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SHOT GUN VIOLENCE IN 1872

Episode Number: 1872-12

KNOWLEDGE PACKET

Date: January 1872

This episode summarizes key events and themes from provided newspaper excerpts detailing incidents in Kansas during early 1872. The sources highlight instances of violence, often involving firearms, and provide insights into journalistic reporting of the era.

Main Themes:

Prevalence of Violence: The sources document multiple shooting incidents within a short timeframe, particularly in and around Newton and Sedgwick, Kansas, suggesting a period of significant unrest. The description of "Kansas Is Still Bloody" (Pomeroy's Democrat, New York) and "Newton is reported dull, only one man having been shot in two weeks" (The Florence Pioneer, reprinted in Emporia Weekly News) underscore this theme.

Misdirected Aggression/Accidental Shootings: Several cases involve individuals being shot unintentionally or as a result of an "accident." The Ward & Keener case is a prime example where "Mr. Merrill [was killed] by mistake" (The Cleveland Leader). Similarly, Mrs. Lebigre was "accidentally shot" while examining a revolver (The Salina Journal).

Varying Accounts and Information Discrepancies: Different newspapers, even when reporting on the same event, often provide conflicting details, especially regarding who shot whom or the exact circumstances. For instance, in the Ward & Keener case, The Topeka Commonwealth and The Daily Missouri Democrat offer significantly different narratives regarding the initial altercation and who initiated the shooting. The reporting on Mrs. Lebigre's shooting also presents conflicting accounts of who was the shooter and who was the victim.

Swift Justice/Public Reaction: In some instances, perpetrators were arrested quickly, and public sentiment is occasionally noted (e.g., "The citizens are horror-stricken over the matter" in

Sedgwick City). However, the "Taylor was arrested, but will probably be released soon" (The Topeka Commonwealth) suggests a potentially lenient approach to some forms of violence.

Journalistic Practices and Bias: The "Allegro" source exposes the potential for journalistic blackmail and unreliable reporting. The public warning against E.J. Harrington's "entirely unreliable" statements and his ability to be "bought for a very small price to 'write up' the lowest, or 'write down' the best" (The Kansas State Record) reveals concerns about journalistic integrity.

Most Important Ideas or Facts:

1. The Ward & Keener Incident (January 17, 1872 - Case # 1872-HM01):

- **The Southwestern Stage Company's Role:** The incident is tied to the newly established stagecoach service to Sedgwick, indicating the arrival of new people and potential for conflict.
- **Mistaken Identity/Collateral Damage:** The core of the tragedy is the accidental killing of Mr. Merrill. As The Cleveland Leader states, "Mr. Ward took his shot gun and went to interview Mr. Taylor. He found him at Mr. Merrill's saloon and fired at him. He killed Mr. Merrill by mistake, and Mr. Taylor killed him." This is echoed across multiple sources.
- **Retaliatory Killing:** Taylor immediately retaliated, killing the stage employee (identified as Ward or Keener depending on the source). The Topeka Commonwealth vividly describes Taylor "draw[ing] his revolver and 'brained' his pursuer, from which he fell and died instantly."
- **Conflicting Identities and Circumstances: Ward vs. Keener:** The perpetrator of the initial shooting is referred to as "Ward" in The Cleveland Leader and The Boston Post, but as "Keener" in The Daily Missouri Democrat. This discrepancy highlights the fluid nature of information in early reports.
- **Initiation of Violence:** The Topeka Commonwealth suggests the stage employee "began to fire promiscuously among the crowd," while The Daily Missouri Democrat claims Taylor first "attempted to shoot Keener, but the pistol did not fire," leading to Keener gaining the revolver. These vastly different accounts demonstrate the challenge in discerning precise facts from contemporary reports.
- **Merrill's Age and Burial:** A.M. Merrill was "22 years old when he died" and is buried in Pleasant View Cemetery of Castalia, Iowa.

