

MELSON ACQUITTED OF LEE'S MURDER

The Verdict a Surprise to Court
Attendants and the
Community.

JURY OUT TWO HOURS

"I'll Never Touch a Drop of Liquor
Again as Long as I Live,"
Said the Prisoner When He
Heard the Verdict.

One of the most surprising verdicts ever rendered in a capital case in Camden county was the verdict of acquittal returned by the jury yesterday in the trial of Edward Melson, charged with the murder of ex-Policeman Daniel Lee. It was surprising because there was no denial of the killing on the part of the defendant and the utmost hope of his counsel was for a verdict of manslaughter. The prisoner admitted on the witness stand that he killed Lee—shot him down in a saloon, before a blow had been struck. There was direct and positive evidence of the killing in the testimony of several eye witnesses.

A plea of self defense was set up, for there was no evidence that Melson used his weapon to protect his life, and yet, in the face of this testimony, the jury acquitted the prisoner after deliberating for less than two hours. It was a big victory for Lawyer Frederick A. Rex, counsel for Melson, for he would have considered his client lucky in getting off with a conviction for manslaughter. Prosecutor Jenkins looked upon the verdict as a miscarriage of justice.

CLOSE OF THE CASE.

Yesterday was the second day of the trial. As both prosecution and defense had developed their strength on the opening day, there was very little testimony of importance.

Lawyer Rex for the defense called witnesses to show that Melson had been beaten and kicked in the scrimmage in Dilmore's saloon immediately after he shot Lee. An effort to weaken the testimony of George Martin, a well-known politician and business man and an eye witness of the shooting, was made by calling William Hind, of 265 Mechanic street. He testified that he met Martin in Maurice Hertz's liquor store, on Kaighn avenue, and that Martin told him that Melson had shot Lee and that as Lee was his best friend, he would swear to anything to hang Melson.

In rebuttal the State tried to introduce a statement made by Melson to Assistant Prosecutor Carson the morning after the shooting, but Judge Garrison ruled it out.

Joseph Taylor, John J. Welsh, A. K. Snyder, W. Kaminski, John Lee and Constable Frederick Volgt, testified to Lee's good character.

Policeman Fitzsimmons testified that he knew Lee for over twenty years, and that his reputation for peace and quietness was good when he was sober. He volunteered the information that both Lee and Melson were bad men when drunk, and for this Judge Garrison censured him severely.

Each side occupied an hour and a half in argument. Prosecutor Jenkins asked for a verdict of murder in the second degree. Lawyer Rex, for the defense, asked for acquittal, but claimed that, in any event, his client should not be convicted of any degree of crime above manslaughter.

SURPRISING VERDICT.

The jury returned at quarter after 5 o'clock, after being out less than two hours. To the surprise of everybody they returned a verdict of acquittal. Even Melson himself was surprised and said that he did not expect such a verdict. He remarked:

"That settles it. I will never touch another drop of liquor as long as I live."

Melson received the congratulations of his father and brother and a number of friends. He then proceeded to the county jail to get his effects and was greeted with cheers by the prisoners who had heard the verdict.

This is the second murder case tried this month in the Camden Criminal Court that has resulted in a verdict of acquittal.

The jury that acquitted Melson was composed of Monroe C. Bennett, James A. Rowland, W. H. Hogan, Frank H. Powell, Thomas Willis, Moses M. Mulford, James McNeill, Harry F. Renner, Samuel Thompson, John M. Masters, Frederick Halloway, James Farraday.