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**Preachers Spreading A New Gospel Unwittingly Sowed The Seed Of A Startling Crime In The Isolated Shore Community Of Pocasset**

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The second advent – the doctrine of the second coming of Christ – which formed the prelude to the Pocasset murder, had begun two years earlier. Itinerant preachers spread the new gospel. They found willing listeners on Cape Cod. Many became converts. But these preachers of the gospel began to speak so fanatically at the Methodist meetings that ministers forbade them to speak there at all.

Coverts to the new religion began dropping out of the Methodist flock. During the winter of 1877-78 a revival precipitated the real schism. Pocasset was an isolated community in the 70’s. In the church was the only relaxation from the routine of farm life. Religion was dominating community interest. There was stubborn resistance to an attack on traditional faith. There was fervent adoption of the new teaching.

The itinerant preachers moved on to other fields and new converts, perhaps reveling in the emotional upset they had brought to Pocasset and, of course, quite unconscious that they had sowed the seed for a startling crime. A band of 25 or 30 who had withdrawn from the Methodist church began to hold meetings in their own homes. Second Adventist feeling flourished because the community itself had produced a leader whose conviction and fervor exceeded that of the evangelists.

Charles F. Freeman[[1]](#footnote-1) had experienced religion at 21. He afterward explained that he was “beat out of it by backsliding Christians.” In Pocasset he had taught in the Methodist Sunday school, cared for the building and rung the bell every Sunday. When he went out of the Methodist congregation with other Second Adventists, he became zealous in his new belief. He told of the band that he was as far ahead of the Second Adventists as they were of other people.

Freeman was convincing in his self-appointed leadership. He was then 33, a man of pleasant, open countenance, and unflinching gaze. He was of medium height, with light complexion; his eyes were light blue. He was born in Highgate, Vt.[[2]](#footnote-2) and when only 15 joined the Union army. He fought through the last four years of the Civil War and remained in the army for ten more years. Honorably discharged, he heeled shoes in Lynn for a time and moved to Pocasset in 1875 with his wife and children. Then he bought a little home in Putts Hollow, near the present golf course. He farmed a little, and being a veteran, was given the job of carrying the mail between the depot and the post office.

Mrs. Freeman had been Hattie[[3]](#footnote-3) R. Ellis of Pocasset before her marriage in 1863.[[4]](#footnote-4) She was 22 this winter of the Second Coming excitement – a pale, rather colorless girl. Psychiatrists said later that she was under the complete domination of her husband and her actions were merely “a reflex of those of her husband.”

The Freemans had three children. Lillian had died in 1872 at the age of two. Bessie Mildred was six. The baby Edith Burgess Freeman, who was to die before her fifth birthday, was four.

**Felt The Call**

Freeman progressed so rapidly in the leadership of the small band, that he soon began feeling the call to evangelism. He felt that he should go forth and carry the world to the world. His neighbors told of how, for ten days previous to May 1, 1879, he walked in a higher sphere, communing with the Lord. Thunder without lightening told him that the kingdom of God was coming upon the earth. At the same time he had an earthly cross to bear. The husband of Mrs. Freeman’s sister came home from sea[[5]](#footnote-5) to find that his wife had accepted to doctrine of the Second Coming. He did not like it, Mrs. Freeman was to testify in court long after.

**A Threat Made**

“He threatened to shoot my husband; it had great effect upon his nerves and troubled him greatly. My husband told me he had seen visons in one of which he heard voices. In another he had seen supernatural sights. For several days he had not eaten anything. He spoke of the great burden he felt – such as Moses must have felt when he entered the temple.”

Freeman new that the Lord had appeared to him to sacrifice a member of his family, “to rudely awaken the world from its present condition.” The distraught husband and father was waiting for the Lord to name the victim when the family retired as usual on the evening of April 30, 1879. The two little girls were put to bed after saying their prayers. Freeman kissed them good night.

About two on the morning of [Thursday] May 1, 1879, Freeman awoke from what he said afterwards had been sound sleep. His wife’s final story was that he had not slept at all.

