

## CCHS Heritage Notes for 3-4-14

In October of 1940, O.A. Kirby, a downtown Vermillion clothing store owner, shot and killed Peter Olson, an attorney in partnership with Mr. Payne. It was the first day of pheasant hunting season and Kirby had purchased a new shotgun. Stepping out of his clothing store across the street from the Citizens Bank, and carrying his new shotgun, he crossed the street and climbed the stairs to the Olson & Payne Law Office located over the bank. He calmly walked into Mr. Olson's small office, aimed the shotgun at Olson's head and blew him away. Kirby then attempted to fire on Mr. Payne, but a young law student doing research in the office grabbed the barrel of the shotgun and deflected the charge to the ceiling, where it blew a large hole. Phil Crew, the law student, then wrestled Kirby for possession of the weapon.

They both fell to the floor, rolled into the hallway, down the flight of stairs, out the front door, across the sidewalk, and out into the street gutter. Meanwhile, Mrs. Jim Fields, the office secretary who had just witnessed the murder, calmly phoned Police Chief Hap Fowler. Thinking that it was just a routine request from Mr. Payne to serve some papers, Chief Fowler began walking up the street toward the law office. He then saw Crew and Kirby rolling in the gutter, with both of them grasping the shotgun. Fowler then ran up to the struggling pair, placed his foot on the gun, and pinned both combatants to the street.

Chief Fowler then took Kirby over to his clothing store across the street to find out what had happened. Kirby told Fowler he had just killed Olson and had to leave as he still had five more killings to perform and Chief Fowler was one of the names on his list. Fowler then flagged down a passing citizen and asked him to call the sheriff's office. Deputy Sheriff Pat Purcell arrived and Kirby was transported to jail. While awaiting trial, Kirby attempted to kill himself twice in the county jail. He was later tried and convicted of murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 5 years, he was released on parole.