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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

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THE UNUSUAL AND BIZARRE

Barney and Clyde:
A Tale of Murder and Madness

by

Jean Roseman

In 1884 a brutal murder occurred in Nashville. The story of the murder unfolds as a tangled web of murder-for-hire, brotherly betrayal, stepsibling adultery, blackmail, spousal abuse, bribery, vote fixing, and insanity. There are two versions of the story: one that is distilled from newspaper accounts and documents and another that is contained in a bizarre book, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles, and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers*.¹

The Document Account

On Saturday April 12, 1884, shortly after 9 PM, Meyer Friedman, a twenty-four-year-old notions and dry goods peddler, was assaulted with a hatchet and literally carved from head to foot. Home from the peddling circuit for his usual Saturday evening stay over with his wife and two small children, the peddler descended the dark stairs of his tenement home to fetch some lemons that his wife had requested, so she could make tea Russian style. The neighborhood store was open late that night as usual. Although contiguous to the notorious Black Bottom district, the area was reasonably safe. Meyer Friedman should have had nothing to fear. It was only a quick errand to fetch some lemons.

Suddenly Rosa Friedman heard a clamor and her husband shriek, "My God, I am done." She screamed, "Murder!" and "Merciful God!" in the Russian language. Neighbors and shopkeepers rushed to the scene, but the door to the hallway was blocked and could not be budged. When two policemen gained

*Cover page of the book Jean
Roseman came upon at the
Tennessee State Library and
Archives, Nashville.
All illustrations in this
article are from this book.
(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)*

entry through a back door, they found the unfortunate man weltering in his own blood, the victim of a savage hatchet attack. Barricading the front door were two enormous boulders that the first responders soon dislodged allowing the rapidly assembling crowd entry. On the wall was the imprint of a bloody left hand and on the floor a bloody footprint.²

Several in the crowd carried the unconscious man to his upstairs dwelling and set him in his bed. A doctor was summoned and assessed the wounds. Six in number, the first was a triangular ten-inch wound to the head; the second, a wound to the left side which cut one of the ribs in two and slashed the lung; the third, a three-inch shoulder gash which severed a main artery; the fourth wound to the left hand severed the artery to the thumb; the fifth wound to the right shoulder bared the bone; and the last wound, a gash over the left eye flanked by a contusion, was "as large as a hen's egg."³

It did not look good for the victim. Meyer Friedman had been in America for only two years, but in that time he had established a robust peddling route. He was said to not have an enemy in the world and was known not to carry more than five or ten dollars on his person, the result of his week's sales. At the time of the assault, he had sixty cents in his pocket. Friedman hung on but could give no clues as to his assassins.⁴

The next day, Sunday, April 13, in an outhouse nearby, a policeman discovered a hatchet encrusted with blood and hair with part of the blade broken. Speculation and rumor ran rife. Had Friedman been mistaken for the landlord who had been collecting rents in the neighborhood shortly before? Was he the victim of some nihilistic organization he had offended in his Russian Polish homeland?⁵ The attempted assassination of Meyer Friedman was the general topic of conversation in the city.⁶

Nine days after the assault, the peddler died. The clues began to mount:

- The hatchet belonged to one Meyer Moskowitz, Jr., who used it in his dry goods and secondhand clothing store.⁷
- Moskowitz had recently accompanied Friedman to the American Legion of Honor and encouraged him to buy a life insurance policy for five thousand dollars. Friedman argued with Moskowitz that he could not afford the payments but eventually bought a policy for two thousand dollars with his wife as beneficiary. Several days later Friedman went back and changed it to be divided equally between his wife and their two children.⁸
- A man identified by the press as black told police that Moskowitz had offered him fifteen dollars to do the deed. Moskowitz had given as his reasons, Friedman's abuse of his wife and Moskowitz's love for her. When the man refused to do the deed, Moskowitz upped the ante and assured the potential assailant that he would provide the man a safe haven.⁹
- Moskowitz, who was a stepbrother to Friedman's wife, had been involved in an adulterous relationship with her.

