



John Henry “Jack” LaShell (1854 - 1910)

A wealthy man and elected official in the small town of Lothrop, Montana. John, known for his love of liquor and malicious temper, was murdered by his wife who claimed self-defense and was exonerated from all charges.

- **1854-Birth.** John was born on October 26, 1854 in St. Anthony, Hennepin, Minnesota to William and Harriet Clifton LaShell who were of English descent.
- **1866-Married.** John married Julia Ann Burke on November 18, 1866 in Gallatin County, Montana. They had six children: Harriet Elizabeth (1894), Edwin Patrick (1895), Paul Sylvester (1898), John Henry (1901), Walter Allen (1905), and Frank Anthony (1908).
- **Early 1890s-Arrived.** John and his family arrived in the lumber town of Lothrop, Montana in Missoula County. (Lothrop is located near Alberton, Montana at Petty Creek.) John was a wealthy man and owned a considerable amount of property around Lothrop. It is said that he was well liked and knew every man in the Coeur d’Alene’s.
- **1897-1900-School Clerk.** John was the school board clerk of Lothrop.
- **1902.** Reservoir Creek was renamed Lashell Creek.
- **1902-1906-Constable.** John was the elected Constable of Lothrop.
- **1907-1909-Livery.** John owned a livery stable in Lothrop.
- **January 28, 1910-Shooting.** On Friday, January 28, 1910, John LaShell quarreled with his wife because she refused to give him money to drink away. When John eventually received \$10, he immediately headed to the saloon. After a few hours, John came back demanding another \$20. When Julia refused, John hit her with a chair. John then grabbed an axe and threatened to kill their son, Paul. At that point, Julia went into the kitchen, grabbed an empty bottle, and hit John on the head from behind. John was a bit stunned for a moment in which Julia gathered her children and went out of the house. She then sent her eldest son for the saloonkeeper.
- When Mr. Bergset (the saloonkeeper) arrived, he looked a long time through the window at John who was running around the dining room with an axe in his hands. Julia insisted Mr. Bergset go inside and take the axe away from John because her daughter remained inside. Mr. Bergset said he was afraid to go in alone because John was brandishing a new double bit axe in his hands. Eventually though, Mr. Bergset did go inside and retrieve the axe but not without a struggle and John refusing to leave the premises. Julia insisted that John be handcuffed for the night. However, Mr. Bergset and a couple neighbor men hauled John back to the saloon to keep him away from the family and sleep the liquor off.
- When Mr. Bergset stepped out to haul in some firewood, John snuck out of the saloon and returned to his house. John stayed only long enough to issue an ominous warning: John was never going to sleep in this house again until he killed his wife and children. He would return once Julia fell asleep and start the killing by dragging his son, Paul, to the river and strangling him.
- This time when John left for the saloon, Julia nailed closed all but the dining room door and then hid the axe. John arrived at the house a few hours later to be told by Julia that there was a single bed in the dining room where he could sleep, as she was afraid of him and would not open any other door. John began pounding on the locked door and threatening to chop them all up. After a few moments of silence, John began chopping the door with another axe he found in the shed. Julia warned him that she had a bottle and would ‘break his head’ if he came in. The chopping increased in intensity. Julia then scrambled under the bed to find a cleaver when she saw her son’s gun. She grabbed the gun and shot John as he came through the demolished door brandishing the axe. Julia was distraught and immediately sent children to notify the neighbors and fetch the doctor.
- **January 29, 1910-Death.** John died on Saturday, January 29 at noon from damage caused by the bullet lodged in his head. Members of the Eagles lodge arranged the service and burial.
- **Inquest and Verdict.** Julia was very distraught over what she had done. She claimed self-defense and was not taken into custody. A formal inquest was held on January 31, 1910. The Constable testified that he was often called to the LaShell home when John became very quarrelsome and disruptive from liquor. He stated

that John appeared to bear unusual animosity towards his boys who were always able to outrun him and avoid beatings. Neighbors testified that John had been drinking heavily for nine years and in their opinion, John was a good man to keep away from when he was in liquor. All witnesses testified that Julia LaShell was a fine woman known for her hard-work and family values, they all agreed that she deserved better than what she had. The jury exonerated Julia LaShell, stating she acted in self-defense.

- **Family afterwards.** Julia married Conrad Brown in 1913 and died in 1934. Her grave sits on a hill in Lothrop, Montana. The LaShell children all scattered and left the area. Harriet lived and died (1971) in Spokane, Washington. Edwin was employed with Northern Pacific Railway Company and died (1945) in Sheridan, Wyoming. Paul died (1973) after having been imprisoned in Deer Lodge prison from 1947-1949 for forgery. John died (1969) in Oregon. Walter died (1956) California from a brain hemorrhage sustained in a fight. Frank died (1991) in Idaho.

Information obtained from news articles in The Daily Missoulian and research provided by Dawn Dambach.