

## The Murder of Simon Stein

by Timothy Dean Hudson

Born in Asselheim, Rhein Bavaria (now Germany) in 1842, Simon Stein arrived in the Port of Mobile in 1860 with his siblings. While his older brother, Daniel Stein, left Mobile and came to Farmerville in 1861, Simon remained in Alabama, where he enlisted in the Twelfth Alabama Infantry Regiment. He served in the Army of Northern Virginia throughout the War, *“making a gallant Confederate soldier.”* After the War ended, Stein joined his brother in Louisiana, where he primarily worked as a salesman in Daniel Stein’s thriving mercantile firm.

In 1882, Simon bought his brother’s store at Stein’s Bluff, located on Bayou Corney just west of Farmerville, and it proved highly successful. In 1892, he returned to Farmerville and operated a mercantile business there for a few years. Stein became a popular citizen in Union Parish, with one resident describing him as

*...a congenial and warm-hearted man...passionately fond of his family, and the doors of his comfortable home at Stein’s Bluff were always wide open to his friends and acquaintances, where he was lavish in the bestowal of hospitality.*

Simon Stein married in 1882 to Pauline Blum, a native of Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorain, France. Orphaned in 1867 when both of her parents died, in 1870 Pauline lived in the Jewish Widows & Orphans Association home in New Orleans with her siblings, Adele, Isaac, and Samuel. After her marriage, she settled with Simon at Stein’s Bluff and maintained an apparently close relationship with her brother, Isaac, who occasionally visited from his home in New Orleans. Sam Blum followed his sister to Farmerville and worked as a clerk in Simon’s store and as his cotton factor at Stein’s Bluff. By the early 1890s, Pauline’s sister, Adele, also followed her siblings to Farmerville.

Due to low cotton prices and possibly over-imbibing, Simon Stein’s mercantile store in Farmerville did not thrive, and he lost a good deal of money. He sold his store to his brother-in-law, Sam Blum, who successfully operated it until 3 October 1894, when he sold the business to his sister, Pauline Stein. These transactions resulted in bitter feelings between Simon Stein and his brother-in-law, and for over a year they were not on speaking terms.

In November 1894, the Steins began preparations to move to Monroe, where Simon and Pauline rented the Veranda House, which they remodeled and opened as the Stein Hotel. Their venture proved highly successful, reportedly due to Stein’s *“estimable wife, who personally looked after the house.”* Pauline’s sister, Adele, moved from Farmerville to Monroe and lived with them in the hotel. Sam Blum followed his sisters to Monroe, working as a cotton seed buyer for the local

oil mills and as a clerk and bartender on the steamboat "*Belle D'Arbonne*." At times when the steamer was docked in Monroe, Blum boarded at the Stein Hotel. By early 1895, the relationship between Simon Stein and Sam Blum had improved, as Adele said that they were then on good terms. She said that Stein attempted to arrange his overnight business trips so that Blum could stay at the hotel while he was gone.

Simon Stein had the reputation of a good-natured man, and he remained popular among his many former patrons in Union, Lincoln, and Claiborne Parishes. However, Adele Blum Hirsch said, "*Mr. Stein was very good when sober, but very ugly when drunk.*" In 1890, Cecely Archie took a position as a domestic servant and lived with the Steins at Stein's Bluff. She followed them when they moved to Farmerville and then to Monroe. Cecely said that Stein became "*very cross and mean while under the influence of liquor,*" adding that Pauline routinely gave her Stein's pistol to hide whenever he was drinking.

On the week beginning Monday, 10 June 1895, Simon Stein went to Farmerville to check on his planting interests near his former home at Stein's Bluff. After returning home on June 19<sup>th</sup>, he began drinking heavily and frequently quarreled with his wife. His sister-in-law reported that he was "*very ugly and very abusive; drinking this week,*" and that he had repeatedly called his wife names and threatened to kill her. Following their usual routine, Pauline and Adele took his pistol and hid it in Cecely's room so he wouldn't hurt anyone.

On Friday, the 21<sup>st</sup>, in an outburst, Stein stabbed a knife towards Cecely before leaving the hotel. He spent the entire night walking around Monroe's streets. On Saturday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Stein returned home early in the morning, saying he intended to go to Farmerville on the steamboat, but before going he would kill his wife. He packed his valise and asked Adele for his pistol, but she told Stein that she didn't know where it was. She reported that Stein "*was acting very strange,*" and then he left the hotel.