Moskovitz, however, had an alibi. At the time of the murder he was working in his store, five doors north of the murder scene. Witnesses corroborated his story.¹⁰

The police uncovered the complicity of two black men. One, Zeke White, a "roustabout on the Nashville steamboats," had remained in Nashville and was arrested with Moskovitz. The other, Tom Owens, had fled but was eventually caught in Louisiana and returned to Nashville for trial.¹¹

The story gets increasingly complicated with confounding names. Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., was the stepson of Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., and the son of Esther Morris Moskovitz. Her first husband, the father of Meyer, had the surname Morris. That husband had died of cholera in Russia while in the Russian Army. Mr. Moskovitz and Mrs. Morris had known each other in the Russian Polish village of Makowa. By the time they came to the United States, each had been widowed. They married in New York and then moved to Nashville. Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., had two daughters, Leah and Rosa. The younger daughter, Rosa, had stayed behind in Russia where she married Meyer Friedman. She eventually traveled to Nashville to be with her father. Her father later brought his son-in-law, Meyer Friedman, to Nashville. Mrs. Morris-Moskovitz had two sons, Meyer and Moses, thus making Rosa and Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., stepsiblings.¹²

Members of this blended family—Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., and Esther Morris Moskovitz, along with Leah, Meyer, and Moses—arrived in Nashville about 1875. A newspaper account notes Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., came to Nashville “a very poor man and by strict attention to business and hard work has accumulated a small fortune.”¹³ Well schooled in Hebrew and Judaic traditions, he soon became one of the leaders among the city’s Orthodox Jews. Leah married a Nashville merchant named Barney Lubin.

The funeral for peddler Meyer Friedman took place at the Jewish cemetery in North Nashville. Directly thereafter Rosa Friedman, his widow, was arrested, interrogated, and then released. Of interest is the prejudicial description of her in the newspaper: “The wife of the deceased man is about 22 years of age, of average good looks, and a face expressive of rather a negative character.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, other “negative” suspects and informants were being rounded up. A black wood-sawyer gave the following statement to the police:

It was on the Saturday before Thanksgiving that Meyer Moskovitz, Jr. came to me and said he had been intimate with Meyer Friedman’s wife and wanted to get him out of the way. He offered me \$15 and a pistol if I would kill Meyer Friedman for him. . . . I refused to do the job . . . then he came to see me again and offered me \$20 and a hatchet. . . . Meyer told me [he] wanted her husband killed because Friedman had treated her bad and she didn’t want to have anything to do with anybody but him.¹⁵

That informant mentioned the name of a black accomplice whom Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., had assured him he could rely on to help carry out the crime. The informant then confessed to blackmailing Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., to conceal the information.¹⁶

The informant’s clue led to the “notorious Black Bottom thug and law breaker Tom Owens.”¹⁷ But Tom Owens had absconded and was in Cairo, Illinois. His whereabouts were known because of a letter that was mistakenly delivered into the wrong hands. A Mrs. G. Moskovitz (ostensibly no relation to the Meyer Moskovitz family but indicative of the confusing name similarity that threads

through this story) received the letter. She could not read English so she went to the saloon next door and asked the saloonkeeper to read it:

Friend Meyer: How is our friend Meyer who was cut. Telegraph at once. T. O.¹⁸

The word was out. A further clue came when Charles Sulzbacher, a leader in the Jewish community, offered a reward for solving the crime. He received an anonymous letter threatening him that unless he rescinded the reward, he would be “killed like the other Jew.” Police found the same writing paper and envelopes at the store of Meyer Moskovitz, Jr.¹⁹

Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., was arrested and incarcerated in the city jail. Some in the outraged community seeking their own brand of justice gathered around the jail wanting to lynch him, but police staved this off. Rosa was again arrested and separated from her lover. Zeke White, suspected of being Owens’s accomplice, was also in jail. Almost a month later, they were in court “charging Meyer Moskovitz, alias Meyer Morris, Rosa Friedman and Zeke White, colored, with having on the 12th day of April, 1884, unlawfully, feloniously, willfully, deliberately, premeditatedly and maliciously murdered Meyer Friedman.”²⁰

An order of indictment came down:

It is therefore ordered by the Court that the Atty Geil file an indictment officially, against the said Meyer Moskovitz alias Morris, Rosa Friedman, Zeke White and Thomas Owens charging them with the crime of murder in the first degree.²¹

About this time the press made several Jewish-specific references. First, Rosa was viewed as being very exotic and very Jewish:

She is a short, stout and good-looking woman. Her hair is of that dark nut-brown color for which Oriental woman are so famed. Her eyes are black and almond-shaped, so much so as to make them the remarkable feature of her face. Her features are prominent, but well formed, after the Jewish type, and her hands and feet small and shapely.²²

Rosa Friedman.

