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# MANAGER IS KILLED BY WEALTHY HEAD OF BUNKIE FIRM

## Disagreement Over Business Affairs Blamed for Fatal Clash

Bunkie, La., Dec. 20.—Hill Smith, 50 years old, vice-president and manager of the Union Cotton Oil Company, was shot fatally in the office of the oil company here late today, during a clash with Dr. W. D. Haas, wealthy and widely known citizen of Alexandria and Bunkie, who is charged with the homicide but is at liberty pending further investigation of the killing.

Investigation by a coroner's jury tonight resulted in a verdict being returned fastening the killing on Dr. Haas, who, it is understood, will plead self-defense. The verdict was that Smith "came to his death from gunshot wounds at the hands of Dr. Haas." Intense excitement was caused by the killing, both men being among the best known citizens of this part of the state. They had been business associates for many years in the conduct of the cotton oil mill which was owned largely by Dr. Haas, and apparently had been the best of friends.

No one witnessed the shooting, it appears, but Dr. Haas remained in Bunkie and offered to aid in the investigation, placing himself at the disposal of the sheriff. He declined to discuss the affair, however, except to indicate that he would plead self-defense when he faces trial.

Smith was shot twice with a pistol, being wounded in the body. He died an hour later at a local hospital. He was a native of this part of the state and was among the leaders in the development of this territory. A wife and other relatives survive.

Dr. Haas, who is regarded as a power in Central Louisiana politics, is one of the wealthiest men of the section. In addition to being the chief stockholder in the Union Cotton Oil Company, he is part owner of the Merchants' and Planters' Bank here, the Bunkie Record, local newspaper, the Avoyelles Wholesale Grocery Company with branches here, at Alexandria and Ville Platte, and other enterprises. He owns thousands of acres of land, a sugar refinery at Augusta plantation, and has done much to advance the development of Avoyelles parish.

# DR. HAAS IN JAIL AFTER SLAYING PLANT MANAGER

## Witnesses Tell How Business Differences Led to Killing

Alexandria, La., Dec. 21.—Dr. W. D. Haas, 55 years old, wealthy citizen and business man of Alexandria and Bunkie, charged with shooting and killing R. Hill Smith, 53, prominent planter and cotton oil mill man, at Bunkie last night, was in jail at Marksville this afternoon, according to Sheriff Couvillion, of Avoyelles.

The shooting occurred in the office of the Union Cotton Oil Company of Bunkie, of which Smith was manager, and Dr. Haas a large stockholder. Dr. Haas is alleged to have fired two shots from a revolver. The second shot struck Smith's right temple and lodged in his brain. He died an hour later.

According to the Avoyelles parish authorities, the shooting had its origin over business affairs. The tragedy is said to have been the culmination of a dispute between the men, which arose when Dr. Haas is alleged to have asked Smith for his resignation as manager of the oil company. Besides the principals to the tragedy, there were in the office at the time, Sheriff Couvillion said, W. D. Haas, Jr., son of Dr. Haas, and Franklin Mikell, Haas' son-in-law, bookkeeper.

Immediately after the shooting, Sheriff Couvillion said Dr. Haas telephoned to him at Marksville, that he had shot Smith and that he was ready to surrender. Later, when it was learned that the wounded man had died, Sheriff Couvillion and Dr. L. C. Tarleton, coroner of Avoyelles parish, went to Bunkie, where the coroner impaneled a jury and held an inquest.

After examining several witnesses, the jury rendered a verdict to the effect that the deceased came to his death as a result of a pistol shot wound at the hands of Dr. W. D. Haas, but the verdict did not make any comment as to whether the killing was justifiable. The coroner's jury was composed of the following: G. V. Pierce, Joseph M. Weiss, W. A. Johnson, Earl Neilson and Harvey Bubenzer.

Those who testified before the coroner's jury were W. D. Haas, Jr., Franklin T. Mikell and J. D. Dubrock, night watchman at the Union Cotton Oil Company's mill.

