A Death at Crooked Creek: The Case of the Cowboy, the Cigarmaker, and the Love Letter, by Marianne Wesson (book review)

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Abstract
Marianne Wesson's A Death at Crooked Creek tells the story of one of the most intriguing mysteries in American legal history. For evidence teachers, and possibly even law students, Mutual Life Ins. Co. v. Hillmon is a classic nineteenth century mystery story. The case raises the question: Was the deceased John W. Hillmon, who had recently taken out the extraordinary sum of $25,000 in life insurance, or was it Frederick Adolph Walters, an itinerant who had left Iowa a year earlier?

In addition to teaching at the University of Colorado School of Law, Wesson is the author of three mystery novels. Possibly for that reason, Wesson is interested in writing something other than a legal history of this extraordinary case. Instead, Wesson is interested in a character study, in the people who plodded their way through trial after trial, as well as in the story of whose body it was.

Wesson writes well and the stories, despite the numbing nature of trial after trial, move quickly along. A Death at Crooked Creek is a productive mélange of fact and fiction, of mystery and science, and an enjoyable meditation on law and persons.

Recommended Citation
Death at Crooked Creek

Wesson Marianne Marston Book Services 9780814784563: This is an extraordinary and ground-breaking book, a wonderfully creative mix of fact and theory, imagination and drama. In A Death at Crooked Creek, Marianne Wesson re-examines the long-neglected evidence in the case of the Kansas cowboy and his wife, recreating the court scenes that led to a significant Supreme Court ruling on the admissibility of hearsay evidence. Wesson employs modern forensic methods to examine the body of the dead man, attempting to determine his true identity and finally put this fascinating mystery to rest. A Death at Crooked Creek, The Case of the Cowboy, the Cigarmaker, and the Love Letter by Marianne Wesson. Buy the eBook.

In A Death at Crooked Creek, Marianne Wesson re-examines the long-neglected evidence in the case of the Kansas cowboy and his wife, recreating the court scenes that led to a significant Supreme Court ruling on the admissibility of hearsay evidence. Wesson employs modern forensic methods to examine the body of the dead man, attempting to determine his true identity and finally put this fascinating mystery to rest. This engaging and vividly imagined work combines the drama, intrigue, and emotion of excellent storytelling with cutting-edge forensic investigation techniques and legal theory. Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, Hillmon, Sallie E, Wesson, Marianne. Year: 2016.

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A Death at Crooked Creek book. Read 14 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. One winter night in 1879, at a lonely Kansas campsite near... The companies' case rested on a crucial piece of evidence: a faded love letter written by a disappeared cigarmaker, declaring his intent to travel westward with a "man named Hillmon." In A Death at Crooked Creek, Marianne Wesson re-examines the long-neglected evidence in the case of the Kansas cowboy and his wife, recreating the court scenes that led to a significant Supreme Court ruling on the admissibility of hearsay evidence. Wesson employs modern forensic methods to examine the body of the dead man, attempting to determine his true identity and finally put this fascinating mystery to rest. Professor Marianne Wesson is both a well-respected law professor and legal scholar as well as a widely read mystery novelist. In this remarkable book she combines her skills as a scholar and as a storyteller to impressive effect. The case went through five trials and two appeals to the United States Supreme Court before it was finally settled in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among the many mysteries of the case was a love letter from a missing cigarmaker whom the insurance companies claimed was actually the dead man, a steamer trunk belonging to John Brown, which was never opened during any of the five trials to search for evidence, and a missing tintype photograph that could have provided crucial evidence.