

Case study of valentine shortis



Introduction

Francis Valentine Cuthburt Shortis came from a wealthy Irish family that had established a successful business in cattle dealing. As an only child, Shortis was spoiled by his mother, however, his father thought that his son needed to learn how to be independent. On September 1893, eighteen years old Shortis was sailed to Canada alone on the S. S Laurentian to learn those values (Friedland, 1986, p. 3). After almost year Shortis had arrived in Montreal, his mother visited for a month to help her son establish a life in Canada. Shortis was hired to be a private secretary to Louis Simpson, the general manager of the Montreal Cotton Company for a trial of two months (Friedland, 1986, p. 4). However, Simpson did not renew Shortis' contract as he did inadequate work and associated with a family of a rival company. While working at the company, Shortis associated himself with Millie Anderson and her younger brother Jack. The Anderson family had conflicts with Simpson and the cotton company as they had their own company the Anderson Foundry (Friedland, 1986, p. 4). After being terminated from the company Shortis continued to see the Anderson family.

In 1895 March 1st, Shortis had left the Anderson home around ten o'clock in the evening and went to the Montreal Cotton Company to visit his old co-workers (Friedland, 1986, p. 4-5). Particularly on this night, four workmen were unloading and packing \$12, 000 into pay packets in an office that was to be distributed to the workers the next pay day (Friedland, 1986, p. 5). As the workmen went to put the money in the vault, Shortis grabbed the company revolver he knew about from the office drawer shooting one of the workers, Hugh Wilson (Friedland, 1986, p. 5). As the other workmen stood in

shock, another worker, John Loy, tried to call for a doctor but Shortis immediately shot and killed him (Friedland, 1986, p. 5). The other two workmen, John Lowe and Arthur Leboeuf, sheltered themselves within the vault closing the door behind them. Wilson tried to escape into the factory, but had been found by Shortis and was shot in the head (Friedland, 1986, p. 6). Shortis made his way back to the other workmen who were trapped in the vault, but before executing his plan to start a fire and smoking them out, Shortis encountered the night watchman and immediately shot and killed him (Friedland, 1986, p. 6). However, unknown to Shortis, Wilson had miraculously survived the gunshot in the head and went on to sound the alarm in the engine room alerting the authorities (Friedland, 1986, p. 6). As authorities arrived at the scene of the crime, Shortis had immediately surrendered and was charged with two accounts of murder.

Speculation of the crime was difficult to detect as Shortis' motivations were unclear. Many believed the motive of the crime was robbery, but others had other theories that involved Millie Anderson and her younger brother Jack. Specifically, theorizing the crime as a revenge plot against Louis Simpson and as speculated robbery, but the money would have been used by Shortis to escape town with Millie as they had formed a romantic relationship at the time (Friedland, 1986, p. 7). Although the motives of why Shortis committed the crime are unknown, two judges in different districts were assigned to the case as the venue of the trial was held an issue. The defence had made a petition to have the trial set in Montreal to as they believed that Shortis would not have a fair trial within the same district he had committed the crime (Friedland, 1986, p. 18). However, the petition was denied and the trial

venue was not changed, Judge Michel Mathieu of the Quebec Superior Court assigned to the trial (Friedland, 1986, p. 31).

Summary of the Prosecution

As the trial began, Donald Macmaster and Charles Laurendeau, a Beauharnois lawyer, would represent the Crown (Friedland, 1986, p. 32). Throughout the duration of the trial, the Crown was determined to eliminate the defence's insanity plea, however, Judge Mathieu allowed the plea to be presented in court (Friedland, 1986, p. 35). In the opening address, Macmaster argues that determining whether a person is "insane" is solely based on an individual's perception of their moral certainty that the accused was on wrongful mind when committing the crime (Friedland, 1986, p. 37-38). Concluding his opening argument, Macmaster notes that if the jury does excuse Shortis of being insane, determining the duration of his sentence is uncertain as Macmaster states that "there is no law that he will be confined for life" (Friedland, 1986, p. 38). Introducing the Crown's first witness, Macmaster brings John Lowe as he recounts the events that happened the night of the crime. The next witness brought in was Hugh Wilson. It was the first time Wilson had given a statement about the crime as he was recovering from his injuries during the inquest and preliminary hearing (Friedland, 1986, p. 44). Wilson recounted the nights of the event from his perspective as Shortis shot at him several times before escaping and alerting the authorities. Other witnesses were called such as Dr. Sutherland, who had initially tended to Wilson's injuries and first confronted Shortis with another workman, and Ernst McVicar, an employee of the mill who had evidence of premeditation as Shortis discussed topics of robbing the company and the

train that contained the money that was to be delivered to the mill company (Friedland, 1986, p. 45).