Dubrock declared that a few minutes before 6 o'clock he entered the office of the Union Cotton Oil Company and left his pistol in a drawer of a desk. He found Dr. Haas standing at the end of the desk, talking to Hill Smith, who was sitting on a stool in front of the desk and about six or eight feet from Dr. Haas. The drawer in which the watchman placed the pistol was between Dr. Haas and Smith, he said.

Dubrock told the jury he heard the men discussing some business matters and he went out a rear door.

Just as he passed under the window behind Smith he heard two shots, he said, and looking through the window, saw Smith fall from the stool.

The testimony of W. D. Haas, Jr., and Franklin T. Mikell, bookkeeper, before the coroner's jury was substantially as follows: Dr. Haas and Dave Haas, Jr., had arrived from a business trip to Marksville, shortly

before 6 p. m., and when Dr. Haas entered, he said to Smith that he had received a letter and was surprised at it and that he was going to ask for Smith's resignation as manager of the mill. Smith is alleged to have replied that he would kill Haas before he would resign. Dr. Haas then said he would call a special meeting of the board of directors to call for the resignation. Dr. Haas then proceeded to dictate a letter to Mikell, instructing him to mail the letter calling a meeting of the board of directors. There were nine copies of the letter being written and sealed.

They also declared that while Dave Haas was at work on the letters, he turned and said to Smith: "You and I have been mighty good friends for a long time, but I do not like your threat to kill my father." A few moments later the shots were fired. Smith was not armed, according to the jurors. A pencil was found clenched in one of Smith's hands after he had fallen.

Sheriff Couvillion announced this afternoon that Dr. Haas was in jail in Marksville, and that he would be given a preliminary examination there next Tuesday.

Owing to the prominence of the principals in this unfortunate tragedy, it has created intense excitement in Bunkie and Alexandria.

Dr. Haas is one of the wealthiest citizens in Central Louisiana, having for more than a quarter of a century been identified with many enterprises in Avoyelles, Rapides and adjoining parishes. He is engaged in banking and agriculture, cotton oil and manufacturing and other industries. He is one of the largest land owners in this section of Louisiana. He was formerly president of the Commercial Bank and Trust Company of Alexandria and is still a director in that institution. He is also head of a banking institution in Bunkie. He was formerly president of the Louisiana Bankers' Association, and for many years has been one of the leading cotton men of this section.

Mr. Smith, the dead man, was also well known throughout this section. He formerly resided at Cheneyville, where he was engaged in agricultural pursuits. For several years, however, he has resided in Bunkie, where he has been engaged in agricultural operations and also in the cotton oil business, in which he is reputed to have been very successful.

The dead man was about 53 years old. He is survived by his wife, formerly Miss Theo S. Selt, of Natchitoches, to whom he was married about two years ago, and one son. He also leaves his mother, Mrs. Mary E. Smith, of Cheneyville, four brothers, S. T. Smith and John Smith, Cheneyville; W. H. Smith, of Ponchatoula, La., Horace Smith of Bunkie, and one sister, Mrs. L. L. Dejean, of Ponchatoula.

He was a graduate of the Louisiana State university, a member of the Masonic fraternity, and was also a Knight Templar and Shriner. His funeral took place at 3 o'clock this afternoon, with interment in the Christian church cemetery at Cheneyville.

# DR. HAAS COMES TO NEW ORLEANS FOR MEDICAL AID

## Banker Indicted for Killing Is Suffering from Heart Trouble

Dr. W. D. Haas, wealthy banker and business man of Central Louisiana, who is under indictment for manslaughter in connection with the killing some time ago of Robert Hill Smith, came to New Orleans Sunday for medical attention by Dr. S. Denux, also of Marksville.

