Pumpkin Center. A grove of trees yet stands on the south side of the road where her house stood.

It was through this Mrs. Lewis, who had known the James brothers near her home in Ray County, that Mrs. Talbott sent word to Frank and Jesse she was interested in making negotiations on a jail delivery of her sons. Many years ago her son Thomas Cushman "Cush" Lewis

"Frank and Jesse James arrived after dark with a third party who went on ahead to Mrs. Talbott's home and told her of their arrival. He then made his departure by a different route. Later that night, Mrs. Belle Talbott, accompanied by one of the boys' fiances, arrived at the Lewis home. They talked until long into the night. The James's said they could break her sons out of jail and get them to safety for \$5,000.

However, they wanted the money in advance, as they stated it wouldn't

be safe for them to make a return trip to collect. Mrs. Talbott didn't want to pay until the jail delivery was complete, as of course being outlaws, the James's might have simply took the money and went on."

Spending the night at the Lewis house, Jesse got into bed. Frank, not quite sure of "Cush" said, "You in the middle, Bud." Cush Lewis said, between those two, he didn't sleep much that night. The James's made their departure before daybreak. Word, however, leaked out and the brothers were moved to the Savannah and later the St. Joseph jail.

They were hanged at Beal Park in Maryville July 22, 1881. Each had confessed to save the other. On the gallows Charles told the executioner, "If you hang me, you are hanging an innocent man."

In this case, this historian believes there was reasonable doubt, as the Talbotts always claimed a group of armed men shot Dr. Talbott. I have always felt the detective involved wanted to make a name for himself, but a century and five years have gone by. We'll never know.

The Talbott mansion stood empty for many years. A few people tried to live there, but mysterious lights and sounds of scrubbing at the bloodstains always frightened them away. When torn down, \$50 was found in the wall in a coffee pot. I believe that's how the treasure story got started.

I don't believe Talbott ever buried any gold and that reports we have heard is all rocks.

This story is written from information furnished by my father, Paul Wellesley Curram, and the 1910 Nodaway County History.



All that remains of the Talbotts is this small family gravesite near Arkoe.