Sam Blum arrived at the hotel shortly after Stein left, having walked from the wharf where his steamboat had just docked. Pauline begged her brother to not leave on the boat's next trip upriver to Farmerville, saying she needed him to stay and protect her. Blum agreed and left the hotel to borrow a gun for protection, acquiring a .38 caliber Smith & Wesson pistol. Next, he searched for Stein before returning to the hotel, stationing himself in one of the dining room doorways. He told Pauline to leave the front of the hotel, instructing her to go into the kitchen and not come out.

After leaving the hotel earlier, Stein had gone to the Southern Hardware Company nearby, where he attempted to purchase a pistol. Store clerk Sigmund Marx greeted Stein and told him to pick out a pistol from the showcase. None of the selections satisfied Stein, as he claimed they were

too small. Marx showed him a larger one, and Stein then made a highly unusual request: he asked Marx for cartridges to load it there in the store. Marx refused, so Stein took out his own cartridges from his pocket, loaded the gun, and in a very nervous and excited manner, he started to walk out of the store. Marx had heard of Stein's drinking problem, so he became suspicious and took the pistol back, refusing to sell him a firearm.

Angered at his inability to secure a pistol, Simon Stein arrived back at the hotel about 10:00 a.m. Cecely Archie stood in the doorway between the kitchen and dining room as waiter Paulo Jones unloaded dishes on the dining room buffet. Porter Joe Ross watched as Stein walked into his room and stooped down to pick up a heavy walking stick. He then rushed towards the dining room where Blum waited. At that moment, Stein's six-year-old son, Daniel, came into the dining room, but Blum ordered the boy upstairs. Simon Stein walked through the north door to the dining room while waving his stick and immediately engaged in a quarrel with Sam Blum, who was standing in the south door.

Stein cursed both Blum and Pauline, then said to Blum, *"Are you meddling with me and my family?"* Blum said, *"No, Simon, I did not come here for that,"* to which Stein replied that it was *"fight and die and go to hell for my children."* Stein called his wife a strumpet, and Blum said, *"Simon, do you mean to call my sister a strumpet."* Stein replied, *"Yes,"* and he then proceeded to hit Blum with his walking stick on the arm. Upon seeing Stein attack Blum, Cecely ran back into the kitchen, joining Pauline.

As Stein struck him again with the walking stick, Blum pulled his pistol from his pocket, prompting Jones to drop the dishes he carried and flee from the dining room into the kitchen. Blum fired his gun three times at Stein. One bullet hit him in the left jaw and passed downward, exiting at the right clavicle, while the second bullet hit him between the third and fourth ribs on the left side, lodging under the skin on his right side. The third bullet entered Stein's body between the fourth and fifth ribs on the left side and then passed through his body to the right side. All three wounds were fatal, and the last two bullets both passed through Stein's heart.

Hearing the three gunshots from where they hid in the kitchen, Pauline and Cecely ran into the dining room. Upon seeing her husband lying on the floor in a pool of blood, Pauline fainted. She regained consciousness as her children and hotel guests rushed downstairs, and she cried for a doctor, saying that her husband was dying. Blum left the hotel after shooting his brother-in-law, while the noise of gunshots quickly attracted a crowd to the hotel. A Monroe newspaper reporter described the scene:

*On the side gallery just outside of the dining room lay the dead body of Simon Stein weltering in his blood which was still trickling from three fatal wounds, and had formed a horrible pool beside the body. A crowd of people surrounded the corpse, and gazed as if fascinated at the gruesome sight, while from a room near by came the sound of the weeping and wailing of women and children.*

Jacob Stein, Simon's nephew, worked in Monroe at that time, and he immediately telegraphed his father in Farmerville, Col. Daniel Stein, of the tragedy. The following day, Col. Stein, his other son, Abe Stein, and his stepson, Capt. Lazarus Brunner, all left Farmerville by steamboat for Monroe. Col. Stein returned to Farmerville the following day with his brother's corpse and buried him in the Farmerville Cemetery. Col. Stein left his sons in Monroe to observe the preliminary trial the following week.