Late Sunday night, Dr. Haas, who had registered at The Roosevelt and checked out earlier in the day, went to the home of Dr. R. B. Harrison, his son-in-law, of 2327 Napoleon avenue, where Dr. George S. Bel, of this city, Dr. Denux and Dr. Harrison held a consultation. The physicians refused to make any statement regarding the condition of Dr. Haas, or whether he would enter one of the New Orleans hospitals for treatment. According to Dr. Harrison, his father-in-law is suffering from heart trouble, but Dr. Harrison refused to say whether the condition of Dr. Haas is regarded as serious.

# DR. HAAS' TRIAL AS SLAYER OPENS AT MARKSVILLE

## Planter, Banker Claims Self- Defense in Killing of R. Hill Smith

Marksville, La., March 29.—The jury to try Dr. W. D. Haas, business man, planter and banker of Alexandria and Bunkie, charged with the killing of R. Hill Smith, was selected in the district court here today and examination of witnesses was commenced when the afternoon session opened. Judge L. P. Gramillion is presiding and the case is expected to be concluded late Saturday.

The killing of Smith by Dr. Haas occurred on the night of December 20, 1926, in the office of the Union Cotton Oil Company of Bunkie. Dr. Haas, claiming self-defense, has been out on bail since short time after the killing occurred.

There are approximately ten witnesses each to be examined by both the state and defense. The health of Dr. Haas, which became impaired shortly after the killing, and which delayed the trial, is very much improved, it is announced, and he listened coolly to the testimony given.

The first witness to testify was Dr. H. C. Jones of Bunkie, who was called to see Smith after the shooting and by whom the corpus delicti was proven. Delthunt Dubroc, night watchman

to see Smith after the shooting and by whom the corpus delicti was proven. Delthunt Dubroc, night watchman at the Union Oil Company's mill at Bunkie, who entered the office just prior to the killing, related the circumstances as he said he saw them. His testimony was the same as he gave at the preliminary trial shortly after the killing occurred. Mrs. A. C. Clover of Bunkie also testified.

By agreement between the attorneys for the prosecution and defense, the testimony given by Alvin Martin, negro boy, at the preliminary examination was read into the record, as Martin has disappeared and could not be located. At 4:30 o'clock this afternoon, court adjourned and the jury was taken to Bunkie, where the members inspected the office of the cotton oil company and the premises where the killing occurred.

The jury selected to try the case is composed of the following members: R. B. Lemoine, traveling salesman, Mansura; Cleo Gauthier, farmer, Moreauville; Jack Paul, farmer, Vick; Filmore Norman, mechanic, Marks-ville; P. S. Brouillette, highway em- ploye, Marksville; S. J. Bordelon, farmer, Plaucheville; James Villermatette, merchant, Hessmer; Clayton Woodson, farmer, Center Point; By- ron F. Lemoine, merchant, Big Bend; E. J. Beridon, Jr., merchant, Ham- burg; C. J. Moncia, merchant and farmer, Moncia; T. H. Wilson, farm- er, Vick.

Dr. Haas is being defended by John H. Overton and John R. Hunt- er of Alexandria; Judge Allen Bor- delon and Wade E. Couvillion of Marksville. The prosecution is be- ing conducted by Lester L. Bordel- on, Avoyelles parish district attor- ney, Howard B. Warren of Shreve- port and G. L. Porterie of Marks- ville.

## VICTIM'S WIDOW CITES ADMISSION AT KILLING SCENE

### Tells of Dr. Haas Trying to Justify Fatal Shooting at Bunkie

Marksville, La., March 30.—"Mrs. Smith, I did this. I had it to do, he threatened my life. I will do all I can for you. I am sorry, as sorry as I can be."

This was the statement made by Dr. W. D. Haas, on trial in the Avoyelles parish district court for the killing of R. Hill Smith, cotton oil mill man at Bunkie, December 30, 1926, to Mrs. Theodosia Self Smith, widow of the dead man, upon her arrival at the office of the cotton oil company on the fatal afternoon, where she had gone after receiving the information that her husband had been shot, ac- cording to the testimony today of Mrs. Smith, a state witness at the trial of Dr. Haas.

Mrs. Smith declared that when she arrived at the office Dr. Haas walked up to her, held out his hand, and made the statement referred to.