“The Lord appeared to me,” said Freeman, “and informed me that the victim of the sacrifice was to be my pet, my idol, my baby Edith. I awoke my wife and we talked the matter over and prayed to the Lord for guidance and direction. The Lord said it was necessary.”

**She Agreed**

Freeman and his wife talked for half an hour. At first she objected, finally she agreed – a sample of what the psychiatrists called his domination of her. Then they arose, kneeled by their bed and prayed again.

The divine voice they listened for did not return. Freeman said later that he prayed, half hoping and half expecting that God would stay his hand at that final moment, as He did that of Abraham over Isaac of old. He prayed that if he were compelled to pursue the deed to the bitter end, that it might be done quickly. He prayed, he said, that death might come to the relief of the martyr at the first blow.

As he came to his decision, Freeman felt a great relief, as if a great load was raised from his mind. His wife, too, became convinced that their clear duty lay ahead: their duty to make a wiling sacrifice to heaven.

They arose from their prayers joyfully and dressed themselves. all the while singing praises of the Lord. In the dead of night, Freeman left the house, went outside to a small shed a few yards distant, and secured his large sheath knife. He returned to the bed chamber where awaited his wife. She lighted an oil lamp, held it high, and they entered the room in which the babies slept. Later accounts differ as to whether Mrs. Freeman held the lamp over the bed of the little one, or whether she rested it on a chair. At any rate the mother stood there as the father walked to the side of the bed in which little Edith slept.

Drawing aside the coverlet, the father deliberately plunged the knife into Edith’s side, just below the heart, “I raised my hand to strike the blow still believing the Lord would stay my hand but he did not,” said Freeman. “The knife descended. My darling turned as the knife struck her, lifting her hands and opening her eyes said, “Oh papa.” My oldest child became awakened and was taken by my wife to our bed. I took the little victim of the Lord’s into my arms and held her until she died. Then I went to bd with my dead darling.”

Freeman said he wept bitterly. “It seemed as if God had deserted me as he did Jesus on the cross. But in the morning I felt gloriously.”

Freeman sent notes to the faithful commanding them to a meeting at his home that afternoon when they would hear a revelation. Then he carried the morning mail to the post office as usual.

How the gathering that afternoon hear the “revelation” is adequate testimony after half a century to the grip which the faith and Freeman had upon them. They heard the murder story from his own lips. They viewed the body of the sacrificial victim. No member of that group said a word to the police. The story of that meeting and the denouement of the crime is as unusual as its first chapter. Each unfolding development in the Pocasset murder is an odd contribution to the story of human character.

The little band of believers in the Second Coming gathered in the farmhouse in Putts Hollow, Pocasset, on the afternoon of May 1, 1879, in eager anticipation to hear the revelation that their leader had summoned them to hear. They thought they knew what the word would be, that Charles F. Freeman would tell them that God had insisted that he leave them and spread the Gospel of Christ’s Second Coming in other, less awakened communities.

**In the Parlor**

Freeman welcomed them to the parlor. Mrs. Freeman was there. So was her mother, Mrs. Harriet Swift,[[6]](#footnote-6) and Alden P. Davis. a prominent figure among the Adventists and a storm center un the story that follows. Davis knew no more that he was entering the scene of murder that he could know that years later he was to be himself a murder victim in these same Cape Cod hills.

Freeman called the meeting to order and remarked that he thought it best to dispense with the usual singing and prayer. He told his auditors he deeply regretted that outsiders and the unconverted were not present to hear what he had to say. For half an hour, contemporary accounts relate, the fervid leader held forth in general religious discourse. Then he told them of the vision in which the Lord had appeared and directed him to kill his baby Edith as a sacrifice for the good of the world. “I told them the whole story and they agreed I did right,” said Freeman after his arrest.

**At First Disbelief**

The Boston Globe reporter said:” For a few moments the greatest consternation was manifest. The visitors were astounded and refused to believe it until their eyes saw what their consciences refused to accept.”