After interviewing witnesses and inspecting the premises, the coroner's jury issued their verdict. They ruled that Sam Blum had killed Simon Stein in an act of justifiable homicide, with Blum acting in self-defense. Although exonerated by the coroner's jury, at the preliminary trial held Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, Judge Richardson placed Blum under a \$2000 bond to await action of the grand jury later that fall. This gave an indication Judge Richardson did not believe Blum's actions constituted self-defense.

Simon Stein's death generated considerable excitement across Union Parish, for the Stein siblings, Daniel and Simon Stein, and Helena Stein Arent, had become well-known, beloved figures to regional farmers due to their mercantile businesses over the previous three decades. Blum was but a recent arrival to the region, and although residents knew him as a cotton factor and merchant, local sentiment held Blum entirely accountable for the assassination of Simon Stein.

The editor of Farmerville's "*The Gazette*" seemed to convey the attitudes of most locals, writing that "*Blum can never excuse himself for his rash act in the eyes of the people who knew Mr. Stein.*" He described the deceased merchant as "*an old man, small and weak; not of a quarrelsome or overbearing disposition...it was an easy matter to get along peaceably with him.*" Most felt that, even if Stein had hit Blum, as a young man of medium size, Blum could easily have overpowered his attacker. While any man should protect his sister from assault, even by her husband, as Stein's brother-in-law, the locals believed Blum should have attempted to reason with Stein rather than shoot him.

In an incident unrelated to the killing of his brother-in-law, a Union Parish grand jury indicted Sam Blum for carrying concealed weapons, a common problem among men of the era. Blum pleaded guilty to the charge in October, and the court fined him \$12.50.

On 8 November 1895, an Ouachita Parish grand jury indicted Blum for the murder of Simon Stein. Blum's trial began on Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, with Ouachita Parish hiring Farmerville attorney, and future State Bank Commissioner, State Representative, and Shreveport Mayor, Lee Emmett Thomas to help prosecute him. The Court heard testimony from numerous witnesses beginning on Friday, with Farmerville residents Gustav Hartman, Jesse Pearson, Daniel Stein, Elijah M. Dean, Abe Stein, and Samuel C. Trimble providing testimony. The State presented its case for Blum's conviction at noon Monday, with well-known Monroe attorneys Charles J. Boatner, a United States Congressman, Frederick Gray Hudson, and W. D. Munholland serving as Blum's defense.

The judge turned the case over to the jury at 7:30 p.m. Monday evening, and at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon, the 26<sup>th</sup>, the jury returned a verdict of guilty of manslaughter. However, during their night of deliberations, one of the juror's children was accidentally shot, so with the consent of one of Blum's attorneys, the bailiff allowed the man to separate from the others to look after his child. On this technicality, the Court overturned the conviction and ordered a new trial, releasing Blum on bail.

Various legal matters delayed Blum's second trial until early 1897. When the jury deadlocked, the judge declared a mistrial. The Court tried Blum for the third time beginning Tuesday, 13 April 1897. After hearing arguments and receiving their charge, the jury deliberated only three hours when they hopelessly deadlocked, with seven voting for conviction of manslaughter and five for acquittal. When informed that the jury could not reach agreement, the judge again declared a mistrial. The District Attorney then allowed the case to lapse for several years before deciding not to prosecute Blum again.

After her husband's death, Pauline Blum Stein filed suit in January 1896 in the U.S. Circuit Court against the Supreme Lodge, Knights of Pythias of the World. Her suit asked for \$3000, the amount of Simon Stein's life insurance policy. The Knights of Pythias had refused payment, claiming that he lost his life while violating Louisiana's criminal laws by attacking Sam Blum. Since the prosecutions of Blum had all resulted in mistrials, she had appealed her case to the Supreme Court.

In December 1898, the Knights of Pythias offered a compromise, agreeing to pay her \$1500 if she dropped the appeal. Pauline accepted the offer, and then moved with her children to Galveston, Texas, where she operated a boarding house. She and her children spent their lives in Galveston, although they frequently visited their relatives in Farmerville. Pauline Stein lived until 1932.

After his trials ended in 1897, Samuel Blum moved to Kenner, Louisiana. In 1900, he worked as a grocery clerk there. He died at Touro Infirmary in New Orleans on 20 November 1902 at the age of forty-one.