2. The Joseph Grisel Incident (January 22, 1872 - Case # 1872-HM02):

- **Debt Dispute:** The Atchison Daily Patriot identifies the cause as a dispute over a bill owed by Grisel to Fred Minke. Minke shot Grisel after being ordered to leave his house, resulting in "Forty-two shots [taking] effect in Grisel's left shoulder."
- **Conflicting Cause (Jealousy):** The Lawrence Daily Journal and Emporia Weekly News attribute the shooting to "jealousy," with Grisel as the shooter and Joseph Minkey (or

Minke) as the victim. This is a direct contradiction of the Atchison Daily Patriot's account, demonstrating significant factual discrepancies. The Lawrence Daily Journal states: "Joseph Grissel... got out his little gun and ensconced about forty buckshot in Mr. Minkey's frame."

- **Legal Outcome:** Grisel was "bound over in the sum of one thousand dollars" (Emporia Weekly News).

3. The Mrs. Lebigre Incident (February 6, 1872 - Case # 1872-HM03):

- **Accidental Shooting:** This case is consistently reported as an accident.
- **Victim/Shooter Confusion:** The Lawrence Daily Journal initially reports Mrs. Lebigre as the shooter and Mrs. Hoffman as the victim. However, subsequent articles clarify that "Mrs. Lebigre was actually the victim, not the shooter." The Neosho Valley Register states, "Mrs. Hoffman, while carelessly examining a revolver... accidentally shot Mrs. Libigre."
- **Circumstances:** The Salina Journal provides the most detailed account: Mrs. Lebigre was seeking a revolver for self-protection while her husband was away. "A Mrs. Hoffman, who handed her the revolver, was exhibiting to her the art of firing it, when the revolver, loaded but unknown to her, was discharged, the ball taking effect in the region of Mrs. L.'s heart."
- **Recovery:** Despite a "critical wound," Mrs. Lebigre was "reported to be in a fair way of recovery" (The Salina Journal).

4. About Allegro (E.J. Harrington) (February 10, 1872 - Case # 1872-HM04):

- **Journalistic Malpractice:** This source is a public warning from prominent Newton citizens against E.J. Harrington, a "newspaper correspondent" who used various pseudonyms.
- **Blackmail and Unreliability:** Harrington is accused of "operating in the blackmail line to a considerable extent" and threatening to write "articles derogatory to the character and business qualifications of some of our best business men unless they accede to his demands." The citizens declare his statements "entirely unreliable, as he can be bought for a very small price to 'write up' the lowest, or 'write down' the best" (The Kansas State Record).
- **Personal Character Assessment:** The source paints a highly negative picture of Harrington, calling him "a low, miserable, drunken loafer, who has spent much of his time since his arrival in Newton in lying around houses of ill fame where his principal occupation has been that of furnishing violin music for dances of the inmates, and in drinking whisky." This provides context for the strong distrust in his reporting.

In conclusion, these sources offer a glimpse into the volatile social landscape of Kansas in early 1872, marked by violent incidents and the evolving, sometimes unreliable, nature of early American journalism. The inconsistencies across reports highlight the challenges for contemporary readers (and modern researchers) in piecing together accurate accounts of events.

Thought-Starters

What was the "Ward & Keener" incident, and what different accounts of it exist?

The "Ward & Keener" incident refers to a double murder that occurred near Newton, Kansas, in January 1872. According to *The Topeka Commonwealth*, an employee of the Southwestern Stage Company (later identified as Keener in *The Daily Missouri Democrat*) and a man named Taylor had an altercation in a saloon. After an apparent reconciliation, the stage employee, while intoxicated, began firing indiscriminately among a crowd, accidentally killing Merrill, a friend of Taylor, who had no involvement in the initial dispute. The employee then pursued Taylor, yelling for him, and when he reached Merrill's body, Taylor shot and instantly killed the employee.