One by one the company foiled into the next room and past the body of Edith, who had been killed the night before by a knife blow struck by her own father while her mother looked on. After this Mrs. Freeman made what was reported in the newspapers as “a few remarks, endorsing everything her husband said.” “Others stood to assert that everything must have been by the will of the Lord and that Freeman had only observed the command of God. The company then separated.

“It is almost impossible to conceive of an assembly of people in such a state of mind as to attempt to conceal such an atrocious deed,” remarked The Boston Journal, “but they told no one, and went about their usual vocations.”

**Suspicions**

Only because young Constable Seth Redding went “sparking” to the home of Alden P. Davis that evening did arrest come quickly to Freeman. Redding thought the 16-year-old daughter of the Davis family was particularly serious. But no member of the family even hinted at the revelation of the afternoon. The girl began to cry. Redding began to press her for the reason. After much persuasion he wrung from her the murder story.

Redding went from the Davis home to that of another of the group. The man confirmed the girl’s story. Constable Redding went on to the Freeman home and waited outside until daylight He must have spent a distraught night, for such a crime of violence in the innermost respectability of his own community was not in the experience of the young policeman.

**Would Rise Again**

When Redding finally knocked on the door of the Putts Hollow cottage, Freeman came forth and shook hands with him. The constable asked the murderer how he felt. Freeman replied that he didn’t’ feel well. The constable reawaked simply that he didn’t wonder at that. “It’s horrible,” said Freeman and told the whole story. Redding gazed upon the body of little Edith while the father told him he had done right in the sight of God, and that in three days little Edith would rise again. Edith would then, said Freeman, go about with him, assisting him to spread the gospel. Mrs. Freeman, according to The Globe, “gazed rapturously at her husband as her recited the terrible tale.” Three days – but in three days, Freeman and his wife were in cells at Barnstable jail.

Constable Redding had no trouble whatever in arresting the mad parents. Alone, he took his buggy, picked up his prisoners, drove to Monument and there caught the 6 P.M. train for Barnstable. As the train moved along, Freeman seemed in high spirits, singing and praying.

There were some 50 passengers on the tarin moving down from Boston to Barnstable. They knew nothing of the tragedy until Freeman kneeled upon his seat and, facing the back of the car with its audience of travelers starring in surprise. burst into words. He again told his story and again asserted that baby Edith would be raised from the dead n three days or be transported bodily into heaven.

**Awoke The World**

The Freeman case awoke the world, as Freeman expected, but not to its sense of wickedness. The world was horrified at what was then called the Pocasset Murder. Newspapers thundered denunciations and printed columns and columns about the case.

Dr. Munsell, the medical examiner form Harwich, talked to Freeman in the jail and called the case more marvelous than any of a similar kind in medical books. Hs said neither Freeman nor his wife were insane but “in a morbid mental state convinced that God can and dose talk directly to human beings.”

Freeman said God had rewarded him by filling his soul with light. When a reporter asked him (probably gently) whether he expected to hang for his deed, Freeman said no, that God would justify his servant. If it had been his wife or other child, he would have done the same. He had begged God to command him to take his own life, but it was not to be. He loved his child better than himself. Denying he was insane, Freeman declared he would not be defended by the use of money.

“Do you think it is a delusion when your minister tells you that God put it into his heart to preach the Gospel or that God directed him to be a missionary?” asked Freeman. “Now, I just as firmly believe that God put it into my heart – that is spoke to me – to do that act, that the world might see there was faith as great as Abraham’s. I did think he would stay my hand before I struck the blow. I can’t see any difference between my firm belief and the firm belief of others that they have been in personal communication with God.

**Appeared Calm**

The Globe reporter wrote, “The man seems to be free from care and sorrow and calmly awaiting the day when God will release him from his imprisonment so he can begin his work of evangelism. His lively and cheerful demeanor presents a striking contrast to that of his sorrow-stricken wife. Mrs. Freeman was today engaged in sewing. Her fingers feebly did the work. She weeps frequently.”

In Barnstable jail Freeman asked for the Bible, and the jailer, whose calm sense was in striking contrast to the excitement about him, replied, “I guess you have had Bible enough for a while.”

