

“Accidental shooting and death,” 23 March 1851

(keywords: Frederick Coombs, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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ACCIDENTAL SHOOTING AND DEATH.—Yesterday about noon, a man named William Warnecker entered the store of Charles Beer & Co., No. 5, Kearny street, and accidentally shot and killed one Theodore Cramer. The facts, as elicited upon the Coroner’s inquest, are these: Cramer, who was a clerk of Mr. Beer, was standing behind the counter, when Warnecker entered. A four-barrelled revolving German pistol, belonging to Mr. Beer, and which is always kept loaded at the store, was lying upon the counter. This Mr. Warnecker picked up, and inquired the price of it. Before Cramer could reply, the pistol accidentally went off, and the ball passed directly into Cramer’s heart. He reeled, and exclaimed, “My God, I’m shot; why are you so careless.” A number of officers hearing the shot, entered, and just before Cramer died, he said, “My friend has accidentally shot me.” He lived about five minutes. Warnecker was nearly crazy, and was taken in charge by the officers.

It seems that Warnecker had been here but a few days, and having brought a letter of introduction to Mr. Cramer he had procured a situation for Warnecker in Coomb’s Daguerrean Gallery, and Warnecker had come yesterday to thank Mr. Cramer for his kindness when the fatal accident occurred. Cramer was a native of Saxony and has been in California about eight months, and has a brother in some part of the mines. He was thirty one years of age. The verdict of the Coroner’s jury was that he came to his death by the accidental discharge of a pistol in the hands of William Warnecker. This is another melancholy example of the danger of too common a use of fire arms. Too much care cannot be exercised in the manner in which they are disposed, if kept at all, or in which they are handled. In this case carelessness has been the cause of death of a man who was in the very prime of his life.

We notice in the *Picayune* of yesterday, a statement entirely incorrect, and which is calculated to convey an entirely false impression in this matter. The names given are both wrong, and, instead of the name of the man who actually was shot, (Theodore Cramer.) the name of his employer (Mr. Charles Beer) was given as the man who was killed. How much misery might unnecessarily be brought upon the friends of this man, alive and well, as he is, in a foreign land, should they pick up this paper, and see the record of his death.

Beside this the report in the *Picayune* is very wrong in the inferences it leaves to be drawn upon the guilt or innocence of Warnecker, the prisoner. By its report he appears to have been guilty, while the evidence before the Coroner’s jury was as clear as daylight that the shooting was purely accidental, and thus they rendered their verdict.

Moreover the melancholy affair occurred about noon, and the Coroner’s inquest was concluded by one o’clock, at least an hour before the *Picayune* went to press, so there is

no earthly excuse for this most lamentable error. The fact is we very much doubt whether the Picayune man exerted himself to a very great degree to learn the truth in the matter, and has thus procured an entirely incorrect statement of the whole proceeding. In matters which affect life and reputation itemizers cannot be too particular in their accounts, and should at least take the trouble of gathering a report that should appear the most plausible and correct.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

Although this account has little to do with the daguerreotype, it does add dimension to our understanding of the California experience.

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