

## “The Dynamite Outrage”

*They said they would blow my shop to atoms, burn my house, kill me and my family . . . Three fellows came to my shop [and] warned me to quit or I would suffer, and they kept their word.*

--George H. Schmidt, blacksmith.

At 10:57 on Tuesday night, May 24, 1892, a thunderous explosion rocked H Street (Market) between Fifth and Sixth Streets. People rushing to the scene found the smoldering ruins of a blacksmith shop owned by B. F. Fredericks and run by George Schmidt. “Beyond a doubt,” reported a *San Diego Sun* newsman, the blast was “caused by a manufactured bomb, made of iron or gas pipe and filled with dynamite or nitro-glycerin.”

Political overtones tied to labor rose immediately. Fredericks’ shop was known to be run on “non-union principles” and the shop owner was quick to blame union blacksmiths for the blast. “I know how it is . . . I know who the d--d fellows are.”

George Schmidt, who had run the shop on H Street for only one month, took the sabotage personally. “The d—d union blacksmiths have been doing everything in their power to hurt me. . . I have no other enemies but the union men and there is no other man mean enough to treat me so.”

But San Diego’s local blacksmith’s union quickly denounced the crime and offered a \$100 reward toward the arrest and conviction of the party or parties that “perpetuated the outrage.” A circular published in the local newspapers announced that the union men “would spare no trouble or expense in assisting the ferreting out” of the guilty.

The *San Diego Union* praised the blacksmiths union’s quick denunciation of the bombing and attacked the unknown “subversives of good order.” “Russianizing in the United States,” the newspaper warned, “will infallibly recoil with deadly effect upon those who employ it.”

Subversives seemed to be at work the next day when an unexploded pipe bomb was found in the bicycle shop of George Lemon at 735 Sixth Street. The blackened end of the device seemed to show that it had been lit but somehow extinguished before it could explode. Lemon would not blame any labor organization but ascribed the bomb to some unknown personal enemy.

But the Lemon incident took a strange twist when the *Union* announced the following day that the story was a hoax. A foolish practical joke or a deliberate lie, the newspaper was not sure. But the *Union* editorialist did wonder: “Since Lemon has shown such an aptitude in manufacturing imitation bombs, the question arises in the minds of many, could he have had anything to do with the real one?”

The police had other ideas. On May 27, they arrested two well-known union blacksmiths--George W. Carey and Emery P. Ells—on suspicion of destroying the shop on H Street. The *Los Angeles Times* noted the men “claim to be innocent but the evidence against them is very strong.”

B. T. Frederick and George Schmidt praised the arrests. Frederick believed he had been personally threatened by Carey, telling the *Union*, “He told me that if we did not charge the full

union rates they would reduce the price of horse-shoeing to seventy-five cents.” Schmidt added that Ells had visited him before the bombing to advise him “as a friend” to leave town, as “the boys were going to do him up.”

Carey and Ells quickly secured attorneys and were released on \$3000 bail. A Grand Jury investigation followed but the jurors dismissed the case after not finding any hard evidence against the two men. The alleged perpetrators of the Frederick-Schmidt bombing were free, but bitterness in the local blacksmith community simmered.

A few weeks later George Schmidt was returning to his rebuilt building on H Street when George Hardy, a union blacksmith with a shop across the street on Sixth, called him over. The two men argued, and then began to fight. The public brawl ended when police officer Jose Cota arrived and escorted a battered Schmidt to police headquarters. The aggrieved blacksmith swore out a warrant charging Hardy with battery. Hardy pleaded guilty and paid a \$15 fine.

The next incident was more serious. On Sunday evening, August 21, Schmidt ran into Emery Ells on the street. Schmidt raised a gun as Ells rushed toward him “hoping to close with him before he fired.” Now with a gun in each hand, Schmidt shot Ells in the abdomen.

“I hope to God I’ve fixed him!” the blacksmith yelled as two policemen arrived and dragged him off to county jail. Ells staggered to his home at 644 Fourth Street, where doctors were summoned. “The victim is reported very low,” the *Times* reported, “and his death is a question of a day or two.”

In September, George Schmidt went on trial in Superior Court on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon. Among the prosecution witnesses was a recovered Emery Ells who claimed he had no idea why Schmidt had attacked him. After a week-long trial, Schmidt was found guilty.

The despondent blacksmith awaited sentencing in his jail cell, complaining he had not been treated fairly. A Chinese cell mate offered him opium and Schmidt swallowed a huge dose. When jailers discovered the suicide attempt they gave him strong black coffee, stood him on his feet, and marched him through the hallways until doctors arrived.

On October 12, Schmidt received a sentence of three years in San Quentin. Judge Elisha Torrance told the defendant that while he had no doubt that his shop had been blown up by “designing persons” he was not justified in taking the law into his own hands. Three days later, Schmidt was taken north on the steamer *Queen* to begin his sentence.

Schmidt’s former antagonists continued to prosper in the blacksmith trade. George W. Carey would become the secretary of the San Diego chapter of the National Brotherhood of Blacksmiths.

Emery Ells would soon leave San Diego and move his shop to Escondido. In 1893 he was arrested on a charge of seducing Mollie L. Cassady under a promise of marriage. Charges were later dropped when he agreed to marry the young lady.

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