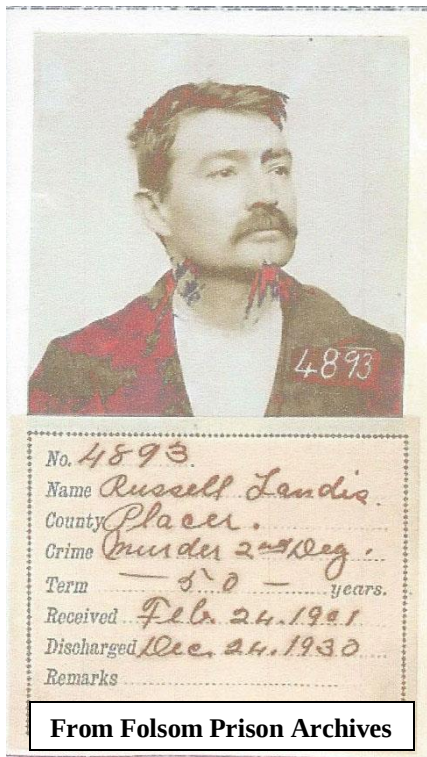


## A Rocklin Tragedy



In 1900 Rocklin's granite quarries had survived the economic depression of the mid 1890s and were busy shipping stone for many of Northern California's monumental buildings. Rocklin's roundhouse was busy servicing the engines needed for Trans-Sierra trains. And the city's population peaked above 1,000 in the late stages of an influx of first and second generation Finnish immigrants.

Times were good in Rocklin and notwithstanding an active Finnish Temperance Society Rocklin's saloons were flourishing. But in October that year tragedy was afoot.

Thirty-four-year-old Russell Landis, his wife, twenty-seven-year-old Lizzy, and two daughters, ten-year-old Lollie and seven-year-old Annie lived near the roundhouse on Front Street across the tracks from Lizzy's parents' house on Railroad Avenue. During their 10 year marriage the Landis couple had befriended Rocklin Township Constable William Clydesdale, brother of James Clydesdale who was Rocklin's fire chief during the conflagration which leveled Front Street in 1914. William Clydesdale and Russell Landis were good friends and sometimes worked odd jobs together. But Landis thought that the friendship between Lizzy and Clydesdale was suspiciously close and there was tension in the Landis household.

Russell Landis was a drifter, often away from Rocklin for several days, even weeks at a time. He sometimes lived at home while he was in town but the rumor in the neighborhood was that Lizzy was ready to file for divorce and take custody of the two girls. Landis was not going to let that happen.

On the night of October 3, Landis steeled himself with alcohol at a local saloon, grabbed a double-barrel shotgun, bought a box of shells, tromped to his home in a stupor and knocked on the door. Lizzy woke from her sleep, donned her night clothes and met Landis in the doorway. Annie was awake and Landis wanted to take her, but Lizzy blocked him. Landis was enraged. Lizzy was frightened and she bolted, possibly intending to cross the tracks to reach help at her parents' house. Russell shot her in the back and in the side of her head as she ran, decapitating her while little Annie looked on.

Russell Landis then looked unsuccessfully for William Clydesdale in nearby saloons. He eventually found Clydesdale at home, reading in bed. "You have done me up once but your time has come," said Landis as he shot Clydesdale twice in the lower abdomen and left him for dead. Landis returned to the saloon, bragging to his buddies: "I got them both and made a good job." He then surrendered to Rocklin Sheriff Keenan who locked him in the county jail in Auburn. Clydesdale survived and was hospitalized at the Sisters of Mercy, Mater Misericordia Hospital in Sacramento. Physicians operated but Clydesdale died of his wounds on October 19. He was 24 years old.

Russell Landis went on trial for murder on January 8, 1901. He claimed temporary insanity in the rage over his wife's affair and testified in his own defense. About 80 other witnesses testified, including little Annie. On the first jury ballot, voting on first degree murder, the jury hung

temporarily. Eight jurors voted guilty and four voted not guilty. After the trial a reporter speculated that the four not guilty votes represented justification for killing a spouse and a lover caught in an infidelity.

Eventually the jury was unanimous on second degree murder and on February 24, 1901 Landis started a 50 year stint at Folsom Prison. In 1910 Annie and several influential citizens appealed for his release and he was paroled in 1914. He went to work in his brother's business in San Jose and died by asphyxiation, probably suicide, in September 1918.

Lovers William Clydesdale and Lizzy Landis are interred in the Rocklin Cemetery. According to historian Valarie Vine, Russell Landis' mother, Annie Melissa Landis, moved away from Rocklin after the murders, probably to escape her son's notoriety, but after her death in San Jose in 1912 a son-in law interred her in the Rocklin Cemetery in an unmarked grave.

Rocklin Kiwanis President Elect, Cris Gerard, is the great granddaughter of Fire Chief James Clydesdale.