

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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DUBIOUS REPORTING



On April 4, 1900 the Rochester Courier reported the following story under the headline "Fought For His Life Within His Coffin." It follows:

"The hamlet of Sandy Creek in Orleans County, fourteen miles northeast of Albion, is excited over a discovery made yesterday, which revealed the fact that one of its citizens had been buried alive.

On January 4th Vett Case died from scarlet fever. The remains were interred in the Sandy Creek Cemetery. Case was 35 years old, and was unconscious for several hours before he was pronounced dead by the attending physician.

On Friday of last week Case's father was taken violently ill, and on Sunday he died. When arrangements were made on Monday for burial in the family plot, it was discovered that there was no room for the elder Case without a re-arrangement of the bodies already interred. It was, therefore, decided to remove the casket containing the body of Vett Case to a place several feet distant. This was done.

Upon disinterring the casket the grave-diggers were astonished to find that the glass front in the coffin was shattered, the bottom kicked out and the sides considerably sprung. The lid was removed and the body found resting upon its face, the arms bent at the sides, and in the tightly-clinched fingers were handsfull of hair.

"There is no doubt that Case was buried alive, but the date of his issuance from the trance, of course, is not known. Both bodies were interred this afternoon." The hamlet of Sandy Creek is now known as Murray.

This story peaked my interest, so as a result, I consulted one of the funeral directors at Merrill-Grinnell to inquire of him just when embalming became readily prevalent in the area. He indicated that certainly by the early 1920's it would have become customary. So indeed, such a situation as

this could possibly have occurred if the body had not been embalmed. However, with a little more checking into this "Case" I discovered a brief article in an Albion paper totally refuting what the Courier had reported under the title "A Cruel Fake." It is as follows:

"A cruel story was sent out from Albion to Buffalo and Rochester papers last week, to the effect that the body of Sylvester Case, a Murray farmer who died in January last, had been disinterred in order to make room, by changing its location on the family burial lot, for the body of his father, who died a few days after a brief illness, and that the position and condition of the casket and body furnished positive proof that the man had been buried alive and had regained consciousness in the grave and made an awful struggle. The story was false in every particular. The body was buried at Kendall and has not been taken up while the body of the senior Case was buried at Sandy Creek. The effect of such a report on the family of the deceased can well be imagined, and the parties who originated and gave publicity to the story should hang their heads in shame."

Well I guess that makes it fairly clear that the first story was a complete hoax. Noting the date on the article, I'm given to wonder if this wasn't someone's attempt to create an April Fools joke. After all, this past April first we read in the Journal Register about "Plans For a Naval Park at the Medina Canal Basin," which was in reality a prank.

It was Oscar Wilde who stated "One should always be a little improbable." It is obvious to me that down through the ages correspondents and reporters must work according to this maxim. These stories point out the fact that you should never always believe everything you read in the papers, especially around April Fool's Day.