Different newspaper accounts offer varying details and perspectives:

- **Cleveland Leader:** States Ward (the stage employee) intended to shoot Taylor but killed Merrill by mistake, and then Taylor killed Ward, highlighting the irony that the intended victim survived.
- **Pomeroy's Democrat (New York):** Briefly states a stage driver shot at Taylor, killed Merrill, and then Taylor killed the stage driver, emphasizing "Kansas Is Still Bloody."
- **The Herald (New York):** Mentions an initial "amicable arrangement" before the stage man fired, hitting Merrill instead of Taylor, and then Taylor retaliated.
- **Boston Post:** Echoes the New York papers, focusing on the stage driver shooting Merrill by mistake and Taylor's retaliatory killing.
- **The Daily Missouri Democrat (St. Louis):** Provides the most detailed account, naming Keener as the stage employee and elaborating on the sequence of events, including Taylor's initial attempt to shoot Keener, Keener disarming him, Keener shooting Merrill, Keener pursuing Taylor to the store, and Taylor's final retaliatory shot. This article also notes the initial peace of Sedgwick being marred.

The exact identity of the stage employee is sometimes confused between "Ward" and "Keener," with *The Daily Missouri Democrat* explicitly naming "Keener." A.M. Merrill, the innocent bystander, was 22 years old when he died.

What happened in the "Joseph Grisel" shooting affray in Newton?

The "Joseph Grisel" shooting affray occurred in Newton on January 22, 1872. The accounts differ on who was the shooter and who was the victim, and the motive.

- **The Atchison Daily Patriot:** States that Joseph Grisel, a carpenter, owed a bill to Fred Minke. When Minke demanded payment at Grisel's house, Grisel refused and ordered Minke to leave. Minke then fired two shots at Grisel from a double-barreled shotgun,

hitting him with forty-two pellets in the left shoulder. Grisel was in critical condition with little hope of recovery, and Minke was arrested.

- **The Lawrence Daily Journal & Emporia Weekly News:** Present a conflicting narrative. They state that Joseph Grisel shot Joseph Minkey (or Minke) with a shotgun, hitting him with about forty buckshot, and that the cause was "jealousy." Grisel was arrested and bound over on a \$1,000 bond.

Therefore, there are contradictory reports regarding who shot whom and the motive, with some papers reporting Minke shot Grisel over a debt, and others reporting Grisel shot Minkey due to jealousy.

What was the incident involving Mrs. Lebigre and Mrs. Hoffman?

The incident involving Mrs. Lebigre and Mrs. Hoffman was an accidental shooting that occurred in Newton on February 6, 1872. The initial report in *The Lawrence Daily Journal* incorrectly stated that Mrs. Lebigre accidentally shot Mrs. Hoffman while explaining a revolver. However, subsequent articles clarify the true sequence of events:

- **The Neosho Valley Register:** Correctly identifies Mrs. Hoffman as the shooter, stating she "carelessly examin[ed] a revolver" and accidentally shot Mrs. Libigre (Lebigre).
- **The Salina Journal:** Provides the most detailed explanation. Mrs. Lebigre, whose husband was away, was seeking a revolver for self-protection due to having money on her. She went to a gun shop where Mrs. Hoffman was demonstrating how to fire the weapon. Unbeknownst to Mrs. Hoffman, the revolver was loaded, and it discharged, striking Mrs. Lebigre near her heart. The wound was critical, but Mrs. Lebigre was reported to be recovering.

This highlights how initial newspaper reports could be inaccurate and corrected by later, more detailed accounts.

Who was E.J. Harrington, also known as "Allegro," and what was he accused of?

E.J. Harrington was a newspaper correspondent who used various pseudonyms, including "Allegro" and "Adelade." He had been active in the Newton vicinity for about six months prior to June 1872, corresponding with several Kansas newspapers such as *The Topeka Commonwealth*, *Journal of Commerce of Kansas City*, and *Republican Journal and Democratic Standard of Lawrence*.

A public card signed by nine prominent citizens (George Halliday, E. Smith, Johnson Barker, S.J. Bentley, Daniel Ainsworth, A.F. Horner, D. Hamill, H.C. Schly, Fred P. Lord) accused Harrington of "blackmail." They claimed he threatened to write derogatory articles about local businessmen unless his demands were met. The signatories described Harrington as a "low, miserable, drunken loafer" who spent much of his time in "houses of ill fame," providing violin

music for dances and drinking whisky. They asserted he had no character to lose and that his statements were entirely unreliable, as he could be "bought for a very small price to 'write up' the lowest, or 'write down' the best." Their purpose in publishing this warning was to guard the public and advise them to view his statements with "a great deal of allowance."