Summary of the Defence

Representing the defence was Henri St. Pierre, J. N Greenshields, and George Foster, a solicitor (Friedland, 1986, p. 14). The evidence presented by the defence was made within two days; no opening statements were made and the defence presented their first evidence which was of the Irish commission that consisted of 575 handwritten pages of statements made by forty-eight witnesses, however, only two of the forty-eight witnesses were heard (Friedland, 1986, p. 47). Robert Dobbin, the first witness, was the defendant's father's solicitor. Knowing Shortis as a child for eight or nine years, Dobbin had seen a few incidents involving Shortis where he had the young boy putting out a large fire that he had suspected that he started it himself (Friedland, 1986, p. 47). The second witness, John Ryan, a classmate of Shortis had considered him a "hot-tempered fool", recalling the time he had seen Shortis acting like a "madman" hitting a worker with a heavy stick when he did not get out of the way, often having headaches, and a fascination for guns (Friedland, 1986, p. 47). Other witnesses enhanced the defense's insanity plea, as Richard Malone, a worker of the defendant's father, told of how Shortis mistreated some of the cattle and found enjoyment in torturing the animals as he stuck pitchforks in the cattle (Friedland, 1986, p. 48). The most important piece of evidence the defence presented were the testimonies of the defence's psychiatrists. Each of the four psychiatrists supported the defence's insanity plea as they had similar conclusions that Valentine Shortis was not of sound mind. One of the

psychiatrists, James V. Anglin, concluded that Shortis was mentally ill from evidence such as incoherent speech, interests in subjects such as fatalism and reincarnation, delusions, and auditory and visual hallucinations (Friedland, 1986, p. 60).

Verdict

With the jury about to decide the verdict of the trial, both the defence and the Crown gave their closing arguments, where the defence primarily focused on putting pressure on the jurors making them feel responsible for their decisions as Greenshields' opening words were "Thou shalt not kill" (Friedland, 1986, p. 90). Whereas the Crown concentrated on disproving the defence's insanity plea, finding a contradiction in one of the defence's psychiatrists, Dr. Clarke's testimony, as Macmaster found Dr. Clarke had used his description of a criminal to describe the term moral imbecile, used to describe Shortis (Friedland, 1986, p. 105). On 3 November 1895, the jury found Valentine Shortis guilty of the murders and was sentenced to death by hanging on 3 January 1896 (Friedland, 1986, p. 115-117). Although the sentence was to be carried out, Greenshields made a statement stating, "(T)he only thing we now intend doing is to petition the Minister of Justice for commutation of sentence from the death penalty to imprisonment for life" (Friedland, 1986, p. 119). Before the sentence was carried out, George Foster, the defence's solicitor, went to present the petition in Ottawa to the minister of justice, Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper (Friedland, 1986, p. 122). A cabinet meeting was held to discuss the petition of Valentine Shortis, a vote was to be made from ten cabinet members on whether to sentence was to be execution or life in prison (Friedland, 1986, p. 148). The vote was

undecided as each side had five votes, therefore another vote was to be held with other cabinet members voting (Friedland, 1986, p. 149). Speculation of influencing cabinet members to have the petition be approved were thought as each cabinet member was associated with those who were affiliated with wanting Shortis to be given a life sentence. People such as Shortis' parents as they may have bribed cabinet members in election funding, and Judge Mathieu, the trial judge, whose brother-in-law was one of the cabinet members may have influenced his vote as Mathieu was in favour of the petition (Friedland, 1986, p. 150-151). On 31st December 1895, the petition was approved and was announced that Valentine Shortis was to serve a life sentence in St Vincent de Paul Penitentiary (Friedland, 1986, p. 173).

Conclusion

In reviewing the case of Valentine Shortis, I believe that justice was served. In today's society, if a case were to be brought up under an insanity the jurors and those in court would be more understanding of the circumstances of the case. However, in the case of Shortis, the plea of insanity was questioned throughout the trial even though evidence of mental illness was presented by witnesses and psychiatrists. Perhaps because of the historical time period, the use of psychology in court was not acknowledged as if it is to be presented in court today as they may have believed that if a crime were committed the individual was sane and knew of their actions.

Bibliography

Friedland, M. L. (1986). *The case of Valentine Shortis: a true story of crime and politics in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.