

DEATH OF WILLIAM ARMSTRONG

Was Once Held for Murder and Abraham Lincoln Defended Him.

CHICAGO, May 13.—The death of William Armstrong at Ashland, Cass County, Ill., is announced. His claim to fame lies in the fact that in 1858 Abraham Lincoln defended him on a charge of murder and secured his acquittal. Lincoln took the case without fee and discharged a debt of gratitude. He won it by means so simple that the story is often told as an illustration of the great common sense which was one of President Lincoln's distinguishing characteristics.

In the days before Lincoln had made a name for himself, when he was still struggling for an education, Mrs. Armstrong, the widowed mother of his client, had been kind to him. As he told the jury, she had been a mother to him; she had washed and mended his clothes while he lay in bed for want of anything else to wear. When her boy got into trouble he felt he could do no less than volunteer for his defense.

Armstrong, with James H. Norton, was alleged to have beaten James Metzger on the night of Aug. 29, 1857, so severely that he died the next day. The affair took place in Menard County, on the outskirts of a camp meeting. Metzger had smuggled whisky into the camp meeting and the quarrel arose from its too liberal consumption. Norton was tried in Menard County, found guilty, and sentenced to eight years in the penitentiary. Armstrong got a change of venue to Cass County, and his trial was held in the building now occupied as a City Hall in Beardstown.

One Allen, who was a witness for the prosecution, testified that he could see the blow which caused the death by the light of the moon, which at midnight, he said, was shining brightly. Lincoln impeached this testimony by an almanac, which showed that the moon on that night did not shine until several hours after midnight. Lincoln, it was charged in a political article published years later, used a doctored almanac, and even one of his biographers has asserted it, but this is refuted in an address before the Kansas Bar Association delivered several years since by Judge Bergen, who was a resident of Ashland at the time of the trial, and who was in constant attendance at the trial.

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