In Pocasset, the tumult of emotionalism continued as on Sunday, May 4, they buried the baby Edith. “The people of Pocasset are incensed beyond measure at the disgraceful doing of the Adventists here today,” The Globe reported on Monday. The Adventists were equally angry with the attitude of their Methodist neighbors. The factions clashed in the church. The day’s events only ended when, after the earth had been scraped over Edith’s shallow grave, the Adventists were ordered from the church yard.

**Stark Tragedy**

There is no element of mystery in the Pocasset Murder, except as it concerns the workings of the human mind. There is a story of emotionalism which made the funeral day one of stark tragedy, and which for weeks set the people of Pocasset one against the other. Alone serene and peaceful, was Freeman in Barnstable jail.

The funeral was held[[7]](#footnote-7) in the little white church[[8]](#footnote-8) on the hill with the old country road winding by. The Methodists had offered use of their church on the strict understanding that no Adventists were to participate in the service. The Methodist pastor, Rev. Edward Williams, waited at the church with the Rev. Alexander Murray the Baptist supply from Boston.

Up the road came the cortege, led by Alden P. Davis in an open buggy with the casket. There followed a carriage containing the only surviving child of the Freemans, seven-year-old Bessie Mildred. Grandma Swift, mother of Mrs. Freeman, and a brother of Freeman from Natick. Then there came four carriages of Adventists.

Mr. Davis dismounted, tucked the babe’s casket under his arm and, refusing preferred assistance, marched down the aisle of the church. The casket rested on a table at the foot of the pulpit. A current newspaper description said:

“The corpse was dressed in a white robe, with narrow blue sash about the waist, and blue ribbons twined in the hair. The face was calm and peaceful, and bore no trace of a painful death. She seemed as if fallen asleep where she lay. It was strewn with flowers, principally white roses. The plate on the casket lid was surrounded with a handsome wreath of mingled mayflowers and evergreens. It bore the inscription, “Little Edie – lived only 57 months. She shall surely rise again. – John, vi 39,’ ”

**Church Crowded**

The church must have been crowded, for an influx of visitors from Falmouth and Sandwich had joined the Pocasset people. The service opened with singing of “Christ, the Solid Rock,” which had been requested by friends of Edith. Then the Rev. Mr. Williams preached for 20 minutes, Pastor Williams announced as the closing hymn, “We Shall Sleep, But Not Forever.”

At this moment Alden P. Davis stepped up in front of the pulpit beside the coffin and said: “To facilitate time, while friends are viewing the remains, I will make a few remarks as I –” Pastor Williams interrupted him. “We don’t wish for any more remarks.”

Said Mr. Davis, “Very well. Then the remains will not be viewed outside.” – and he commenced to screw on the casket lid. Nevertheless. the casket was opened in the church yard. Mr. Davis carried it outside and placed it atop a vault. Some 200 people crowded around. A newspaper reporter recorded that only seven of the gathering joined Davis in recitation of the Lord’s Prayer.

“The world is standing aghast at the nature of what has happened and its causes.” began Mr. Davis. “I know something about it but don’t know it all. What I have to say will be in defense of, and from love to, the father and mother now in jail for the horrid crime. I can vouch for it that there never lived a purer man than Charles Freeman, dating from his conversion.”

Selectman David D. Nye interrupted to beg Mr. Davis to stop. Pastor Williams also interposed. Cries arose of “Arrest him. Don’t let him go on.” Davis asked those who desired him to stop to raise their hands. The reporter wrote that only seven hands were raised. But Davis tried to go on.

“I had hoped,” said Davis, “that she hadn’t died in vain. As far as I can judge from the continued hostilities, further time is necessary to change the opinion regarding this horrible’ – voices in the crowd are said to have shrieked “crime,” “murder” – Davis after the interruption finished deed.”

Still he tried to continue. “Before I dismiss this meeting I desire to give notice of a Second Adventist camp meeting from June 15 to 30. I extend an invitation to championship speakers of either church to come here and get” – the crowd finished for him to cries of “murder,” killed.”