What was the general perception of violence in Kansas as portrayed by these newspaper articles in early 1872?

The newspaper articles from early 1872 portray Kansas, particularly the Newton area, as a place where violence, especially shootings, was a notable and recurring event, though perhaps not constant.

Phrases like "Kansas Is Still Bloody" (*Pomeroy's Democrat*) and "Murder In Bleeding Kansas" (*The Herald*) directly highlight a perception of ongoing violence. The repetition of "shooting affray" in different case descriptions (Ward & Keener, Joseph Grisel) further solidifies this. However, there's also a contrasting sentiment of shock or relative peace being disturbed. *The Daily Missouri Democrat* notes, regarding the Ward & Keener incident, that "The citizens are horror-stricken over the matter, as this is the first thing that has ever occurred to mar the peace and quietness of the place." This suggests that while violence occurred, it was not necessarily accepted as the norm and could be deeply unsettling to the community.

Additionally, the *Florence Pioneer* (reprinted by *Emporia Weekly News*) humorously, or perhaps ironically, states "Newton is reported dull, only one man having been shot in two weeks," which, while lighthearted, implies that shootings were a sufficiently regular occurrence to be a measure of a town's "dullness."

In summary, Kansas was seen as capable of "bloody" incidents, but these events could still "mar the peace and quietness" of communities, indicating a mixed perception of its violent character.

How did the establishment of the Southwestern Stage Company relate to the "Ward & Keener" incident?

The Southwestern Stage Company's service to Sedgwick, which began in January 1872, is directly linked to the "Ward & Keener" incident. The first source states that the company "began running four-horse stage coaches every day to the city of Sedgwick in January of 1872." It then immediately follows by stating, "It was later that same month, however, when the stage brought in trouble of its own, and then delivered the news across the country that a shooting affray had occurred in the little town."

One of the key figures in the incident was explicitly identified as "an employee of the Southwestern Stage Company" in *The Herald* and *The Topeka Commonwealth*, and later by name (Keener) in *The Daily Missouri Democrat*. This indicates that an employee of the newly established stage line was directly involved in the double murder. The company's presence thus

not only facilitated travel and communication but also, in this instance, inadvertently introduced a participant in a violent event that garnered national attention.

What role did taverns or saloons play in these incidents?

Taverns or saloons appear to have played a significant role as locations where conflicts escalated or began in these incidents.

In the "Ward & Keener" case, *The Topeka Commonwealth* states that the "altercation occurred in a saloon" between the stage company employee and Taylor. It further details that after their apparent reconciliation, "both parties took a drink" and then "Taylor and his friend Merrill went outside" before the employee came out and started firing. *The Daily Missouri Democrat* also places the initial "row" between Taylor and Keener (the stage employee) "in a Saloon at Sedgwick."

While the "Joseph Grisel" incident doesn't explicitly mention a saloon as the direct scene of the shooting, it involves a debt dispute, which often could have origins or discussions in such establishments, though the shooting itself occurred at Grisel's house.

The presence of saloons as common gathering places for men in these frontier towns made them natural settings for both social interaction and the outbreak of disputes, sometimes with fatal consequences.

How do these sources illustrate the challenges of accurate reporting in the 19th century?

