

0. THE MURDER and the COVER-UP - Story Preface

1. WHO WAS CELIA?

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3. TRIAL of CELIA, A SLAVE

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Illustration depicting the interior of a slave cabin, with a fireplace. Online, courtesy Library of Congress. Expecting that Newsom would disregard her pleas to be left alone, Celia was waiting for "the master" when he came to her slave cabin on the night of June 23rd. Not only was she waiting, she was holding a heavy stick which she planned to use if he refused to leave.

Celia struck Newsom, with the stick, the first time.

She hit him again, when he came back toward her. Thomas Shoatman—a [witness at trial](#)—described what turned-out to be a murder weapon:

The stick with which she struck was so large as the top part of the chair, of a [Windsor chair](#) above the seat but not so long.

Celia wanted to hurt Newsom, to keep him away. [According to William Powell](#), another witness at the subsequent trial, she did not intend to kill him:

...She said it was bedtime, or about 10 o'clock when he came down to her house. She said she had made threats. Said she'd threatened him that she would hurt him on the condition that he would not leave her alone. Threatened to hurt him, not kill him.

She said she wanted to hurt him, not to kill him ... said she had told the white family. She said that she had threatened that she would hurt him if he did not quit forcing her while she was sick. I do not know what her condition was as to her health - had heard she was sick. Do not know that she was pregnant, judge from her appearance that she was. Said that she did not want to kill him, struck him but did not want to kill.

Celia may not have wanted to kill Newsom, but she struck him with such force that she produced an unintended result.

Newsom, the slave owner and rapist, dropped dead in Celia's cabin.

Realizing Newsom was dead, Celia panicked. [Powell's testimony, at trial](#), relates his later conversation with her:

She said he came into the house - think she said he came to the door ... she said she struck him twice. She became alarmed. Said she became afraid she would be hung for it.

Frightened at what she had done, Celia tried to dispose of Newsom's body in her fireplace:

Said that after she had killed him, the body had laid a long time, she thought an hour. She did not know what to do with it, thought she might try to burn it.

She put the body on the fire and kindled the fire on and around it with some staves that were made for hogs heads and were in the yard. She bound the body up and placed some of the bones under the hearth, and under the floor between a sleeper and the fireplace.

She said she took out the ashes before day. I don't recollect where she said she put the ashes. It was late when he came down, late bed time. She doubled him up to put him in the fireplace.

Celia had no idea how long it takes to [combust a human body](#). She did not know that her fireplace would never produce a temperature hot-enough to burn Newsom's remains.

Her efforts to dispose of the body, however, left incriminating evidence. It would be enough for Missouri's prosecuting attorney to charge her with murder.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-MURDER-and-the-COVER-UP-Celia-A-Slave>

Media Stream



Windsor Chair - 19th Century

Image of 19th-century Windsor Chair, measuring 27 1/2" high x 25 3/4" wide x 17 3/4" deep. Online, courtesy Kaminski Auctions.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Windsor-Chair-19th-Century>