



SINCE

1841

WOODLAND

HISTORIC CEMETERY & ARBORETUM



A Cold Case

This story begins with a violent end. On the snowy evening of January 11, 1867, Adam Kett¹ returned from work and was puzzled to find a silent house. Passing through to the kitchen, he was horrified to discover the body of his sister, Christine, lying dead on the floor with her feet dangling over the cellar stairs.

Immediately, he ran screaming for help, which arrived in the form of city Marshal Isaac Hale, doctors Henry K. Steele* & Henry W. Weis, and any number of curious neighbors and other local busybodies.



Above: photo of a woman reading, ca 1890, is NOT Christine Kett. Courtesy of the [Public Domain Image Archive](#).

[2] *The Daily Empire*, 1/21/1867

[3] *The Daily Empire*, 1/12/1867

A coroner's inquest determined that Christine had certainly met her end at the hand of parties unknown. But who had killed her? And why?

As the person who discovered the body and the pistol's owner, Christine's brother was an early suspect, but didn't remain one for long. His alibi for the day of the murder was rock solid; [Dr. William Webster](#) testified that Adam Kett had been working for him all day on January 11th, and a neighbor confirmed it.

Furthermore, Adam Kett hadn't used his gun in more than a week. After firing off a few celebratory shots on New Year's Eve, he had cleaned and disassembled it, wrapping the pieces in cloth and storing them in his trunk. His gunpowder was found in the cupboard where it should have been, but not in the usual place⁴. As far as Adam Kett knew, his sister was the only other person who knew where he kept either gun or powder.



Even more bewildering were the footprints in the snow outside, and the ax with snow on it in the cellar⁵.

There were other theories; the Kett home had at one time been a brothel, and the family had found it necessary to insist it no longer was one to the occasional prospective client⁶.

Perhaps this had happened while Christine was home alone that day, and this prospective client had killed her for daring to point a gun at him and tell him "no".

Their investigation yielded confusing results. Christine's death had been caused by two devastating blows to the right side of her head². What could not be accounted for was the pistol found at Christine's side (identified by her brother as his own) or the smears of gunpowder on her face and hands³. Even more confusing was the total lack of bullets—none were found in the house, the cellar, or associated with Christine's wounds.

[1] Ohio Census, 1860.

The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.		
	Age.	Sex.	White, black, or mulatto.
3	4	5	6
John Ketty	45	m	✓
Christina "	44	f	✓
Adam "	18	m	✓
Christina Kette	16	f	✓
Elyth "	13	f	✓
Augusta "	9	f	✓
Helena "	7	f	✓
Francis "	11	m	✓
William "	2	m	✓
Frederick "	5 1/2	m	✓

The above census, taken in 1860 in Dayton, suggests that the only Kett brother old enough to have a job, let alone a gun, in 1867 would be Adam Kett.

[4] *The Daily Empire*, 1/12/1867

[5] *The Daily Empire*, 1/21/1867

[6] *The Daily Empire*, 1/21/1867

Left: [Colt Army Model 1860](#) - a single-action cap & ball revolver. During the Civil War, these would have been used as a sidearm by cavalry, infantry, and artillery troops. Though no reports ever specify the model of gun found at the Kett house, the Colt 1860 would

Maybe, as some believed, while Christine had been home alone that afternoon, she had taken it into her head to borrow her brother's gun in order to shoot at rats in the cellar, and with one thing leading to another, the whole situation truly had been a terrible accident⁷.

After Christine's boyfriend, Anthony Goetz, and Buck Hughes, a local 'notorious character' were also investigated and subsequently cleared, the case went cold.

For the next seventeen years, the mystery lived on: what really happened to Christine Kett?

[7] *Dayton Daily News*, 6/17/1934

*Dr. Henry K. Steele is NOT buried at Woodland, but his father, Dr. John Steele, is - in section 77, lot 18.

Upcoming Tours & Events:



This is a free event, but donations to the Woodland Arboretum Foundation—which focuses on the restoration, preservation, horticultural and educational projects needed to keep Woodland a cultural resource for Dayton and Ohio—are always welcome.

New! Woodland Harvest Market

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Celebrate the fall season with home-made baked goods, local artwork & textiles, and a curated selection of vintage items from the Dayton area & beyond. Appreciate the autumn foliage with the sound of local musicians in your ear and a warm beverage in hand, have some lunch from a local food truck, and participate in a community art project.

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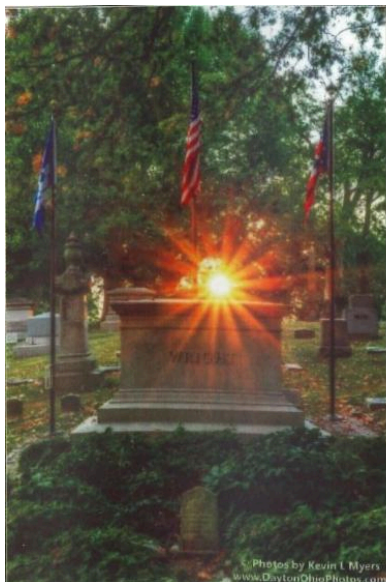
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