These sources clearly illustrate several challenges to accurate reporting in the 19th century:

1. **Conflicting Details and Identities:** The "Ward & Keener" incident demonstrates confusion over the perpetrator's name (Ward vs. Keener) and slightly varying narratives across different newspapers regarding specific actions. Similarly, the "Joseph Grisel" case has completely contradictory accounts of who shot whom and the motive (debt vs. jealousy).
2. **Lag Time and Information Dissemination:** News traveled slowly. Reports from New York and Boston about the Sedgwick shooting appeared several days to weeks after the event (January 27-30 vs. February 4-8), indicating a delay in information reaching distant cities.
3. **Local vs. Distant Accounts:** Local papers like *The Topeka Commonwealth* and *The Daily Missouri Democrat* often provided more detailed and seemingly more accurate accounts of the "Ward & Keener" incident compared to the briefer, sometimes less precise, reports from Cleveland, New York, and Boston. This suggests that proximity to the event allowed for more thorough investigation or direct access to witnesses.
4. **Sensationalism and Simplification:** Headlines like "Kansas Is Still Bloody" or "Murder In Bleeding Kansas" demonstrate a tendency towards sensationalism, potentially simplifying complex events for wider appeal.

5. **Correction and Retraction Issues:** The Mrs. Lebigre incident explicitly highlights the process of correction, where an initial report (Mrs. Lebigre shot Mrs. Hoffman) was later corrected by other papers (Mrs. Hoffman shot Mrs. Lebigre). This shows that while errors occurred, there was also a mechanism for their rectification, though not always immediate.
6. **Bias and Personal Attacks:** The "About Allegro" piece is a direct, published attack on a journalist's character and credibility. This reveals that personal vendettas or attempts to discredit reporters could influence public perception and cast doubt on reported information.

Study Guide

Quiz

1. Describe the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Merrill in the Ward & Keener case.
2. How do the various newspaper accounts of the Ward & Keener incident differ regarding the identity of the stage employee and the initial resolution of the altercation?
3. What was the motive given for the shooting in the Joseph Grisel case, and what was the outcome for the shooter?
4. Detail the sequence of events that led to Keener's death according to the St. Louis Daily Missouri Democrat.
5. Explain the discrepancy regarding the victim and shooter in the Mrs. Lebigre accidental shooting.
6. What was E.J. Harrington's profession, and what accusations were made against him by the group of Newton businessmen?
7. What specific details about A.M. Merrill's life and death are provided in the source material?
8. How did Fred Minke's initial encounter with Joseph Grisel escalate into a shooting, according to The Atchison Daily Patriot?
9. What was the "state of peace" in Sedgwick City before the Ward & Keener incident, according to The Daily Missouri Democrat?
10. What type of establishment was Mrs. Lebigre visiting when she was shot, and what was her reason for being there?

Quiz Answers

1. Mr. Merrill was killed during an altercation between a Southwestern Stage Company employee (Ward/Keener) and a man named Taylor. The employee intended to shoot Taylor but mistakenly hit and killed Merrill, who was Taylor's friend and had no prior involvement in the dispute. Merrill died shortly after being shot in the lungs or breast.
2. Some accounts refer to the stage employee as "Ward," while others name him "Keener." The New York Herald states the initial altercation was "amicably arranged" before the shooting, and the Topeka Commonwealth agrees, saying "matters in dispute were apparently adjusted." However, other articles omit this detail or suggest a more immediate escalation.
3. The Lawrence Daily Journal and Emporia Weekly News both state "jealousy" as the motive for Joseph Grisel shooting Joseph Minkey. Grisel was arrested and later bound over in the sum of one thousand dollars, indicating he was released on bond.
4. According to this account, Keener shot Merrill, then went to a hotel. While officers prepared to arrest him, Keener came out and went to the store where Taylor and Merrill had run. He asked for Taylor, but before he could see him, two men caught Keener and took his revolver. While they were holding him, Taylor emerged from another part of the store and shot Keener in the head, killing him instantly.
5. The Lawrence Daily Journal incorrectly identifies Mrs. Lebigre as the shooter and Mrs. Hoffman as the victim. However, the Neosho Valley Register and The Salina Journal clarify that Mrs. Hoffman accidentally shot Mrs. Lebigre while demonstrating how to fire a revolver, or while Mrs. Lebigre was acquiring it for protection.
6. E.J. Harrington was a newspaper correspondent who wrote under various pseudonyms like "Allegro" and "Adelade." The businessmen accused him of blackmail, threatening to write derogatory articles about them unless his demands were met. They also labeled him a "low, miserable, drunken loafer" whose statements were unreliable and who could be easily bought.
7. A.M. Merrill was born on February 30, 1849, making him 22 years old when he died. He is buried in the Pleasant View Cemetery of Castalia, Iowa. His death occurred when he was shot by the stage employee (Ward/Keener) during the altercation with Taylor.
8. Fred Minke went to Grisel's house to demand payment for a bill. Grisel refused and ordered Minke to leave, which Minke obeyed. However, after walking twenty or thirty yards away from the house, Minke turned and fired two shots at Grisel from a double-barreled shotgun, hitting Grisel in the shoulder.