"The wife of Mayer Friedman, the murdered man." It is not known whether this is truly a picture of Rosa Friedman. Many pictures in the book were undoubtedly staged. (Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

Second, her father made a haunting reference to the land they had departed: "I am sorry she has to go to jail, but the law is supreme and she knows that. Russians know that the law must be obeyed."²³

The suspects, excluding Rosa, who posted bail of \$2,500 with the help of an unnamed Jewish sympathizer, remained in jail but not without generating more publicity, even far removed from Nashville. In distant Lima, Ohio, a newspaper ran an article that Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., had received a heavy, bulky package in the mail. The suspicious jailer opened the package and found a dynamite cartridge of a "Nihilistic" make.²⁴

The arraignment followed with several court appearances, all with continuances through most of July. A jury had been duly impaneled, and on July 20, 1884, it found defendant Zeke White not guilty, but the jury was unable to agree on the verdict for

defendant Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., thus resulting in a mistrial for him.²⁵

The new trial that began on September 1, 1884, ended with a verdict on September 16, 1884, that Moskovitz, Jr., was an accessory before the fact. His lawyer immediately challenged this verdict and requested an "arrest of judgment" and a new trial arguing that no perpetrator had been physically presented to the court, therefore Moskovitz could not be an accessory to an unknown and unestablished principal.²⁶

This motion was overruled the next day. The judge asked the defendant to stand and receive sentence: "You have been found guilty as accessory before the fact to Thomas Owens, colored, of murder in the first degree. The law fixes your punishment to confinement at hard labor in the State penitentiary during the period of your life."²⁷

Eighteen months after the murder, Tom Owens was captured and tried. Initially he was found guilty, but the case was appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court.²⁸ The Supreme Court reversed the decision of the local criminal court "on exceptions to some incompetent evidence."²⁹ The case was sent back to the local court for retrial. Tom Owens was acquitted by a jury of white men.

The dynamics of the entire murder case generated interesting observations far and wide but none as curious as the acquittal of Tom Owens, a black person, and the imprisonment for life of an accessory *before the fact* when the two perpetrators had been exonerated, thus effectively impugning the fact of murder itself.

Following the acquittal of Owens, sympathy for the imprisoned Moskovitz mounted. Over 120 highly regarded civic leaders in Nashville signed a petition for his release. Twenty-one of the most prominent and financially successful leaders in the Jewish community supported the petition. In short, their twelve-page petition supported by numerous examples of case law boiled down to the simple statement that the conviction of Moskovitz was "a logical monstrosity, to say that no man could help another do a thing, which the other did not do."³⁰

Indeed, Governor Robert Love Taylor agreed and in the waning minutes of his administration granted pardon. Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., alias Morris, was released on January 11, 1891. Noted on the release record were his marital status as single, his nativity as Poland, his occupation as merchant, his literate skills as fair, and his religion as Israelite.³¹

Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., reestablished himself in society and married two years later. On the marriage certificate the penned name of Moskovitz is crossed out. Penciled in is the name Morris.³² Federal Census returns for ensuing decades show Meyer married to Jennie (Schonberger) Morris who had emigrated from Austria-Hungary. The couple had two sons, Marvin and Aron.³³ Marvin does not seem to have ever married, but Aron has descendants who are prominent and honored in the Nashville community today.

During the span of the murder and the release of Moskovitz, two effects on others in the Jewish community are documented. The first involved a family with the same name. They filed a petition for a name change:

Petition—Rachel MOSKOVITZ & Daniel MOSKOVITZ

Rachel Moskovitz is a widow & besides Daniel, who is of full age, has four minor children: Laura MOSKOVITZ, Joseph MOSKOVITZ, Isadore MOSKOVITZ & Isaac MOSKOVITZ. - petition name change from MOSKOVITZ to MORSE - 19 Feb. 1889. Name 'Moskovitz' foreign and difficult for American people, with whom they associate, to write or pronounce . . . also Meyer MOSKOVITZ, no relation of theirs, has been sentenced to the penitentiary for murder.³⁴

Their petition for the name change to Morse was granted in February 1889.