Freeman’s brother stepped up. There were hisses. But at last Davis had yielded. Freeman and Davis placed the coffin a two-foot grave. The Methodist minister read the ritual; the Baptist recited the Benediction. The small group of Adventists continued to talk among themselves until Benjamin E. Swift ordered them from the cemetery.

The Globe report of that day added the comment: “The local constable who was present refused to interfere on account of the Sabbath; the other constable has, it is asserted, anticipated this quarrel, and was enjoying a ride in another part of town.” Another newspaper reported that the grandmother of the slain child still upheld the father and “even glorified in this evidence of his implicit faith and obedience to God’s command.” “Could anything be more horrible?” inquired a Boston newspaper, “and yet these people are human beings, as sensible and practical in all other respects as their neighbors.”

Those in allegiance to Freeman had become a small band against the world. The New York Times remarked editorially:[[9]](#footnote-9)

"Freeman's mind was undoubtedly acted on by what social scientists call environment. The inhabitants of southeastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod are a class by themselves, unlike any other citizens of the Commonwealth. Dwelling in a hard, unfertile, unblessed corner of creation, half sand, half marsh, swept in winter by bitterly cold winds, and yielding little bloom on verdure under a summer sun, these people have all the tough and wiry qualities of the Yankee, without his genial and generous side. Their religion takes its color from their gloomy surroundings, and faiths that broaden elsewhere, contract there until all heart and tolerance and human sympathy are squeezed out of them. Freeman and his deluded company are specimens of the inhabitants of Cape Cod."

**A Rare Tolerance**

On the contrary the leaders of the community were to show a truly rare degree of intelligence and tolerance in the days that followed. That tolerance had been demonstrated by the opening of the church doors for the funeral. To keep the Adventists from speaking at the service need have been no more than a precaution for order. That tolerance was bespoken a few days later when the selectmen of Sandwich (all Bourne was still part of the old town) called a public meeting. Venerable Captain Ebenezer Nye rose with tears in his eyes to plead for an inquiry "not by force of arms, but to the full extent of the law.” Pastor Williams told his congregation on the following Sunday that the eyes of the nation were on them and advised them in shrewd good sense to "talk less and pray more.”

"If they had not had heart and tolerance, they would have turned the zealots, who have come here to preach their shallow humbug, out of these borders," said a local commentator, "and sent them adrift as they deserved to be sent. They have had too much tolerance."

While the good sense of the community asserted itself and while each day made it clearer that Freeman was a victim of insanity, the mob cries which had been raised at the Sunday funeral echoed through Pocasset. At the public meeting convened by the Sandwich selectmen, one speaker thought it "high time to ascertain how far. . . Freeman was influenced by other Adventists.” A resolution was proposed which named the Adventists who had gathered to hear Freeman's revelation and demanded that they all be arrested as accessories after the fact because they concealed the crime. A deputy sheriff watched with Freeman's brother at night for fear some attempt would be made to disinter the murdered child's body. It was reported that a small Davis child had been found crying on the street "in fear that her father would kill her.”

**Asked For Protection**

Davis wrote to District Attorney Hosea M. Knowlton in New Bedford: "In view of the public excitement stimulated by atrocious falsehoods daily appearing in the press, I now demand the protection of the state or prompt criminal arrest.”

Mr. Davis's picture of the situation is somewhat modified by the action of the public meeting on the resolution which named him as one of those who should be arrested. The meeting decided to leave the problem to the district attorney. Attorney General Marston wrote a letter (which was not published until years after) in which he said that “the Adventists were only technically accessories, if they were even that.” He added a word of blame for the reporters.

