

Book Review

Ada and the Doc:

An Account of the Ada LeBoeuf and Thomas Dreher Murder Case by Charles M. Hargroder

Reviewed by Margaret E. Judice

Charles M. Hargroder has written an extremely interesting and informative book on a murder committed on July 1, 1927, which murder resulted in the conviction and hanging of a woman in Louisiana for the first time in the history of the state. Hargroder primarily relied on the trial transcript and news stories in the writing of this book, first published in 2000 by the University of Louisiana-Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies and now offered in reprint. The following is a brief overview of the book.

Hargroder begins the book by describing the discovery of the body of James LeBoeuf and continues with the investigation of the murder. The carved-up body was found in Lake Palourde. Railroad angle irons were found around his neck and feet and his body had been disemboweled to prevent buildup of bodily gases, both in an attempt to prevent the body from sur-

facing. If the 1927 flood waters had not started to recede, the body may not have been found.

James LeBoeuf's wife, Ada Bonner LeBoeuf (Ada), was the first individual questioned. When first questioned, Ada said that she and her husband took a boat ride and that shots were fired. She then said that her husband thought she and Dr. Thomas E. Dreher were having an affair, that she and her husband were going to meet with Dr. Dreher to patch things up, that at the meeting her husband fired his gun first, and that James Beadle (Dr. Dreher's handyman) then fired two shots. She was brought to jail and gave a confession. The second person questioned was Dr. Dreher. He also said that James LeBoeuf fired first and then James Beadle fired two shots. Dr. Dreher was then taken to jail. James Beadle was the third individual questioned and he denied any knowledge of the murder. He was then

taken to jail.

Hargroder then describes how Dr. Dreher mortgaged his house and hired attorneys to represent all three of the defendants. The defense attorneys began their own investigation. One interesting detail is that the defense attorneys represented all three defendants and that the three defendants did not have separate attorneys. Shortly thereafter, the District Attorney announced that he would seek first-degree murder indictments for all three defendants.

District Judge James D. Simon, who was 28 years old at the time, was the presiding judge. The Grand Jury met on July 12, only 11 days from the murder. Indictments on all three defendants were turned over to the District Attorney.

The book continues with the arraignment on July 13. At this proceeding, all three defendants pleaded not guilty. The trial was set for July 25. Although the

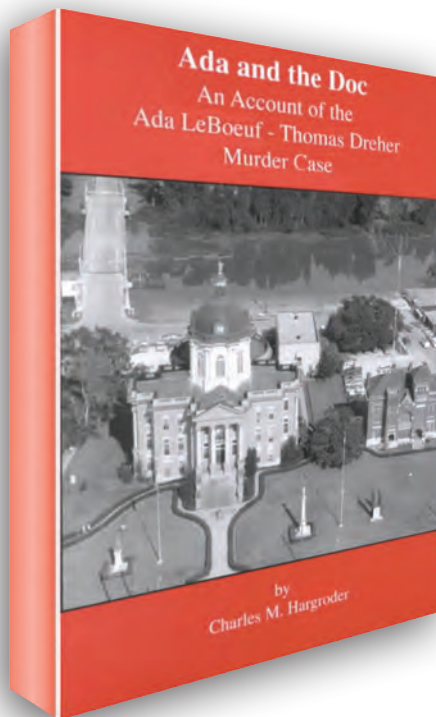


defense objected to the trial date due to insufficient time to prepare a defense, the motion was overruled by Judge Simon. The defense attorneys then sent a letter to the jury commission arguing that the Louisiana statute on women serving on juries conflicted with the 14th and 19th amendments of the United States Constitution. Louisiana law at the time stated that women had to ask that their names be included among those from whom juries would be selected. No women had made such a request. Judge Simon ordered the jury commission to proceed.

On July 25, the trial began. The last jury member was selected on July 28 and the trial was due to start on July 29. On July 29, one juror was replaced and the trial commenced. Testimony was given. Several days into the trial, James Beadle requested that he be provided with his own attorney and Judge Simon appointed a new attorney for him. James Beadle's statement or "confession" was submitted to the jury without any objection from James Beadle's new attorney. Despite objections from their defense attorneys, the confessions of Ada and Dr. Dreher were also admitted to the jury.

On Aug. 3, the State rested its case. Ada testified and she stated that James LeBoeuf fired the first shot and that James Beadle fired the next two shots. The State pointed out to the jury that Ada's confession and testimony were different.

On Aug. 4, Dr. Dreher testified and he also stated that James LeBoeuf fired the first shot and that James Beadle fired the next two shots. James Beadle did not testify. The jury was given the case and did not have a lengthy deliberation. The jury returned verdicts against Ada and Dr. Dreher of guilty as charged, and a verdict against James Beadle of guilty without capital punishment.



Judge Simon denied a motion for new trial and the attorneys for Ada and Dr. Dreher lodged a suspensive appeal with the Supreme Court. It was heard in February 1928 and the judges ruled in a 4-3 decision that the defendants had received a fair trial. The United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

In November 1928, the defendants appealed to the State pardon board, which was composed of Attorney General Percy Saint, trial Judge Simon and Lieutenant Governor Paul N. Cyr. Even when presented with a petition signed by 75 percent of the voters of St. Mary Parish and a petition of the jurors that they had been unduly influenced by pressure from the community, in a vote of 2-1, the board refused to grant a commutation of the sentence.

Numerous clubs of women and members of the public tried to save Ada and

Dr. Dreher from hanging. Nevertheless, Governor Huey P. Long set the date of Jan. 5 for the executions.

On Jan. 3, Judge Simon agreed to a stay pending a hearing on application for appointment of a sanity commission. After the hearing, Judge Simon declined the plea.

On Jan. 4, Governor Long refused to grant clemency.

On the night of Jan. 4, Justice O'Niell issued a stay of execution based on the state Constitution giving any judge of the Supreme Court said right. A few days later, the Supreme Court held Justice O'Niell's order null and void.

Despite an enormous amount of pressure to spare them from capital punishment, on Feb. 1, 1929, Ada LeBoeuf was first executed and then Dr. Dreher.

The book is very informative and clearly highlights the differences in criminal cases from the time of this murder case to present day. The case moved along rapidly, even with the objection of the defendants. I highly recommend this book to any individual interested in a historical murder trial.

Copies of the book can be purchased for \$22 (plus \$5 shipping costs) by mailing a check (payable to "Ada and the Doc Continues") to Pam Heffner, 1406 Thomas St., Franklin, LA 70538. For more information, email Heffner at stmarysecwfranklin@gmail.com.

Margaret E. Judice is a partner in the Franklin law firm of Aycock, Horne & Coleman. She has been a member of the Louisiana Bar Journal's Editorial Board for several years. (margarettjudice@cox-internet.com; P.O. Box 592, Franklin, LA 70538-4101)

