

The Addison B. Maclin Saga

by Timothy Dean Hudson

A native of Virginia, Thomas Littleton Haldane Maclin received his medical degree from the University of Louisville, Kentucky in 1843. He headed south and married Mary Ann Binford in Limestone County, Alabama in 1854. They soon headed west and settled at Hillsboro, in southern Union County, Arkansas, where Dr. Maclin opened a practice and hired an overseer to manage his rented farm and large number of slaves. After the Civil War, he moved across the state line into Union Parish and settled near Marion, where he practiced medicine until his death on 20 March 1885.

Dr. Maclin had developed the reputation as the head of one of Union Parish's "*best families*." Dr. Maclin's second son, Addison Binford Maclin, was born at Hillsboro on 9 May 1861, and in 1880, he still attended school. He married Linnie Maud Cammack, a granddaughter of early Union Parish Baptist minister Elias George, in October 1881 in Ashley County, Arkansas, and they settled near her parents and began farming.

The summer after Addison Maclin's marriage, a Texas cattle buyer, Mr. Griffin, arrived in the Ashley-Chicot County region. Given his business, he was known to carry a substantial amount of cash with him. He disappeared one day in July 1882. Several days later, his body was found in a field, initially believed on the Ashley side of the county line. His assailant had crushed his skull in a horrible manner, with the throat shot away with a load of mixed shot. No money was found on his body. Multiple witnesses reported that Addison Maclin was the last man seen with Mr. Griffin. Although initially present, Maclin had left during the investigation and returned to his father's home near Marion. In September, Ashley County Sheriff Stillwell lured him back to Arkansas, arrested him, and charged him with murder. In his actions, Maclin betrayed no sign of guilt or apprehension, requested a speedy investigation to clear him.

As officials had only circumstantial evidence against Maclin, their investigation proved tedious and lengthy. After their preliminary inquiries, an Ashley County grand jury indicted Maclin for murder, but after running a survey, they discovered that Griffin's dead body was actually found in neighboring Chicot County. Officials in Hamburg continued to confine Maclin in their jail without bail while a Chicot County grand jury investigated. During his lengthy confinement in the Hamburg jail, Maclin became seriously ill, but his wife, Linnie, "*a faithful little woman stuck by him through thick and thin*." She remained at the jail with him, nursing him back to health. That winter, after

her husband improved, Linnie Maclin and her sister managed to obtain the keys to his cell from the jailor's wife and allowed Maclin to escape.

Addison Maclin evaded all attempts to capture him for the next year, but all indications pointed to his hiding out in the woods near Marion, close to his father's farm. On 18 October 1883, Sheriff Stillwell from Ashley County and his posse from Arkansas finally found Maclin's trail and chased him to his father's residence. The posse surrounded Dr. Maclin's home, and Stillwell demanded that the physician surrender his son. Dr. Maclin refused, not even allowing Stillwell into his home, which was filled with Addison Maclin's relatives and friends, all well-armed and intending to make a stubborn fight.

The standoff created considerable excitement throughout the Marion region, and few believed that Addison Maclin would be taken alive. Out of his jurisdiction and without legal authority to storm Maclin's home, Stillwell sent a runner to Farmerville to obtain an arrest warrant. Deputy Sheriff Charles D. Covington and several other deputized men from Farmerville returned to Dr. Maclin's home with the proper papers, only to find that Maclin's relatives had distracted the posse while he sneaked away quietly through the woods. The posse pursued him, but Maclin made good his escape.

By late November 1882, Maclin presumably tired of life on the run, and he wrote the Arkansas State Auditor, announcing that he was anxious for a trial. He promised to surrender himself for trial if the Auditor would agree not to keep him in jail too long. The Auditor agreed and made the necessary arrangements. As he promised, on Saturday, 1 December 1883, Maclin voluntarily surrendered himself to the Chicot County authorities, claiming that he would *"have no difficulty in establishing his innocence of the crime charged."* At his trial, witnesses reported that Griffin and Maclin had met one day and began discussing cattle, and that Maclin knew Griffin carried considerably money.

Maclin took Griffin to look at cattle in his Ashley County neighborhood, and at the home of Maclin's neighbor, he borrowed a shotgun, loaded it with shot, and the pair rode away towards the field where Griffin's dead body was afterwards found. In his testimony, Addison Maclin accounted for virtually all the circumstantial evidence against him, even documenting that the evening the crime was committed, he played croquet with several neighbors, when *"if guilty his hands were bloody with a terrible deed."* His actions certainly did not fit those of a typical guilty man. The day after Griffin was last seen alive, Maclin freely announced to multiple acquaintances his intentions to visit his father in Marion.

As the prosecution presented their case, the Court ordered Griffin's body exhumed so officials could examine certain wounds. They boiled the flesh away from his frame and afterwards brought the bones into Court as evidence. Maclin was clearly enthralled at the demonstration, as curious as any at the testimony of the physicians. He betrayed no agitation whatsoever that indicated any guilt. Maclin even obtained witnesses who verified that his gun carried two charges when he returned from the last ride with Griffin, and when the prosecution noted that a band on his barrel was loose, resulting (they claimed) from blows delivered to the victim's head, Maclin proved the loose band had occurred prior to the murder.

Maclin also accounted for all the money he had, even proving he changed some bills for the deceased into larger denomination bills. The only thing Maclin could not prove was that he was not the last man to lay eyes on Griffin. He claimed that Griffin wanted to go over into Chicot County and get some whiskey. Maclin said he showed Griffin the road into Chicot County, and that was the last that he saw of him.

Despite the circumstantial evidence for his guilt, the jury found Maclin guilty and sentenced him to hang on 26 September 1884. Linnie Maclin immediately became seriously ill, swearing that she would poison her husband rather than see him hang. Maclin's attorneys motioned for a new trial, but the judge overruled the motion. They then filed an appeal.

A few days before his scheduled execution, a newspaper reporter visited Maclin at the state penitentiary. Maclin stated

No, sir, I don't feel like a man who can see his death awaiting him but a few days ahead. I'm not guilty, I've done nothing to die for, and I cannot and will not resign myself to such a death; while I have life I shall continue to hope. I have a loving wife and two little ones sorrowing for me at home; and though the thought of an eternal separation from them fills me with grief, I can't feel any terror over the sentence which has been passed upon me, for I know I am innocent, and I can't bring myself to believe that God will let me suffer...I don't look like a guilty one, do I? No, I'm not a murderer, and I am not afraid.

Five days before his scheduled execution, the Arkansas Supreme Court granted Maclin's appeal and issued a stay of execution. When they considered his case in March 1885, they ordered a new trial. He was eventually released and moved to Texas, where he died in 1928.