Mr. Davis went to work on a marble stone for little Edie. An inquest was convened in Pocasset and adjourned to Barnstable. Justice Smith K. Hopkins signed his name to this report on May 12:

"Edith B. Freeman came to her death at Pocasset, Thursday May 1, 1879, in consequence of a stab of a knife inflicted by Charles F. Freeman of Pocasset, the knife wounding her in the left breast between the sixth and seventh ribs and penetrating the heart, causing nearly instantaneous death; and that the stab and wound were inflicted by Charles F. Freeman with full deliberation and without provocation or excuse; and that Harriet R. Freeman, his wife, was present at the time, aiding, abetting and assisting the act by her voluntary consent; and I further find that the commission of the homicide by Charles F. Freeman and his wife, Harriet R. Freeman, was by reason of their belief that the same was required by Almighty God as a proof illustration of their faith in him."

During his first three days in Barnstable jail, Charles F. Freeman assured all who came within hailing distance that God's power was about to be revealed in an astonishing manner. In “impassive, loud tone" he reiterated that all unbelievers were to be humbled to dust when within those three days the Lord raised from the dead the five-year-old daughter Freeman had stabbed to death as a sacrifice the Lord demanded. Freeman said he would come into power and glory, to become to the new dispensation what Abraham was to the old.

In Barnstable jail Freeman was asked what would happen if God, having got him into this scrape, should refuse to help him out. Freeman smilingly replied, "But he won't.” When pressed he added, "Why, gentlemen, I don't conceive of God failing to do justice." He reluctantly admitted that if God didn't Interfere in his behalf, he should begin to believe he was wrong.

When the Freemans, husband and wife, were parted for the night to be locked in their separate cells "they kissed good night, and went to their imprisonment cheerfully. Both slept peacefully – no loud praying or demonstration of any kind."

The legal machinery started by Justice Smith K. Hopkins was to grind on from 1879 to December 1883 before the Freemans were to finally know their fate at the hands of the law.

As days passed and nothing happened, the excitement of the Freemans slowly subsided. Trial Justice Smith K. Hopkins bound Mr. and Mrs. Freeman over for the October court term. He had accused her of aiding and abetting the murder of their daughter. The Grand Jury indicted Freeman but found no bill against his wife as an accomplice.

**Took Three Years**

It took three years for the case to spin out to an end. At a special term called for May 5, 1880, the Court in advance of the trial, on agreement of counsel and physicians, ordered Freeman committed to Danvers state hospital for the insane.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It is part of the story that Freeman gradually improved and won the sympathy of physicians and even the newspapers. Allegiance of his friends in Pocasset continued to the day when he left Danvers to stand trial for murder. Barnstable court records contain a letter, dated two years after Freeman's commitment to Danvers, in which Dr. Charles F. Folsom of the hospital wrote:

"When I first saw Freeman at Barnstable jail his insane delusions were many… he could not correctly interpret his position or understand the nature of his homicidal act. I would say that the causes of Freeman's mental disease are, as usual in insanity, complex. He served from the age of 15 to the end of the war, having been several times exhausted by severe illness, and broke down from overwork in 1871, and within the year of the time had diphtheria. In 1875 after having led a very active life in the army, at Natick, and at Lynn, he moved to a little village of not over 400 inhabitants, where he had little to occupy him or direct him.

**Overwhelmed**

"He was led into, and overwhelmed in, religious excitement. He also had a mild sunstroke…it is difficult to estimate the relative bearing of these different factors, but I suppose with a healthy occupation and amusement, and without intense mental and emotional strain from long continued morbid interest, and activity in revivals and prayer meetings and exhortations, the insanity would not have appeared."

Dr. Folsom at this date, April 27, 1882, found that Freeman's delusions had passed off and that he was virtually well. "He is a man of strictly temperate habits, most excellent general character, intelligent, and unassuming in his religious views, and of exceptionally fine nature," Dr. Folsom concluded.

In the May term of 1883, the Court ordered that Freeman be brought back from Danvers for trial. A sanity hearing was then held. Dr. William B. Goldsmith, superintendent at Danvers, agreed that Freeman was now sane.[[11]](#footnote-11) He wrote: "He does entertain beliefs on religious subjects that are decidedly fanatical ... I think he does not deceive about this, that he was insane when he killed his child. He seems to have reached that conclusion from observing in his fellow patients here many symptoms, physical and mental, that he recalls as part of his own experience. He does not think, however, that the whole affair was the result simply of an attack of insanity, but believes that it had a significance entirely different from other similar acts in that it was the fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy and the mark of an epoch in religious history.”

