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PROBE CASE OF WOMAN'S DEATH IN SANITORIUM

Scalded in Bath in Institution
in Wellesley, Mass.

Young Physician a Witness at
Hearing of Manslaughter
Charges Against Nurse
How Baths Were Given—
Case of Interest.

A despatch a few days ago referred to a case in the Wiswall Sanatorium in Wellesley, Mass.—the death of Mrs. Mary C. Lots of Malden, by scalding, while she was a patient in the sanatorium and was being bathed. Miss Margaret Evelyn Coumans, young and pretty nurse of the sanatorium, was charged with manslaughter and pleaded not guilty before Judge James A. Halloran in the Dedham District Court. The hearing was to determine probable cause. It was alleged that unlawful negligence by her resulted in death of Mrs. Lots. The latter was twenty-six years old.

Mrs. Lots was a patient at the Wiswall Sanatorium and on the night of Nov. 10 was given a bath by Miss Coumans. It is alleged that the nurse failed completely to shut off the hot water valve and that the water entered the tub, resulting in multiple scalds, causing the death of the patient the next morning. Asst. Dist. Atty. Harold Williams appeared for the government and Frank G. Squires, assistant clerk of court, was counsel for the defendant.

The report of Dr. Andrew H. Hodgden, medical examiner, as reported in the Boston Globe, was to the effect that Mrs. Lots met her death from multiple scalds, and that excepting for her face and part of the chest, she was scalded from head to foot, her back and shoulders being almost burned.

Dr. Wiswall Testifies.

The first witness was Dr. Edward Holmes Wiswall, a young physician, who graduated in 1918, and afterwards served six months in the army. His connection

with the hospital was that of assistant physician. He testified that it was formerly conducted by his father and it was for the care of nonmental and insane cases.

Dr. Wiswall could not remember the date of Mrs. Lots's death, but he said that she died in the "tub room," which is also known as the "hydro room."

This room, he asserted, is located in a building occupied, at the time of her death, by excited cases, and there were nine such cases there.

During days five and six nurses were in attendance, but at night there were three, one on the third floor, one on the second floor and one in the hydro room. Miss Coumans, he said, was in charge of and on for several years. She had been employed at the hospital for a considerable time. He did not know her previous experience, as she was employed by his father or Dr. Patch and was there when he came, a year ago last January.

Asked what her duties were, he said, at the time, she was head nurse day-times. She looked after the hydro room at night, where it was customary to bathe the excited cases. She was supposed to remain there.

How Baths Were Given.

Describing the room, the witness said it is 22x23 feet, and is in the rear of the building. It contains two large tubs without fixtures, all fixtures being on the wall, out of reach of the patients. The inflow and outflow of water was controlled from these fixtures. The tubs had the usual overflow and overflow, but there was no chain faucet. The intake was located half-way up the slope at the head of the tub. The water temperature, he declared, was controlled by a mixing chamber operated by a valve.

A valve, and the key by means of which it is operated, were introduced. Dr. Wiswall said that the fixtures were about eight years old, but whether they were or were not of a standard type in use in psychopathic hospitals, he could not say.

A prolonged bath of the type given Mrs. Lots was then described by the witness. He said that the patient was lying in a canvas hammock made of strips, and was then lowered, the strips so arranged that the patient's head could not go under water. Canvas sheathing was placed about especially excited cases, to keep them in the tub.

Mrs. Lots, he said, was sheathed in canvas. He said that sometimes a patient remained in the tub almost twenty-four hours, the temperature of the water being between ninety-four and ninety-six degrees. He explained that the water was let into the tub when the patient had been suspended. Then when the tub was filled, the nurse closed the valve and put a thermometer into the tub.

District Attorney Williams asked why this was done, if the water was regulated

in a mixing chamber, and the witness replied it was the custom of the hospital. Dr. Wiswall said there was a thermometer on the mixing chamber, where the hot and cold water mixed before it passed into the tub. On several occasions, he testified, he had seen Miss Coumans stand beside the tub and test the water.

Death of Mrs. Lots.

It was four o'clock in the morning when he first heard of the death of Mrs. Lots.

Dr. Spaulding, the superintendent, came to his room in the main building and told him about it. Dr. Wiswall said he dressed hastily, went to the psychopathic building and in the "hydro room" saw the body of Mrs. Lots on the floor, covered with a sheet.

The tub was empty, he said, and the canvas hammock and wrappings had been removed. Dr. Wiswall described the temperature of the room as "normal." He said he examined the bathtub valves and found them working properly. No water was flowing into the tub at this time.

Witness thought Miss Coumans went on duty that evening at either seven or nine o'clock, and that she had three patients under her care. Mrs. Lots and Miss Reardon were "hydro patients" and a Miss Ryan was a "dry restraint patient."