The second matter may or may not be directly tied to the incarceration of Meyer Moskovitz, Jr. It involved a bill filed in Chancery Court by K. K. Adath Israel congregation against M. Moskovitz, presumably the stepfather, and H. Frank. Under the laws of the congregation, the defendant Frank had been elected official reader of the congregation for the holidays that

Robert Love Taylor.

*“Our Bob’ Governor of Tennessee, who
signed my brother’s pardon and set him free.”*

This is an actual photograph of the governor.

(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

were ongoing at the time of the filing. At the same time, two assistants were chosen. They then passed a resolution that no others except Frank and the two designated readers should perform the service. The complainants charged in their bill that Frank independently assigned Moskovitz to read. The bill alleged that many

of the congregants were opposed to having Moskowitz read "because they believe . . . that Moskowitz is not a member clean in life as a Hebrew."³⁵ A search of records reveals that Chancery Court was on a six-week break at the time, and there is no accessible resolution to the complaint. It is, however, interesting to speculate whether M. Moskowitz was unacceptable as a reader because of his stepson or for another reason.

The Setting

A short study of the dynamics of the Jewish community of Nashville and the relationship between blacks and Jews at that time offers background to better understand this tale. Jewish presence in Nashville was first noted in 1795 when a transient Jewish family recorded the birth of a daughter. Through the next half century, other Jews came, many also on their way to other destinations. A few, however, stayed and offered their services and goods to the transients. Some came from Cincinnati, known as the Queen City, to set up stores or to peddle in the region. Nashville's advantageous position on a river made it a natural starting point for the further dissemination of goods by foot or by wagon. Andrew Jackson's popularity also added an attractive element of romantic intrigue to the city.

By 1848 numbers were sufficient and the need manifest enough that the first minyan of resident Jews gathered. Shortly thereafter in 1851, a burial ground was secured marking the beginning of the organization that later became the Temple. During the remainder of the 1850s, a significant influx of Jews, mainly of German stock, established residence. As Jews of Polish, Russian, and Hungarian heritage thereafter made their way to Nashville, a clash ensued over which *minhag* should be used for worship. This quickly evolved into a number of different factions ultimately resulting in several variant, short-lived congregations. By the time this story unfolds in 1884, Nashville's quarrelsome Jews had divided themselves into three congregations: the Reform Vine Street Temple; the essentially Orthodox Aduath Israel, which eventually became the Conservative Gay Street Synagogue and ultimately the West End Synagogue; and the Hungarian Benevolent Society,

which would become the Orthodox Fifth Avenue Synagogue, later Sherith Israel. This trifurcation continued in Nashville for almost a century.

Because of fierce loyalties to the religious practices of their origins, early Nashville Jews obviously had problems relating to fellow Jews over religious matters. However when it came to civic matters, there seemed to be general agreement that they wanted to blend in and subscribe to the prevailing mores and public sentiment. This is particularly true during the period of the Civil War. Like their neighbors, the majority of Nashville Jews supported and even fought for the Confederacy. A number of them risked their lives and some suffered imprisonment as a result of smuggling supplies, especially quinine, to Confederate troops.

The Jewish relationship to blacks followed the white model, albeit with modification. While living compactly near blacks in downtown quarters and serving a black clientele in many of their businesses, the minority Jewish population did not mix beyond that with blacks. In reality, they did not mix beyond that with whites, either. They found their strength and support in their own ethnic enclave.

Jews were caught in an interesting position. They were literally "strangers in a strange land." Many lived in an area that was predominantly black. Fisk University historian Reavis Mitchel argues that the area of Black Bottom by the waterfront was essentially under black dominance and that "Blacks ran the area." If a crime occurred of black against black, then it was handled, or not handled, as the case might have been, within the black community. When a situation involved someone white, however, it became the province of the white policemen.³⁶ That is what transpired in the murder of Meyer Friedman.

An interesting aspect of post-Civil War Nashville history is that the city experienced a significant rise in the resident black population. In 1860 Nashville blacks numbered only 3,945. A decade later, their ranks swelled to 9,709.³⁷ Blacks tended to settle in the Fourth, Sixth, Eighth, and Tenth Wards in the core of the downtown area. These wards were also where Jewish shopkeepers lived with their families above or behind their businesses.

Streetcar transportation and the automobile had not yet made possible the westward movement which characterized Jewish residential patterns through the next century.