"He also thinks that he was selected to prompt the religious world to a change for which it had already been prepared. He believes, moreover, that all important changes in world history have been accomplished in much the same way. So that his own case does not appear very exceptional to him. Faulty mental action is perhaps more shown in his exaggerated estimate of his own importance and influence, than by his belief in supernatural control."

**Thought Himself Chosen**

Finally, on December 5, 1883, a special term of Superior Court for the county of Barnstable was called to try Freeman for murder.[[12]](#footnote-12) On the eve of the trial a Globe reporter journeyed again to Pocasset. On Sunday, November 30, 1883, The Globe printed its report.[[13]](#footnote-13) The reporter related his cross-examination of what would now be called "a man in the street.”

Question: “Do you, as an enlightened citizen and as a representative of the church of God, believe that Charles F. Freeman did right in murdering his daughter Edith?" the reporter said he asked.

"Yes," was the answer, "because it was through God that it was accomplished."

Question: "Do you think that Freeman was a sane man when he killed his child?”

Answer: "I do, for that same day, some five hours before the affair occurred, I was in conversation with Brother Freeman. I know at the time he seemed to be perfectly happy and we talked purely about his business transactions, not even mentioning the church. I, to be sure, could hardly believe the act had been done when I was so informed. I at once went to the house and there I saw with my own eyes. I thought he had done right. I should never wish to follow in the steps of Brother Freeman, but if commanded by God, you must obey His commands or you will not be saved. Read the Bible and you will ascertain the truth of my belief."

The “enlightened citizen" went on to say that he still attended Adventist meetings "but not so frequently as heretofore. I don't take the same interest as when the glorious work was led by Brother Freeman for he was our mainstay in the good work."

Question: "Have Mrs. Freeman or her mother, Mrs. Swift, attended any of your meetings?"

Answer: "Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Swift have been with us and taken an active part in the meetings."

Four Falmouth men were in the panel of 60 jurors drawn for the trial. They were: Ezra F. Geggatt, Charles H. Gifford, Obed Pierce and Hiram N. Lawrence. None were on the jury finally chosen. Six jurors were challenged for the defendant; three by the government; eight had formed opinions regarding capital punishment. Attorney General Sherman and District Attorney Hosea M. Knowlton appeared for the Commonwealth. It was Knowlton who later prosecuted Lizzie Borden. Charles A. Taber defended Freeman. Chief Justice Marcus and Judge W. A, Field presided.

Mr. Knowlton, outlining the case, stated it was a trial to ascertain whether the defendant was in such a state of mind when he killed his daughter as to make him irresponsible.

Freeman, according to the newspapers, "looked finely, neatly dressed, apparently perfectly self-possessed.” The prisoner smiled perceptibly when the Court inquired of Juror James F. Mills of Mashpee if he was in anyway related to the defendant.

Dr. George N. Munsell, the medical examiner, testified: "I don't think that when Freeman committed the act he was responsible." Alvin Wing testified to what happened when the neighbors came in on the day of the revelation. The government then rested. Defense witnesses were a group of Pocasset people and medical experts. Two of the Adventist witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. Alden P. Davis, who had been at Freeman's house and were Freeman's friends. Mrs. Davis testified that she had been shown the body of the murdered child and had remained all that night at the house. Nineteen years later the names of both Mr. and Mrs. Davis were to again be called in the courtroom at Barnstable. By then the couple had become two of the many victims of the celebrated mass murderer, Jane Toppan, whose story will be told later. Mrs. Freeman also took the stand in behalf of her husband. She appeared to be making a great effort to restrain her natural feelings for the sake of her husband. She freely confessed that she saw through the delusion by which she had formerly been blinded.

