



the **Prairie Tales** podcast

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## SOURCE ARTICLES

### 1871-11 – SHADOWS IN THE DARK

#### JUSTICE AT THE GALLOWS

He who has stood by a gallows tree can alone tell the nature of the moment that follows when, the clergymen gone, the imminence of death seizes one with enthralling awe. The seconds to the onlooker seem whole minutes; but to the condemned, what are they? All is done as expeditiously as possible to shorten the misery – that is, to shorten the life, for life then is a misery almost too deep to bear. The black cap is pulled over the face. A tremor runs through the miserable creature's tottering clay. One second's pause in perfect silence, a handkerchief waved, the sharp sound of a falling axe, and the criminal's body leaps into the air. In the first half minute following there are distinct nervous writing motions of the body. After these there is no sign of struggle. After hanging five minutes the body is lowered that the doctors might examine for signs of life. In 30 minutes, it is confirmed that the heart has stopped beating, as confirmed by physicians' reports as they stand taking turns in listening at the breast of the thing of clay. The crowd is wild with excitement. Necks are craned to catch a glimpse of the sight of shame, a life given for a life taken - Justice has exacted the full penalty for murder. *The Newton Kansan, Newton, Kansas. Thursday, April 3, 1873. Page 1.*

Tom Collins was a desperado who murdered 11 old women, and drank their blood as medicine for his liver complaint. After being hunted for miles and miles, he at length was captured at Lansing, cut in pieces by the infuriated populace, and then left hanging to a tree. The tree was near the depot. People stopped by to look at the tree where they hung him, and asked the train boys if they had a pamphlet on the life of Tom Collins with further particulars. *The Newton Kansan, Newton, Kansas. Thursday, October 22, 1874. Page 4.*

## THE FIRST NEW YEAR

"The Quakers have started a town thirty miles west of Hutchinson, and call it Peace City. It ought to be at least that far from Newton." *The White Cloud Chief*. January 18, 1872.

Newton by 1872 had already developed a very strongly expressed reputation for violence and vice. Every attempt was made by Judge Muse and others attempting to build the town to downplay such reports, while competing towns reveled in exaggerating Newton's evils. There was no doubt, however, that Newton had earned its reputation as a rough town on the Kansas frontier.

NEWTON - At Their Old Tricks. The Emporia News, of last week, takes pleasure in noticing that a man of that city had his pockets picked in Newton recently. It doesn't say whether he was drunk or sober at the time, or with what kind of company, and he might have received the same kind of treatment in that city. It is apparently a matter of much relief and satisfaction to that paper as well as some others to make such notices without explanation, and to slander Newton as often and as much as occasion will permit." *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas*. Thursday, September 19, 1872.

NEWTON - As we strolled the streets of Newton memory reverted to our first visit there. It was in the spring of 1872. It was soon after the city cemetery was forcibly inaugurated, so to speak, when thirty-odd men died with their boots on. It was evening. A wild, drunken crowd had formed a circle in the street in the midst of which they had corralled another drunken wretch, with whom they were having "a high old time." Such howling and hooting, interspersed with an occasional "bang" from a promiscuous pistol, we never heard before or since. It was all in front of our hotel, and we didn't enjoy it to any very great extent. So we retired to our room very early, and hastened next morning to shake the dust of the town from our brogans lest we might prematurely become a part of it. - E. H. Hoch, Editor. *The Marion Record*. Reprinted in *The Newton Kansan, Newton, Kansas*. Thursday, April 2, 1891. Page 1.

NEWTON - Twenty men have been buried at Newton, Kansas, since August last, who died before they took sick." *The Kansas Weekly Commonwealth, Topeka, Kansas*. Thursday, March 21, 1872. Page 1.

"During this bloody epoch there was still another class of lawless characters still more despicable if possible, who infested Newton – we allude to fakirs, monte men and sneak thieves, who plied their professions by day and night, without let or hindrance. They went around from place to place swindling and robbing the unsuspecting, or inducing them to enter their infamous dens for that purpose." *Harvey County Atlas*. Introduction by Judge R.W.P. Muse. Page 27.

NEWTON - Drunk. Some fellow having mustered up courage enough to get drunk last Friday, allowed his countenance to shine in upon the 100\* in the shade calaboose, and that precinct had music. It may be deserving justice, and fun for thermometers, but nearly death to suffering humanity. The terrors of the law in the shape of a sweat in that place in this weather, would deter the devil from ways that are dark and tricks that count not for game. *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas. Thursday, August 29, 1872. Page 3.*

NEWTON - Sam Wood came down on the train last Saturday night, and made as big a fool of himself as he usually does. A newsboy took pity on the passengers, who through a sense of disgust would hardly notice him, and shut the clap-trap up. *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas. Thursday, September 19, 1872. Page 3.*

CALDWELL - "Wholesale Hanging. We learn that about three weeks ago a party of men went to a ranch southwest of Caldwell, occupied by four women who kept it as a place of secret rendezvous for the horse thieves who ply their trade along the south border of the State. At the ranch they found seven men, who were recognized as old offenders; these and the women they took a short distance from the ranch to a piece of timber, and hung the whole gang. It appears that the folks down that way know the best way to get rid of such persons.

A little determination on the part of the people in this latitude, of a similar character if adopted long ago, would have saved Newton such condemnation. *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas. Thursday, September 5, 1872. Page 3.*

NEWTON - Upstairs, Downstairs. There was a sensational item in town last Thursday afternoon. One man went for two others; the two in order to avoid a collision between their physical selves and the one man's muscle, passed through the knot hole of a partition, descended a flight of stairs a la kangaroo, ran over a drug store, and escaped. We endeavored to gather some facts from the parties but like the boy that got his mother's bed in a fix, they have nothing to say." *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas. Thursday, September 26, 1872. Page 3.*

NEWTON - Business at Newton is improving, and the town is gradually outgrowing the evil reputation of its early days. The morals of the place are improving most decidedly, and in consequence good families are locating in and around the city. – The Wichita Eagle. And nearly all of the hard cases have migrated to Wichita. Fact." *The Newton Kansan, Newton Kansas. Thursday, October 31, 1872. Page 3.*