The Sixth Ward contained Black Bottom, the setting of this story. The name relates to the dark silt that covered the area resulting from the frequent flooding of the Cumberland River and not for the black population who settled there after the Civil War. These African Americans replaced the Irish immigrants who earlier provided the muscle to haul the goods brought into the riverside docks but then moved on into other neighborhoods. The newcomer influx created a demand for housing, much of which was substandard, consisting of lean-tos and shanties. Crime, prostitution, and drunkenness thrived. Probably no more scathing description of the area exists than this, which appeared about twenty years after the Friedman murder in the *Nashville American* showing that the area had not cleaned itself up in that time:³⁸

No city in America or Europe can present a more disgraceful or sickening aspect of modern civilization than that part of Fourth Avenue that runs through the hideous heart of Black Bottom. If a conglomeration of dives, brothels, pawnshops, second-hand clothing stores, filthy habitations and the like accompanied by the daily display of lewdness and drunkenness on the sidewalks and redolent with the stench of every vile odor-- can make a 'hell-hole' then Black Bottom is that place.

In the midst of this odiferous tumult lived many Jewish shopkeepers and their families. The blended Moskovitz family was one of these. They ran a secondhand clothing store at 117 South Cherry. (Cherry Street became Fourth Avenue in 1903 when the city legislated to do away with its homegrown street names and number them like many larger American cities.)

An obscure book that reposes long forgotten in psychiatric and legal libraries offers another perspective concerning the murder. This account was written by Moses David Morris, the brother three years younger than Meyer Moskovitz, Jr. In a tale that escalates to near Faulknerian heights, Moses recounts

his version of the murder in a book replete with startling and sometimes comic photographs, posed for a decade and a half after the crime.

The Book Account

The tale retold from Moses Morris's perspective begins like that of many other immigrants. In his book, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers*, Moses Morris recounts that he was born in "Russian Poland" where his father died of cholera while serving in the Russian Army. He tells that his widowed mother immigrated to New York, kept a stall selling trinkets and notions, and married a cap maker who had friends in Nashville. The family then moved to Nashville. They left Nashville for St. Louis, but returned after deciding Nashville was more to their liking. Moses's stepfather ran a secondhand clothing store and opened a Hebrew school that catered to prominent Jewish businessmen.

Having little formal education, Moses learned, as he says, in the "school of experience." He sold newspapers and worked in a dry goods store for a dollar a week while saving money until he had four hundred dollars and bought out a secondhand clothing store. During his first year in business, he earned over two thousand dollars and started investing in Nashville real estate. Profits accrued, and he ultimately established a drug business, purveying herbs and medicinal plants. From his account, Moses was on the ascent and might have risen to become one of Nashville's foremost Jewish figures had other matters not intervened.

Without citing legal formalities, Moses eventually anglicized his name to Clyde, and his brother Meyer anglicized his to Barney. They both used the surname Morris. Clyde's successful rise suffered a setback during a financial panic that he indicates occurred in 1879. Clyde tells of the "troublous" times and his loss of "about fifteen thousand dollars." According to his account, he successfully weathered the crisis and rebuilt his business.

A second misfortune tested him more sorely. The details are in keeping with the newspaper accounts. The embellishments are

not. On a hot, sultry night in April 1884, Clyde's stepbrother-in-law, Meyer Friedman, was murdered in his home. The peddler, who lived with his family over a fish market, was not a man of money. He had returned home, as was his custom, on a Saturday evening. His wife wanted some lemons. He was exiting the dwelling through a dark passageway that led to the street when he was attacked with a hatchet and bludgeoned to a slow death. His assailants fled but not before barricading the door so no one could come to the victim's aid. One must have slipped in the peddler's blood because a bloody handprint and footprint were the only clues. After lingering near death for nine days, the peddler died unable to identify his assailants.

The peddler's widow was the daughter of Barney and Clyde's stepfather. Clyde's brother and business partner, Barney, was arrested for the crime. A love triangle emerged: Barney was the peddler's wife's lover. It was discovered that Barney had hired two black men to do the deed. Barney was convicted of being an accessory before the fact and given a life sentence.

But the tale did not end there. According to Clyde's account, Barney actually prospered in prison. The warden allowed him to have a stand and sell small articles to the prisoners. Clyde, who presents himself as the long-suffering, ever-faithful brother, visited him regularly, presumably providing the inventory. Barney also was an astute gambler and won frequently from fellow inmates.

