

Leads Party to Grave and Signs Full Confession

Ernest Witmer Glibly Re-iterates Events Leading to And Including the Murder of His Young Wife and of His Activities Since

HEARING HELD IN FEW DAYS

Coroner's Jury Recommends Charge of First Degree Murder at Inquest Held Here Monday

Confined in the Antelope county jail awaiting trial for the cold-blooded murder of his young wife, Ernest Witmer is calm and unconcerned. Staring him in the face is life imprisonment or the death penalty. His full confession and the recommendation of a coroner's jury to charge first degree murder is the web that ensnares him for his crime. County Attorney Rice will ask the extreme penalty and is preparing for the preliminary hearing that will be held in a few days.

The five weeks mystery concerning the disappearance of Rose Witmer came to a climax Saturday afternoon at 3:30 when Ernest Witmer, her husband, directed a searching party of one hundred that found her decomposed body in a shallow, three-foot grave in a cornfield, 150 yards east of their farm home nine miles north of Neligh. A foot of snow covered the field, making search difficult even with Witmer's aid.

Witmer, who has made a complete confession, was very cool, almost jovial in directing the search. Sheriff J. A. Sutton of Antelope county brought the confessed murderer to the scene of his crime.

When Witmer arrived at the farm he was greeted by J. N. Forbes, his landlord, with "Hello, Ernie." Witmer replied warmly, "Hi, John. How goes it?"

Finds Grave

Witmer walked with a lively step to a tree east of the house which he had marked with a string, walked out about 150 yards and began scooping snow off the ground. He searched for one hour before Charles Krause, one of the searchers, located the grave. All during the search Witmer went at it in a cool, business-like manner, not once showing regret or remorse over his crime. His head was high and his step lively as he directed the search. During the search Witmer said "it was like hunting a needle in a haystack." Again, when one of the party thought he had discovered what appeared to be a grave, Witmer said, "No, that's not it, the ground wouldn't be that hard." He also said, "Gosh! Maybe I can't even find it myself. One of you go up to that big tree—maybe that'll help me locate it."

When the body was discovered Witmer looked at the small exposed portion and said, "Yes, that's it that must be her elbow." Before the body was dug out Witmer was taken back to jail at Neligh by Deputy Sheriff Livingston. No violence was attempted on Witmer while he directed the search nor after the body was found. He was not handcuffed.

Is Not Sorry

Witmer, in jail, telling of killing his wife, said, "No, I'm not sorry." A coroner's inquest was called by County Attorney Rice, ex-officio coroner, at 10 o'clock Monday. Only four witnesses were called and testified to facts corroborating the confession of Witmer. Following is the verdict of the coroner's jury.

Verdict of Coroner's Jury

State of Nebraska, Antelope county, in an inquisition holden at Neligh in said county on the 5th day of November, A. D. 1928, before me, Robert H. Rice, coroner of said county, upon the body of Rose Witmer, lying dead, by the jurors whose names are hereto subscribed, the said jurors upon their oath say that said Rose Witmer came to her death on the 26th day of September, A. D. 1928, at about seven o'clock p. m., from a blow or blows wilfully and feloniously struck on her head by her husband, Ernest Witmer, with a blunt instrument or instruments, with the intent of said Ernest Witmer to kill and murder the said Rose Witmer.

We recommend that said Ernest Witmer be held on a charge of murder in the first degree.

In testimony whereof the said

jurors have hereunto set their hands the day and year aforesaid.

DAN SPRINGER

J. K. FRIEDBACH

C. B. VAN KIRK

C. G. MELICK

FRED OLMSTED

E. C. NYROP

Had Been Married Two Years

The Witmers had been married about two years and he had worked for different farmers in the neighborhood during that time. About the first of September they moved to the J. N. Forbes farm where a new home was being built. It was not yet completed on the 26th of September when the Witmers disappeared. They had been living in a granary.

The Witmers were popular among the young people of their acquaintance and attended the dances in the surrounding towns. Ernest was considered one of the hardest working and most dependable farm hands in his neighborhood by his employers and by others who were acquainted with him.

County Attorney R. H. Rice has filed a charge of first degree murder against Witmer.

Witmer's Confession

Following, in substance, is the signed confession of Ernest Witmer:

That he is 28 years of age and was married in Stanton county April 19, 1926, to Rose Dreger. He first met her through her sister, Viola, in 1924, when the Witmer family lived only four miles from the Dreger family. After he met Rose he began taking her to dances and theatres in Norfolk, and later they were married. After the wedding they went to live with Witmer's family, who had moved near Clarkson. It was at this time, he said, he discovered his bride smoked cigarettes, to which he objected. She promised to stop, but continued to smoke on the sly. In March, 1928, they moved to a farm four miles south of Brunswick and resided there until August 22, when they went to work for John Forbes and moved to the farm nine miles north of Neligh. They lived in the granary while Mr. Forbes built a house for them to move into. They always had quarrels about her smoking cigarettes. She lied about it and he came to hate her and decided a week before that he would kill her. He went to Neligh and bought 25c worth of poison the day before the murder. She prepared the evening meal on September 26 and, while she was gone for a pail of water, he opened a bottle of beer, pouring part of it into a pot for her and part in a pot for himself. In her beer he placed the poison. When she returned they drank the beer. She became ill and dizzy and went out on the porch, where he struck her on the head with a club, knocking her down. She begged pitifully for her life, crying "Honey, honey, please don't kill me, please, please."

Appeal Is Vain

He seized a hammer lying near and hit her with it, afterward crushing her head with an axe. He changed his clothes and started for Brunswick with a crate of chickens which he sold there, throwing the axe by the roadside on the way. He met Mr. Forbes, who paid him \$40