He testified that Miss Ryan was not violent, but that it was necessary for her nurse to step in and see her about once an hour. For the patients in the tub he said it was necessary to change the water every thirty or thirty-five minutes.

Under cross-examination by Attorney Squires, Dr. Wiswall testified that he is twenty-three years old, was born in Boston, and has lived most of his life in Wellesley. He received his medical degree from Boston University. The sanatorium property at Wellesley, he said, had been in possession of his family fourteen or sixteen years.

From the time his father died, on Oct. 7, 1918, until recently, the superintendent, Dr. Wiswall said, had been Dr. Frank W. Patch, now of Framingham. The witness testified that he was paid a salary by the institution.

Patients in Psychopathic Ward.

He was asked about the boiler supplying the hot water and replied that it had a capacity of 600 gallons. He said that since the apparatus in the "hydro room" was installed, there had been no changes or repairs, to his knowledge.

On direct examination the witness testified that he believed there were eight patients in the psychopathic ward at the time of Mrs. Lots's death, and under questioning by Mr. Squires, who read the names of eleven women, Dr. Wiswall said he did not believe they were all there at the time.

When asked if no arrangements were made for extra nurses to care for patients, many of whom were violent and several of whom had "suicidal inclinations," the witness replied that there had been no change in the usual routine.

He was asked about his knowledge of the "suicidal inclinations" of a Miss Taft, a Miss Curney and a Mrs. Mack. He said the first two were not suicidal patients and described Mrs. Mack as "more or less agitated." He admitted that all required special care.

He also admitted that in an emergency the night nurse in the psychopathic department could at any time demand the presence in the room of all nurses who were in the building.

Dr. Wiswall said repeatedly that the nurse on the floor above the "hydro room" at the time of the accident was a Miss Lawrence, while Attorney Squires insisted it was Mrs. Norton. Dr. Spaulding, the present superintendent, who was also called as a witness, said the nurse on the floor above was Mrs. Norton.

Case of Miss Segal.

Regarding the testing of water in the tubs, Dr. Wiswall testified that the nurse was required frequently to do so by hand and not to rely entirely on the thermometers.

He denied that the nurse received particular orders in regard to regulation of the valve on the tub in question. Mrs. Lots—to watch and see that the water did not become hot after the valve was shut off.

Dr. Wiswall's attention was called to an alleged accident sustained by a Miss Segal last June. He said this accident occurred in the other tub in the "hydro room."

"The water got too hot, didn't it?" he was asked.

"No, not so far as we could make out," replied witness.

"The patient collapsed, didn't she, and had burns and scalds on her back?"

"No, sir—on the back were abrasions. We blamed it to the patient's objection to restraint in the canvas covering."

"What treatment was prescribed?"

"We applied a healing salve."

"What kind?"

"I think it was resinol."

"As a matter of fact, wasn't it the so-called scarlet salve?"

"Some."

"That was particularly applicable to burns, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied the doctor.

He did not recall whether boric acid was not also applied.

Dr. Wiswall said that the only statement Miss Coumans had made about Mrs. Lots in conversation with him was that she (Miss Coumans) could not explain the accident, as she had closed off the valve.

He said that, so far as he knew, Miss Coumans was a capable nurse in fact, so capable that she was entrusted with charge of the psychopathic department at night.

TETRAZZINI HAS TO PAY BIG TAX BILL.

Kissing a fat roll of bills a laughing good-bye, Miss Tetrazzini, opera star, passed them over to "Big Bill" Edwards, internal revenue collector in New York, to pay her first income tax instalment the other day.

"How much income did she declare?" the collector was asked.

"That would be telling, and the law doesn't allow me to tell," replied "Big Bill." He admitted, however, that it was "more than \$100,000."

CARLETON TOWER ELECTION.

The officers elected by the newly formed Carleton Tower Lodge No. 37 of the K. of P. at the inauguration meeting on Friday night and Saturday morning were as follows: Dr. B. F. Johnson, C. C.; William Stewart, V. C.; C. J. Jenkins, prelate; R. H. Irwin, M. V.; David Allen, keeper of records and seals; E. A. Young, M. F.; D. Kenneth Purdy, M. E.; Charles Emerson, M. A.; Gilbert E. Hart, I. G.; George E. Henderson, O. G.; B. H. Irwin, D. G. The past chancellors are E. A. Young, Frank H. Gardner, G. K. Purdy, Norman P. McLeod and R. H. Irwin. The trustees elected were: Stanley S. Stout, A. A. Lillingham, Charles F. Hannam and the representatives to grand lodge, Frank Gardner for two years, R. H. Irwin for one year with alternatives, E. A. Young and K. Purdy. Thirty members were initiated at the first meeting and thirty will be initiated at the next meeting.

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