

Two Lives Toll Of Sitka Tragedy

Gilbert Kempf Takes Life of Sister and His Own Fearing Nervous Break

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Principals in Last Thursday's Tragedy



A fear that he might become mentally afflicted like his sister, who has been suffering for the past twelve years from a mental aberration, is the probable motive for the tragedy which resulted in the death of Gilbert Kempf, aged 28, and his sister Lilly, aged 29, which occurred at the home of their father Robert Kempf, near Sitka last Thursday morning between the hours of nine and ten o'clock when the young man shot his sister as she lay in bed and then retired to his own room - and took his own life.

Mr. Kempf left the house Thursday morning with a younger brother to work in the barn. He did not remain at the barn long but returned to the house and went immediately to his room upstairs. Shortly after this Mrs. Kempf and daughter, who were working in the kitchen, heard the report of pistol shots and fearing that the lives of the other members of the family might be endangered, they hurried the younger children to the home of a neighbor who with other men in the neighborhood went to the Kempf home to investigate the tragedy. Robert Kempf was in Fremont at the time.

It appears that the young man went to the room of his sister and fired two shots into the body of the girl, one of which entered the chin and severed the jugular (sic) vein in the neck. The other bullet passed through both wrists and it is probable that this was fired after she had thrown up her hands in vain effort to protect herself. The second bullet was found in the mouth.

He then went to his own room, locked the door, and took his own life. Five shots were fired, two of which went wild, two entered the head, and one pierced the heart.

A letter explaining the motive for the tragedy was found in the young man's room.

The letter in part follows:

5-24-18

For some time I've lived not for the joy of this world but to save my folks from the disgrace that was bound to come when I put to death this unbearable hell. Born with a nervous disposition I've felt this from a child up. A weakness of the nerves and mind which would be a disgrace to pass on to other children, and if "Like begets Like" it would be sure to be that way. I can see nothing more beautiful than for the best of manhood and womanhood to pass that on to another generation but I can see nothing more disgraceful and sinful than for a weakling to pass that on to a child that has a whole life of torment and hell before it. If I thought there was a chance I'd bear it a while longer and try and get at something where this nervousness wouldn't be irritated but I don't know what that would be.

I considered this while in Montana while on my way home from the West when it seemed as if there could be no more enjoyment for me in this world, but when I thought of the disgrace to relatives and friends I came on home and while there was no fast improvement, I bore it. But now the time has come when I can't bear it any longer. I trust that my relatives will feel that I at least am better satisfied than before if I am successful.

There must be some sorrow as well as joy, but I believe there must be more joy than sorrow to make life worth while.

As I do not envy other people, I wish you all a world of joy and happiness, at least enough to offset your sorrows.

Gilbert

As nothing in the letter refers to the sister it is thought by the parents that the young man's decision to take the life of the girl was not reached until the morning of the tragedy. The letter is dated Friday, the day after the tragic event.

Gilbert Kempf was born on the farm where he died, November 28, 1889, and has lived there the greater part of his life. After graduating from the commercial department of the Ferris Institute he went north and for three years was in the employ of the Escanaba Lumber Co. He returned home about six years ago. It was about this time that he went to Montana expecting to seek employment as a bookkeeper. He was gone about three weeks during which time he had a nervous breakdown.

For two years he was the tester for the Newaygo County Cow Testing Ass'n. but was forced to give up his work on account of ill health.

Mr. Kempf was always popular with the people who knew him and made friends easily. He was a young man of exemplary habits, was industrious and progressive. In recent years he has been interested in dairy cattle and was the owner of twenty head of registered Holsteins of considerable value.

Lilly Kempf was born Oct. 18, 1888, on the farm near Sitka. About twelve years ago she suffered a nervous breakdown from which she never fully recovered. She became morose and hypochondriac and never regained normality although she was at times under the care of the best mind specialists in the

country. She hasn't spoken in years and seldom left her room. She never remained in the presence of strangers.

Besides their father and stepmother, they are survived by two brothers, six half brothers and four half sisters. Their mother, who was a daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Dennis Miller of this city, died about 24 years ago.

A double funeral was held Saturday afternoon at the home near Sitka conducted by Rev. A. R. Elliot, pastor of Holton Methodist Episcopal church, and was largely attended by the relatives and friends of the young people. Interment took place in Maple Grove cemetery where the bodies were buried in a double grave.