After six years a pardon was granted based on the argument that Barney was an accessory before the fact to a murder that had no proven perpetrator. In other words, he could not be an accessory to a murder that did not have a convicted murderer. The real murderer, Tom Owens, had been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged. In an irony of justice, he was granted a new trial and acquitted. Public sympathy was aroused when the presumed murderer was set free and the accessory was sentenced to life imprisonment. Clyde presents himself as his brother's most loyal advocate in seeking a pardon. In the last half hour before he left office, the governor reprieved Barney's sentence.

Ever the good brother, Clyde brought Barney back into his clothing business. The brothers continued to do well, so well that Clyde decided to invest in another business, a drug store, but this time without Barney as a partner. Clyde's pharmaceutical business quickly became very lucrative.

Successes continued to mount for Clyde, or so they did according to his rendition. Imagining himself an exemplary citizen, Clyde decided to run for the city council, representing his ward. He was met with opposition particularly from local politicians who had an "expert gambler" controlling the voting boxes. The election with three candidates—a Protestant, a Catholic, and a Jew—turned downright dirty with great enmity between the Protestant and the Catholic and their respective supporters. Both wanted Clyde to quit the election so the votes he would receive would go to them. Fearing mayhem, which he captures in a photo posed for many years later, Clyde did withdraw. Not surprisingly in Nashville the Protestant prevailed. Clyde was crushed by his forced ouster.

Barney, meanwhile, was increasingly jealous that he was not part of the profitable drug business. Based on the exertions and disappointment of the recently failed political campaign, Clyde admitted he had become "very nervous." Barney took it a step further. He managed to have Clyde arrested as a "dangerous lunatic." Clyde remained in jail pending a trial. When it looked like a doctor would declare Clyde sane, Barney withdrew his warrant and Clyde was released.

Fraternal bonds were more important to Clyde, and so he forgave Barney for his treachery. Rosa Friedman, the murdered peddler's widow, was no longer a player in this drama. She had been replaced by a very pretty immigrant girl from Austria-Hungary whom Barney married. The day after the wedding Barney made the following proposal to Clyde: since he himself was suffering from lead poisoning contracted while he had worked in the prison paint shop, and since Clyde was suffering from nervousness, would it not be advisable that they go together to a sanitarium for rest and treatment?

Barney prevailed and suggested they first enjoy a restful hunting expedition to Reelfoot Lake in West Tennessee and then relax in a sanitarium near there for the "nervous prostration" that Clyde was suffering. At the same time Barney should get treatment for his lung malady. The sanitarium, in reality the State Asylum for the Insane, was at Bolivar, Tennessee. There, to no surprise, Clyde was declared insane.

Of morbid interest are Clyde's obsessive descriptions of the lunatics in this facility. Fellow inmates included a former prominent lawyer who, having lost an important case, always kept his fingers in his mouth and muttered the same inexplicable syllables, "per die, per die, ti, ti;" a former Baptist preacher/lawyer who every fifteen minutes ordered someone to "Shoot him down, shoot him down;" a jolly Irishman who had been educated for the priesthood but could on a whim turn into a violent and raging lunatic; a lesbian murderess; a doctor considered insane because he was a drunkard; and a former Confederate general given to "spells" that required occasional restraint in a strait jacket. Such were the inmates incarcerated in what amounted to a self-sufficient miniature city. There was over a mile of tunnels under the buildings large enough for men to walk six abreast. The facility had its own reservoir, dairy house, provision storerooms, and steam laundry.

After a month's confinement, Clyde made a bold and calculated escape. On a cold and rainy December night, he sloshed for hours in stormy weather through mud and overflowing creeks until he found he had gone in a circle and was back at the front gate of the asylum. Fearing capture, Clyde pushed himself on until he found refuge in the woods with a kindhearted black man. When his host gave him hog's ribs, Clyde, although famished, remained true to his Jewish origins and would not partake of the meat. He gave it to the dogs. From this refuge in the woods, Clyde made his way to Kentucky and Ohio and on to adventures that grew even more bizarre, leaving the reader to wonder if indeed this is the diary of a madman.

Somehow the writer came back to Nashville where he challenged his entire family about his business assets, over which his

Moses Morris in the asylum.