**A Care-Worn Look**

"She is a lady-like person," said one reporter of Mrs. Freeman, "slimly built, neatly dressed, with a care-worn look on her countenance." "My husband was always very kind to his children and to me,” Mrs. Freeman began her testimony. Then she told of the nervous stress which religion had brought to Freeman, of his sunstroke, the threats of her brother-in-law and the murder itself.

"I was in full sympathy with my husband, believing it an eternal call, and I gave myself up to it unreservedly. I now most emphatically look upon it differently. I never thought for a moment he would ever injure the child," said Mrs. Freeman.

Five physicians corroborated the defense contention that Freeman had been insane. Attorney General Sherman said that no responsible experts had proved Freeman sane and that the government had no purpose to prosecute an irresponsible man. Judge Morton advised the jury to bring in a verdict of "not guilty by reason of insanity.” This it promptly did, after ten minutes’ deliberation. The trial which had begun at 9 A.M. ended at 3:30 P.M.

Freeman, now a sane man by medical opinion, was formally found insane when he committed his crime. He was again ordered committed to Danvers "for the remainder of his natural life, unless pardoned by Governor and council."[[14]](#footnote-14)

Freeman was seen in the prison yard afterward in custody of a deputy sheriff. He was "smoking a cigar and conversing cheerfully with his friends.” Explaining his return to sanity, he said that it was because at Danvers he found people who said they saw God and believed they had special revelations from the Deity. "The question arose in my mind if I was not also insane, and being desirous of arriving at the truth, I was ready and willing to accept it." Here, remarked one reporter, "Freeman broke down and hot tears coursed down his cheeks.”

Freeman said he would be glad to go from Barnstable jail to "a place more congenial to his feelings.” He was returned to Danvers State Hospital on December 6, 1883. On March 17, 1887, he was discharged as not insane.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is believed on the Cape that he went West to begin life anew. He may have lived to look back, as Mrs. Freeman testified in the final trial that she did, "to a terrible dream which one remembers, but can't distinctly connect."

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addendum:

Charles Freeman and his wife Hattie moved to Chicago with their older daughter, Bessie. Charles Freeman was for a time proprietor of a restaurant in Chicago. He later moved to Michigan where he worked as a farmer and where he died on November 4, 1928. Charles Freeman’s mother-in-law Harriet N. Swift also moved to Chicago, where she was living with her granddaughter Bessie (Freeman) Fraser, and died there in 1919. -- *Roger W. Smith*

1. Charles F. Freeman, born Feb 1946 in Swanton, VT; died November 4, 1928 in Lawrence, Van Buren Co., Michigan. He married Harriet R. Ellis in Pocasset on November 18, 1869. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. His marriage record indicates that he was born in Swanton Vt, son of Willard O & Betsey M. Freeman (*Vital Records of Sandwich, Massachusetts to 1885*, compiled by Caroline Lewis Kardell and Robert A. Lovell, Jr. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1996, vol. II, pg. 1014). Highgate is near the U.S.-Canadian border and is near Swanton. His occupation at the time of marriage was “Heeler” (for shoes). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. First name Harriet, nickname Hattie. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The date is wrong. They were married in Pocasset on November 28, 1869. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This was Captain Pliny B. Handy (1840-1816), son of Lewis and Fanny (Brett) Handy of Sandwich, Mass. He married Phebe Etta Ellis (1849-1881), a younger sister of Harriet R. (Ellis) Freeman, Charles F. Freeman’s wife. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Born Harriet Newell Howes on July 24, 1823 in Dennis, Mass. on Cape Cod, Harriet Swift was age 56 at the time and was a widow. She had been married three times. Her first husband, Anson Burgess Ellis (1813-1853) was the father of Harriet (aka Hattie), Charles Freeman’s wife. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. on May 4, 1879 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Cataumet Methodist Church on Cape Cod. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *The New York Times*, May 6. 1879. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Boston Globe*, May 6, 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Boston Globe,* May 1, 1883*; Boston Globe,* May 2, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Boston Globe*, December 5, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Freeman’s Followers,” *Boston Globe*, November 30, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Boston Globe*, December 6, 1883*; New York Times*, December 6, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “A Child Murderer Released,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 1887. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)