J. A. Keller, superintendent of the Union Cotton Oil Company's mill, testified that he was notified by Dub- roc of the shooting about 6 p. m. and was in the mill yard at the time, walking towards the office. When he arrived at the office he found Dr. W. D. Haas, Dr. A. M. Haas, Franklin Mikel and W. D. Haas,

Jr., in the office. He got there before Smith died. Smith was lying on the floor on his back. His feet were near the stool at which he usually sat and his body was lying diagonally across the office floor. Dr. A. M. Haas, he said, was mopping the wounds and asked the witness to turn the wounded man over on his side and hold him in that position as he was suffering with nausea.

Keller said he called attention to the fact that Smith was holding a short piece of pencil in his right hand. During this time, he said, Dr. W. D. Haas was still standing at the corner of the desk. There was a pistol in an open drawer by Dr. Haas. Keller gave a demonstration of the position of Dr. Haas and the general position showing about where the stool was with respect to the position of Dr. Haas.

Keller testified that he had been in the office previous to the shooting. He had gone there to fix up a sample can of oil to send away to be analyzed. He said he heard a conversation in which Smith asserted: "Doctor, you haven't treated me right." Haas replied: "I have treated you as white as a man could, Hill; name some instances where I haven't treated you right." Then Smith spoke of two seed deals, in which he said he was treated badly. Haas then asked Smith for his resignation as manager. Smith said he would not resign.

Haas then said he would call a meeting of the board and force Smith's resignation, Keller testified. When Haas said that, Smith said: "If you do, I will make it hot for you." Haas then said: "You have made an awful threat, young feller, we can settle this right now." Smith said: "I am unarmed and I know you always carry a gun."

At this juncture, W. D. Haas, Jr., came up and said: "Hill, we have been good friends for a long time, but you have threatened the doctor's

life and I shall make this a personal matter between us." Keller said he left the office at this time. The witness told attorneys for the defense that he did not see Alvin Martin, the negro boy who testified at the preliminary examination, in or about the office at any time. Martin has disappeared, and his written testimony was read at the trial yesterday afternoon.

1 Apr 1928, New Orleans Times-Picayune, p. 1

## HAAS ACQUITTED AFTER HE TELLS OF KILLING SMITH

### "Self-Defense" Plea Upheld by Jury Verdict at Marksville

Marksville, La., March 31.—"Not guilty" was the verdict tonight in the case of Dr. W. D. Haas, financier and planter of Alexandria and Bunkie, who was on trial for manslaughter in district court here as a result of the fatal shooting of R. Hill Smith, cotton oil mill manager, at Bunkie, December 20, 1926. The jury was out forty-five minutes.

Dr. Haas' story of the killing to the jury this morning, in which he claimed he shot in self-defense, was upheld by other defense witnesses. Smith not only threatened his life, but was reaching for a gun when Dr. Haas fired at his former friend and business associate, according to the accused man.

Dr. Haas' effort to show that he acted merely in self-defense was a feature of the trial which has been in progress since Thursday. He declared that after his endeavors to make some amicable settlement of the controversy with Smith the latter got off an office stool on which he had been sitting and started for a revolver which was in a nearby drawer. "Then I pulled my pistol and fired twice in rapid succession and Smith fell to the floor," stated Dr. Haas, calmly.

Other members of the Haas family who testified were: Dr. A. M. Haas, W. D. Haas, Jr., Mrs. Franklin Mikell and Franklin Mikell, Dr. Haas' son-in-law. The following witnesses were placed on the stand to testify as to Dr. Haas' good character: Sheriff U. T. Downs of Rapides, Sheriff C. P. Couvillion of Avoyelles, Landry Ducote of Cottonport, Mayor E. H. Talliaferro of Bunkie, Ed Coco of Mansura, L. E. Gremillion of Alexandria, L. P. Garcia and L. P. Carter of Bunkie.

