

# THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

GRAND RAPIDS MICHIGAN, SATURDAY MARCH 7, 1903

## SHOT THAT KILLED

John Welmerink was Slain in a Saloon Row by John Helhorst

Latter Under Arrest and He Claims Self Defense

**Dead Man was Attacking Bartender with a Club when the Fatal Bullet was Fired**

John Welmerink, intoxicated and spoiling for a fight, drove Bartender John Helhorst of the saloon at 183 Butterworth Avenue into a corner in that establishment a little after 7 o'clock last night, and as the infuriated assailant closed with his victim, Helhorst's pistol spoke, and the Welmerink family had one less living representative. Helhorst is a cripple, bears a good reputation and gave himself up immediately after the shooting.

Last night is claimed to mark Welmerink's second call within a few days for purposes of "cleaning out" the saloon in which last night's tragedy was enacted. He was 27 years of age and had a wife and babe in the home near the Midland Plaster Mills, where he claimed to be employed. Welmerink, with the other masculine members of the family, bore a rather doubtful reputation. His cousin, also John Welmerink, who accompanied him last night, was mixed in a criminal assault case two years ago, and another cousin is in jail at present. The two Welmerinks, accompanied by Edward Troy, the man who became notorious here through his summary punishment of Patrolman William Tatroe, went to the saloon about 6:30 last evening. The place is commonly known as "Skelley's," but is operated by Frank Hendricks, under the local agent of the Toledo Brewing Company. Helhorst, who is troubled with a disease of the spine, and who is able to attend to his duties only because of a heavy patent harness which he continually wears, is the bartender.

### **Were Refused Drink**

The Welmerinks and Troy went to the saloon and immediately demanded something to drink. They exhibited no money and the bartender's practiced eye told him they had already imbibed more intoxicants than they could responsibly handle. He refused to serve them. The elder Welmerink became angry in the moment.

"I can get all I want to drink in any joint in this town, whether I have money or not, and it's up to you to give me some." He said. His two companions closed in with him, and Helhorst, fearing trouble, stealthily sipped the piston into his pocket. The gun is ordinarily kept conveniently behind the bar for

emergencies, and Helhorst believed that trouble was brewing, since only a few nights before Welmerink had started a determined though somewhat diminutive "rough house."

The bartender refused a second time to serve the drinks. Welmerink refrained from an outward show of fight, but speaking slowly and with great deliberation, it is said by witnesses, he promised the bartender that unless he gave up the drinks, he would take them himself. Helhorst declined to serve the man again, and Welmerink made a rush to get behind the bar. Helhorst grabbed a heavy club fashioned from the butt of a billiard cue and started to defend himself, but before he could strike a blow, the club was wrested from his grasp and he went down from a swinging blow which close his left eye. Welmerink went down with him, but both men struggled to their feet and both the Welmerinks, according to Helhorst's story this morning, rushed for him, the elder holding the club he had captured.

### **Firing the Fatal Shot**

Helhorst showed his revolver then for the first time. He warned the elder Welmerink, who was in advance to halt. That individual with a smile on his lips jumped for the cripple, but the curse on his lips was shut off by the sharp crack of the bartender's "38." Welmerink stopped short in his tracks. The club dropped and both hands clawed nervously at the breast of his chest. He looked at Helhorst, whose smoking pistol had dropped to his side and gasped: "I'm shot." Then his head dropped forward and half turning, the man collapsed. Five minutes later, he was dead, the bartender's bullet having passed through his heart. Those in the room were paralyzed for a moment. Troy left the place during the excitement thought he took no part in the trouble.

Patrolman William Duga heard the shot and hurried to the saloon, where he met Helhorst at the front entrance. Helhorst explained that he had shot Welmerink in self defense and accompanied the officer to the patrol box, where a hurry call for the ambulance and patrol wagon was registered. Helhorst was locked up at headquarters, but there was no work for the ambulance and that vehicle went back without a burden.

Dr. Chamberlain was hurriedly summoned and Welmerink, who breathed a few times after the bullet

went home, was taken in the back room of the saloon. He died, however, before anything could be done to save his life and Coroner LeRoy was called. The corner impaneled a jury and had the remains removed to the undertaking rooms of Stein & Platte. He attempted to secure some evidence last night, but "Young John," as the younger John Welmerink is known, refused to talk. He said he would talk when the time came, but not then, and went away.

Helhorst, who is about 25 years of age, is almost prostrated because of the affair. He says he can't bear the thought of having killed a man, though he don't see how he could have acted otherwise under the circumstances. He explained this morning that the bar is closed at one end and that his assailants were driving him to that end when he fired the shot.

He says it would have been a physical impossibility to vault the obstruction and to have climbed would have left him without defense. His younger brother, James Helhorst, and Agent Lewis of the Toledo Brewing Company, agree in claiming that the prisoner was justified in using his revolver and John Skelley, another occupant of the room, is a witness in his favor.

The aged father and mother of the prisoner called last night at headquarters, but the superintendent's orders were that none should see him and they were not allowed to visit the cell. Later, as the details of the case came out, the restrictive order was modified and this morning Attorney George W. Thompson, with Lewis, the brewing company agent, had a talk with Helhorst.

#### **Helhorst Shows Bruises**

Helhorst has a cut on the right side of his face and his eye was terribly swollen this morning, as evidence that he did not come out of the fray unscathed. He says he does not know whether he was struck by the club during the scrimmage. He lived with his parents at 237 Lane Avenue.

The two Welmerinks, with Troy, called at the jail less than an hour before the shooting last night to see James Welmerink, the cousin, who was looking for trouble Thursday afternoon on West Fulton Street and who got it in the person of Patrolman Byrne. They were there some time and must have gone almost direct to the scene of the trouble. "Young" John Welmerink lives at 48 Hogadone Avenue.

The police are of the opinion that the shooting was justified.

The inquest was called for this morning, but was adjourned owing to the immense amount of work devolving upon the corner in locating and serving the necessary subpoenas upon witnesses.