

Annie Groves-#1148

By Samantha Davi

October 15, 1907—James E. Passwater sat quietly playing cards at Smizer's Saloon in Encampment Wyoming. Passwater was the manager of the telephone system in the small mining town, and was well known in the area. As he sat holding his cards, a young woman named Annie Groves approached the saloon wielding a gun. She fired her weapon, and despite her strong desire to hit her mark, the back of Passwater's head, the bullet strayed from its' intended course, grazed the brim of Passwater's hat, and lodged into the shoulder of another man within the establishment, Louis Peterson. Shortly after the incident, Passwater fled to the Justice of the Peace where he filed a complaint against Annie.

Annie Groves and James Passwater had quite the history together, or at least that's the story that Annie told. At the relatively young age of 19, Groves was working in Encampment as a prostitute, and she and Passwater had done 'business' together. Groves then became ill with a venereal disease that she attributed to Passwater. She allegedly attempted to contact him several times, asking for assistance with paying her medical bills; requests which Passwater denied. Groves also accused Passwater of beating her on several different occasions. After the disease progressed and spread to the point of the development of an large raw sore that destroyed her bottom lip, Groves became determined to extract a pound of flesh, so to speak, from the one to blame. However, her motive to do so did not make it justifiable in the eyes of the law.

Constable J.J. Wirth was given the task of locating Annie and serving her with the complaint; she was taken in to custody shortly thereafter, and preliminary hearing was conducted that same evening, not even 24 hours after her attempt to take Passwaters life. Due to Annie's financial hardships, a court appointed attorney was assigned to hear her story, and after doing so, she took his recommendation and threw herself on the mercy of the court after a guilty confession. The authorities quickly delivered her to the Carbon County Jail to await trial.

Annie stood before the Third Judicial District Court a mere two days later, and upon hearing her case, the sentence was handed down quickly that she was to be taken into custody and imprisoned at the Wyoming State Penitentiary for the term of 1 year of hard labor. She was delivered to the prison that evening, and while being processed she stated she was born in Kansas roughly 19 years prior, had a 9th grade education, and wouldn't disclose the identity of any family members aside from her husband, E.J. Groves, who was living in Encampment.

Annie's husband quickly went to work to secure a pardon for his wife and after less than five months of her sentence, the request for pardon was granted by Governor Brooks March 2, 1908. After news of her release became public the couple had already fled the state, presumably returning to a former area of residence in Nebraska.

Sources Cited:

Wyoming Frontier Prison files

Petticoat Prisoners – Larry K. Brown