“My second day . . . at Bolivar, with the insane, sweeping the ward.” One of many scenes in the book depicting the outrageous adventures of Moses Morris and his brother. Even though this picture appears staged, the man in the middle may have been Morris. He appears as Morris throughout the book.
(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

mother, presumably under the control of his stepfather and his brother Barney, had assumed legal control. Meanwhile, Clyde, more often “Moses” now, met a girl at Glendale Park, an amusement center just a trolley ride outside of downtown Nashville. After a short courtship, the young immigrant girl consented to marry him. Within a year, they had a daughter. Life seemed to be normalizing for Clyde if one can consider his postponed bridal trip normal. After two years of marriage Clyde took his wife on a honeymoon trip over the very escape route through the brush and

ditches he had taken from the Bolivar State Insane Asylum in West Tennessee!

From all appearances, Clyde did seem to be back on track. He had a small family. He was back in business in Nashville. He even had reconstituted his fraternal relationship with Barney. But there were those in the community who remembered. When the two brothers attempted to secure life insurance policies from a secret benevolent society for three thousand dollars each, they were at first accepted but later their insurance and membership were rejected because Barney had been incarcerated and because Clyde had been in a lunatic asylum.

Disappointed, distressed, and at a breaking point, the fragile Clyde moved to New York where his wife's brother lived. Thereafter he ceased to refer to his wife and daughter suggesting a marital estrangement, a matter he never acknowledged in his book. His circumstances declined and he soon found himself "penniless in Gotham." There he related adventures in pawnshops, experiences in exotic Chinatown, and encounters in the Bowery. He even took a brief stint as a conductor on the Broadway streetcar line. Clyde's interest veered, however, in the direction of "unfortunates." Fascinated by mental aberrations, he began a systematic study of the insane, particularly "feeble-minded youths" in institutions.³⁹

Censuses show that Clyde returned to Nashville as "Moses" and even lived with Barney's family. There is no record of what might have happened to his wife and daughter. Property records show that mother Esther Moskovitz transferred property on Cherry Street, (Fourth Avenue), to Meyer in 1913. Note that she did not transfer it to both sons equally.⁴⁰

Clyde had started his perplexing book immediately after being ousted from Nashville's council election in 1893. Six years later, in 1900, he published it with professional posed-for photographs. Long forgotten, the rare book is entombed in a few select libraries. It can, however, be accessed in online law libraries because of the classic outcome of the legal case.⁴¹ One of the most astounding features of the book is the endorsement in the preface given by venerable members of the Nashville community in 1900.

The last picture in the book.

“‘Barney’ and ‘Clyde,’ they shake hands in the last act.”

(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

Among those notables are nine successful Jewish merchants and nearly fifty gentile supporters including then-governor Benton McMillan of Tennessee, all of whom give credence to this curious tale with the statement: “This book illustrates the adage that ‘truth is stranger than fiction.’”

The endorsers gave unquestionable support to Clyde’s tale:

We, the undersigned citizens of Nashville, Tennessee, hereby certify that we have known Mr. Moses D. Morris, for a number of years, and that we know him to be honest, upright, truthful and trustworthy in all of his business dealings. We take pleasure in recommending him to the public.⁴²

Barney meanwhile seemed to have fallen back into being “Meyer” and attaining a measure of success in Nashville. He continued in the loan and secondhand clothing businesses.

With an undated photograph, Clyde suggested reconciliation occurred between the brothers when they posed in front of Barney's store.

Observations

Among the unusual aspects of the murder was that African Americans were involved but did not bear the brunt of blame. Blacks and Jews interacted within what might be considered almost a separate universe so long as the interaction did not directly or overtly impact on black/Christian relationships. In this and other ways Jews were an in-between group, considered and behaving neither totally white nor black but obtaining benefits as well as some limitations of each.

