AWESOME stories

MURDER OF BILL THE BUTCHER


BILL POOLE.

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Born in New Jersey (on the 24th of July, 1821), William Poole died of a gunshot wound in Manhattan (on the 8th of March, 1855). He was 33 years old. During his life, Poole was many things: a butcher, a politician, a gang-leader. He was killed by a supporter of his Tammany-Hall rival.

On February 24, 1855, while at a new Manhattan bar (Stanwix Hall), Poole picked a fight with John Morrissey, an Irish-born Tammany political opponent. Although the newly married Morrison went home, Poole returned to the bar with his friends. As usual, he was looking for trouble. He found a ready match in the Tammany sluggers, Jim Turner and Lew Baker.

Herbert Asbury, in *The Gangs of New York*, describes the murder of Bill the Butcher:

> *He* [Jim Turner] *quickly flung aside his Talma* [a cape named after the French actor, Talma]*, displaying a huge Colt's revolver, with a long barrel, strapped about his waist. He drew the weapon, levelled it in the hollow of his elbow and pulled the trigger. But his aim was poor and he shot himself in the arm, whereupon he screeched and fell to the floor. There he fired again, striking Poole in the leg. Bill the Butcher staggered forward under the impact of the bullet, clutching at Baker with outstretched arms. But the latter dodged, and as Poole fell heavily to the floor Baker drew a pistol and placed it against his chest.*

Mortal enemies for a long time, Baker now had an opportunity to end Poole's life:

> *He fired twice, but Bill the Butcher, although one of the bullets had penetrated his heart and the other had ripped into his abdomen, slowly scrambled to his feet. For a moment he stood swaying before the bar, and then he seized a huge carving knife and staggered toward Baker, screaming that he would cut his assailant's heart out. But he had gone but a few feet when he collapsed into* [Charley] *Shay's arms...As Poole fell he flung the knife, and the blade quivered in the door jamb as Baker fled.*

Ever the "tough guy," Poole lived with a bullet in his heart for another fourteen days. His doctors couldn't believe it:

"Despite his wounds, Poole live for fourteen days after the shooting, to the vast amazement of his doctors, who declared vehemently that it was unnatural for a man to linger so long with a bullet in his heart. But at last, while Tom Hyer and other Native American gladiators watched anxiously by his bedside and relayed bulletins to a sorrowful crowd in the street, Bill the Butcher died, gasping with his last breath: Good-bye, boys: I die a true American!" (Quotes, here and above, from *The Gangs of New York*, pages 89-90).

Other reports record different last words:

By, boys, I'm a goner!

Thousands of people attended the burial of William Poole. Lewis Baker was never found guilty of killing him. All three of Baker's trials ended with hung juries.

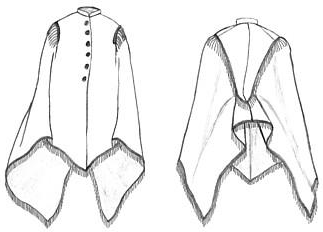
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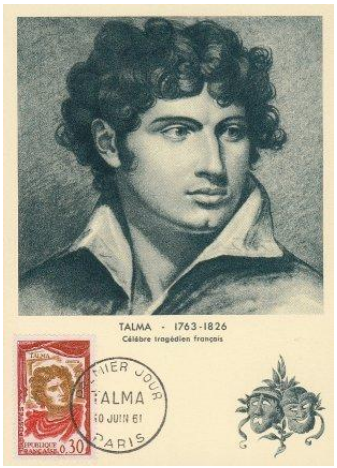
Media Stream



John Morrissey, an Irish-born Tammany Political Opponent
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