After the defense rested arguments by the attorneys were commenced. G. L. Porterie of Marksville and Howard B. Warren of Shreveport for the prosecution were the first to be heard. Judge Allen Bordelon of Marksville, John H. Overton and John R. Hunter of Alexandria, the three leading counsel for the accused, then addressed the jury. District Attorney Lester L. Bordelon made the closing argument.

Dr. Haas in his testimony declared that he had gone to Marksville the afternoon of December 20, with his son, W. D. Haas, Jr., and on his return to Bunkie he went by the Union oil mill for the purpose of having Franklin Mikell write some letters calling a meeting of the board of directors of the Union Oil Company.

He said he did not expect to see Hill Smith at the mill, but was not surprised to find him there, as Smith was not unaccustomed to be there at that hour. He said his trip to Marksville was on business. On arriving at the Union oil mill he walked in

and bade Smith and Mikell a good evening, and immediately walked up to Smith's desk and said: "Hill, I got your letter, and I am surprised and disappointed." Smith, he said, made no answer. Dr. Haas then said: "If that is your attitude toward the mill, I think you should resign." Smith said he would not resign.

#### DEATH THREAT RECALLED

The letter referred to by Dr. Haas was presented to the court after it was identified by Dr. Haas, and was read to the jury. The letter from Smith to Dr. Haas contained an expense account, a request for more salary and a statement of the amount of back salary of an extra \$50 per month for the previous year and for a 5 per cent commission on \$12,000 profits claimed, all totaling more than \$1800. Dr. Haas asserted that the books of the mill showed that instead of making \$12,000 profit, the mill had actually lost \$2000. He said at the July meeting of the board the proposition of raising salaries had been threshed out and had been decided adversely. The letter, he said, was concerning matters that had been settled and should not have been reopened, except for \$50 per month for the use by Smith of his own personal car.

"When Hill Smith said he refused to resign," Dr. Haas continued, "I said I will call a meeting of the board and request your resignation." Smith, according to the testimony, replied, "If you do, you have got to kill me, or I will kill you." Dr. Hill questioned "Hill, do you realize what a serious threat you have made?" Smith replied: "Yes, and I mean every word of it." Dr. Haas said, "Well, we will settle it right now." Smith replied: "I am unarmed."

#### HAD BEFRIENDED VICTIM

When he made that reply, Dr. Haas said Smith backed away from him and went to the end of the desk. Dr. Haas said he then called to Smith: "Why have you threatened my life? What have I done to you?" Smith

replied: "Plenty." Dr. Haas said: "Name some of the things I have done." Smith replied that Haas had made him compromise a suit, in which he lost \$500, he had accused him of buying plant seed through the mill, and said Dr. Haas had required more for the seed he had sold to the mill than was being paid by others. Dr. Haas said he denied that these charges were true, and told Smith that he had treated him as white as anyone could treat another. He cited instances where he had loaned money to Smith and to Smith's family, had put up the money for him when the mill lost most of its capital, for Smith to remain in the business and mentioned other occasions when he had befriended Smith.

After this discussion, Dr. Haas said that his son, W. D. Haas, Jr., walked up to Smith and said: "Hill, we have been exceptionally good friends. We can settle this matter." Dave and Mikell then went about sealing the letters that Mikell had written to the board. In the meantime, Dr. Haas said Keller, the mill superintendent, came into the office and heard part of the conversation, and Dubroc, the night watchman, came in and deposited a pistol in the table drawer.

#### REACHED FOR GUN

Dr. Haas declared that he later endeavored to make an amicable settlement of the controversy, and remarked to Smith: "Hill, you have threatened my life," and Smith replied: "Yes, and I mean it, too." At the same time, Dr. Haas said, Smith reached for the gun in the table drawer, getting off the stool at the time.

Dr. Haas said then he shot Smith. He declared that he felt that his life was in danger; that Smith was a man of resolution and determination and would not make an idle threat. He said he considered Smith one of his best friends. He had assisted Smith financially, and had retained him as manager of the Union Oil mill in spite of the objections of other stockholders.