The brutal murder of Meyer Friedman must have caused great consternation in the local Jewish community. A murder of Jew against Jew, something that rarely happens, did indeed happen in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1884. The Jewish community dynamic is noteworthy. A number of distinguished Jewish citizens stepped forward and supported their own. There is no doubt the community knew that Moses, or Clyde, was of fragile mental health. When he escaped from the West Tennessee insane asylum, the *Nashville Banner* reported, "Moses D. Moskovitz, who escaped from the West Tennessee Hospital for the Insane last Friday has not been recaptured, and his relatives here are quite uneasy about him."⁴³

Between 1850 and 1900 Jews were on the ascent in Nashville. The first generation was getting established in the merchant trades, but their children were being educated in the local school system and some were graduating from Vanderbilt University as lawyers, doctors, and teachers. The grisly murder of Meyer Friedman did not seem to interrupt or hamper that rise. There is an old Jewish joke about what the difference is between a tailor and a doctor. The answer is "a generation." In this case, the murder and attendant publicity did not seem to hurt Jews in the Nashville community as they crossed that generation bridge, prospered, and put the memories of the incident behind them. Moreover these incidents did little to alter the successful rise of

Moskovitz family members within both Jewish and secular Nashville.

This bizarre tale has all the ingredients and potential of a compelling movie, which just might have been called *Barney and Clyde*. Yet now there is no mention in the collective memory of the Nashville Jewish community of these events, or of the family members involved. One centenarian and several near centenarian residents seem to know nothing. There is no information archived in the local Jewish Federation Archives. The story would not be known if it were not for the author's chance discovery of a small book sitting unobtrusively on a bottom shelf of the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

NOTES

¹ Moses David Morris, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles, and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers* (New York, 1900).

² *Nashville Daily American*, April 13, 1884.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Meyer Friedman was born in Makowa, Poland, which at the time of his birth was in the Russian Empire.

⁶ *Nashville Daily American*, April 14, 1884.

⁷ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1884.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, April 23, 1884.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1884.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1884.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1884.

²¹ Davidson County Criminal Court Minutes, May 14, 1884, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, a division of the Public Library of Nashville and Davidson County.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Lima* [OH] *Democratic Times*, May 31, 1884. An article about the case also appeared in 1884 in the far more distant Russian Hebrew periodical *Hameliz*. The translation of the *Hameliz* article presents an account that differs from the other sources in several significant details, including the day of the murder (Sunday, not Saturday) and the part that large stones may have played in the crime. These differences may be the fault of the translation. Jewish Federation Archives of Nashville, Gordon Jewish Community Center.

²⁵ Davidson County Criminal Court Minutes, July 20, 1884.

²⁶ *Nashville Daily American*, September 17, 1884.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1884.

²⁸ [Decatur, IL] *Daily Republican*, October 5, 1885.

²⁹ *Nashville Daily American*, February 26, 1887.

³⁰ Governor Robert Love Taylor Papers, 1887–1891, GP28, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³¹ Prison Records of the State of Tennessee, 1831–1992, RG 25, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³² Davidson County Marriage Records, October 14, 1893, Nashville Public Library.

³³ The 1920 census shows Jennie Morris as head of household with sons Marvin, 24, and Aron, 14, resident with her along with Ester Moskovitz, 75, her mother-in-law, and Moses D. Morris, 49, her brother-in-law. Meyer reappears in the 1930 census grouped with Jennie and son Marvin who is 37 at this time. Esther and Moses are no longer in the household. Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Davidson County, Tennessee; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Davidson County, Tennessee; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Davidson County, Tennessee.

³⁴ Mary Sue Smith, *Davidson County, Tennessee Naturalization Record, 1803–1906* (Nashville, 1997), 122–123.

³⁵ *Nashville Banner*, September 15, 1888.

³⁶ Reavis Mitchel, Fisk University, telephone interview conducted by author, May 25, 2007.

³⁷ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Ninth Census* (1870) (Washington, DC, 1870), 262.

³⁸ *Nashville American*, June 30, 1905

³⁹ Morris, *Fighting Against Fate*, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Davidson County Warranty Deed Reference Book 445, 570. Register of Deeds, Nashville, Tennessee

⁴¹ Only four print copies of Morris's *Fighting Against Fate* have been located through the World Catalogue: they are at the Tennessee State Library and Archives; Harvard University Law School Library; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and College of Physicians of Philadelphia According to Sara Byrd, Reference Librarian, Central Library,

Vanderbilt University, forty-three libraries have the book on microfilm and sixty-seven libraries have access to the online version through the Gale database; <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F105948892&srchtp=a&ste=14> (accessed 7-26-07) and <http://www.worldcat.org/> (accessed by Sara Byrd on July 30, 2007).

⁴² Morris, *Fighting Against Fate*, preface.

⁴³ *Nashville Banner*, December 20, 1893.