9. The Daily Missouri Democrat states that the citizens were "horror-stricken over the matter, as this is the first thing that has ever occurred to mar the peace and quietness of the place." This suggests that Sedgwick City had previously been a peaceful and quiet community without major violent incidents.

10. Mrs. Lebigre was visiting a "gun shop" or her husband's "establishment" (implied to be a gun-related business). She was there to acquire a revolver for self-protection, as she had an amount of money on her and her husband was away fulfilling governmental provisions.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the role of contemporary newspaper reporting in shaping public perception of violent incidents in the American West of the late 19th century, using the Ward & Keener case as your primary example. Discuss the variations in reporting, the potential biases, and how differing narratives could emerge from a single event.
2. Compare and contrast the details of the "Ward & Keener" case as reported by different newspapers (Cleveland Leader, New York Herald, Topeka Commonwealth, Daily Missouri Democrat). Identify the key discrepancies, consistencies, and unique pieces of information, and speculate on the challenges a historian faces when constructing a definitive account from such fragmented sources.
3. Discuss the societal implications of the Joseph Grisel and Mrs. Lebigre incidents, considering themes of personal dispute resolution, accidental violence, and the role of firearms in daily life in 1872 Kansas. How do these incidents reflect broader characteristics of life in frontier towns?
4. Evaluate the nature of E.J. Harrington's alleged "blackmail" activities and the community's response as described by the Newton businessmen. What does this incident reveal about the emerging media landscape, the power of the press, and the methods used to control public narratives in the late 19th century?
5. Examine the legal and social consequences for individuals involved in these violent altercations, focusing on arrests, bonds, and public reactions. How do these outcomes (or lack thereof) reflect the judicial practices and community standards of Kansas in 1872?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Affray:** An instance of fighting in a public place that disturbs the peace.
- **Altercation:** A noisy argument or disagreement, especially in public.
- **Amicably arranged:** Settled or resolved in a friendly and peaceful manner, without serious disagreement.
- **Bound over:** To be ordered by a court to appear at a future hearing, often with a requirement to post bail or bond.

- **Brained:** A colloquial term meaning to strike someone on the head, usually with a weapon, causing death or severe injury.
- **Buckshot:** Large pellets of lead shot used in shotgun shells, typically for hunting large game or for self-defense.
- **Enlivened:** Made more lively, interesting, or cheerful; in this context, refers to an event causing excitement or commotion.
- **Ensconced:** Established or settled in a comfortable, safe, or secret place; here, used figuratively to mean that the buckshot became embedded in a person's body.
- **Houses of ill fame:** A euphemism for brothels or places where prostitution is practiced.
- **Mar the peace:** To spoil, damage, or impair the peacefulness or tranquility of a place or situation.
- **Nom de plume:** A pen name; a pseudonym used by a writer.
- **Promiscuously:** Without discrimination or careful choice; in this context, firing shots wildly or randomly into a crowd.
- **Revolver:** A type of handgun with a revolving cylinder containing multiple chambers, each holding a single cartridge.
- **Stage coach:** A large, enclosed horse-drawn vehicle used for carrying passengers and mail on a regular route, especially in the 19th century.
- **Stage station:** An intermediate stop on a stagecoach route where horses could be changed, and passengers could rest or eat.
- **Tarried:** Stayed for a time; delayed or lingered.

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