

Booze and blazing guns on city streets

"On Thursday last many mournful faces were to be seen in town as the long funeral procession followed our young friend, A. Jay Cleveland to his last resting place. He was the oldest son of Dr. C. E. Cleveland." The Pajaronian, November 13, 1871.

It was said that this tragedy in the doctor's life was what led him to drink too heavily which, in turn, led to another tragedy three years later. "A bloody deed — shocking tragedy in the streets of Watsonville. A

That was Watsonville

midnight horror — Dr. Cleveland and M.J. Gilkey died by each other's hands — the corpses rolling down together."

These headlines are from the Santa Cruz Sentinel, February 1874. If you tried to find the same story in the Watsonville newspaper, you wouldn't be able to as every known copy of that particular issue vanished mysteriously.

The principals in this duel were Dr. Chester Edward Cleveland, 54, physician, and Melvin Jerome Gilkey, 49, millwright. Dr. Cleveland lived on the corner of East Third and Alexander streets.

"AD - Dr. C.E. Cleveland Physician and Surgeon, graduate of the Western Reserve College, Ohio, Session 1849-50. No. 1 at Snodgrass Building or at A.T. Swart & Co.s Drug Store." 1866, Pajaro Valley Times

Mel Gilkey lived on Walker Street and had been in Watsonville for some years. In 1871 he constructed the Liberty Pole in the Plaza with "great energy and skill." The following year he was one of a committee of three to make arrangements for the Fireman's Ball to be held in Hildreth's Hall.

A long-standing feud had built up between the two men, supposedly springing from remarks Gilkey had made which alluded to Dr. Cleve-



Betty Lewis

Local columnist

land having had intimate relations with his women patients. The remarks had hardly been uttered before they were repeated and embellished and, eventually, brought to the ears of Cleveland.

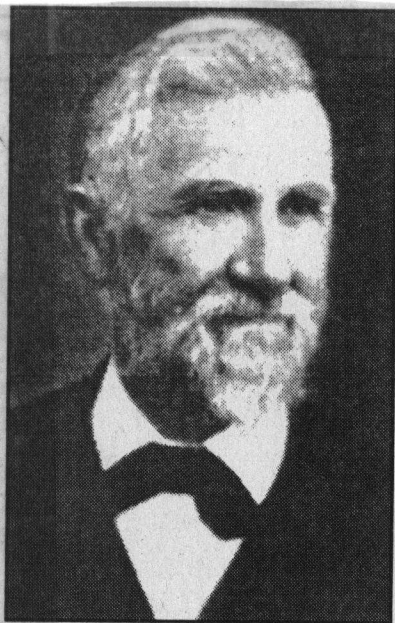
Both men were addicted to "intemperance" and both were known to have hot tempers. Gilkey had been in trouble before and it was also said that he was one of the lynching party when Matt Tarpey was hanged the year before.

On the Saturday night in question, Gilkey was roaming around town inviting a quarrel with anyone he met and it was reported that he had threatened the lives of several men, including that of Dr. Cleveland.

Along about midnight, Cleveland set out to find Gilkey, first fortifying himself with several shots of whiskey at the bar in the Mansion House Hotel. A friend implored him to go home but Cleveland ignored the advise and went to the Scott Saloon on the corner of Maple and Main.

There he had another drink and, though Gilkey was there, he left. But he didn't go far — just across Maple Street to the front of Freiermuth's tin shop. He shouted to his companion that he was going to kill that Gilkey and Gilkey, just coming out of the saloon, heard him and crossed over to the same corner.

Both men drew their revolvers and faced each other, tempers and whiskey intermingling. Gilkey said he was prepared and the doctor took a step backward as if to get his revolver in position.



Pajaro Valley Historical Assn.

Judge Lucius Holbrook conducted the inquest into the shooting.

Gilkey closed in on him and the guns went off with both men receiving a bullet in the chest. Cleveland fell forward on his face and died without a groan while Gilkey staggered backward and then crashed to the ground.

The doctor's body was laid out in his home and Gilkey was taken to the court, which was then located on the corner of Union and Third.

The inquest was held the next day — Gilkey being laid out on a bench with a blanket thrown over him. Judge Devoe, Cleveland's friend, was the only witness of the affray and Judge Lucious Holbrook was the presiding judge. The verdict returned was that each man died from gunshot wounds inflicted by the other. Serving on the jury were Dr. Brownstone, B.A. Osborn, T.S. Cooper, A.W. Rodgers, H.H. Stewart, G.H. Brewington, Cyrus Dubois and C.W. Linscott.

Both Cleveland and Gilkey were



George H. Brewington, a local merchant and landowner, was a member of the jury at the inquest.

Masons and it was said that the Masons had refused to have anything to do with funeral arrangements for either man. It was also the belief that Masons were responsible for gathering up all the newspapers in Watsonville and destroying them.

Both men were buried up at Pioneer Cemetery on Freedom Boulevard, Gilkey next to his wife and Cleveland in the family plot.

"Both were men of strong character, positive opinions, caloric tempers and when under the influence of liquor were known to be what modern parlance terms as 'tough monkeys.'" — Edward Pfingst, early-day Watsonville historian.