

TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE

TAMPA, FLORIDA

THE TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE – FRIDAY, MAY 28, 1909

LABELLA'S ALLEGED SLAYER IS ON TRIAL

HEARING OF ORNIFERIO CHIRAMENTE OPENS IN CIRCUIT COURT

Much Trouble Expected in Getting Jury – Two Special Venires Having to be Drawn

At 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon, Orniferio Chiramente was placed on trial in circuit court for the murder of B. LaBella, the rich New York commission merchant and broker whose body was found buried near the dam of the Tampa Electric Company on the Hillsborough River some months ago. The case is one of the most celebrated in the murder annals of the state, and intense interest will be manifested in it from start to finish. The evidence against Chiramente forms the most convincing chain of circumstances possible to conceive.

Chiramente sat in the court room yesterday apparently little moved while the task of selecting the jury was going on, but when the trial actually opened tense lines began to show in his face, evidencing the strong anxiety which he felt. While Deputy Sheriff Will Spenser, who hunted down most of the clues, testified, Chiramente paid careful attention to his attitude was a study as the officer related point after point of apparently damning evidence against him.

Fits Cogs into Cog

Mr. Spenser told of going to the defendant's home in West Tampa the next day after the body of LaBella had been found and of asking Chiramente if he knew where LaBella was. Chiramente made a characteristic gesture of innocent and stupid amazement, declaring that the wealthy Italian had left for New York.

"No." replied Spenser with emphasis, "LaBella has been murdered and we have found his body." Chiramente again executed the gesture of mock amazement. After asking Chiramente why he had not reported LaBella's mysterious absence to the authorities and receiving no satisfactory explanation, Spenser took him in charge.

Signs of Encounter

When Chiramente was arrested, his face was bruised and cut near the nose, showing that he had had a recent encounter with someone. One of his hands was in the same condition. Pursuing his investigations further, Spenser found Chiramente's pipe near the grave and an empty jug, which Chiramente is known to have purchased full of wine from Phillip Licata.

Near a stump hole was found a pool of blood and wagon tracks were seen leading to the spot. The tracks were measure and later found to coincide with Chiramente's wagon. On the wagon were found clots of blood and evidences that someone had applied soap and water in a vain attempt to remove the blood. The standards from the wagon had been removed with the apparent attempt to disguise its appearance.

Was Look for Hogs

N.S. Roberts, a farmer and hog raiser who lives near the place where LaBella's body was discovered, told of making the find. He had been missing some of his hogs for some time and set out to try to locate them. Seeing the newly disturbed ground, he conceived the idea that someone, after stealing and marketing some of his porkers, had buried the entrails there. On digging down a few feet he was horrified to find a man's knee sticking up. He telephoned the authorities, who responded in an automobile.

County Physician Hamblin told of making an examination of the body of LaBella and how he had come to the conclusion that LaBella had been murdered by being struck over the head with a blunt instrument. This idea was later borne out by finding in a palmetto clump not far away of a bloody wagon standard. Another witness, a countryman who had traded horses with Chiramente, saw Chiramente and another man driving away in Chiramente's wagon from the place where the body was later found and on the day on which it is believed the murder was committed.

Theory of State

It is the theory of the state that LaBella was lured to take a drive with Chiramente and his accomplice, who has never since been heard of on the plea that they would show LaBella a fine orange grove. On the way they purchased a jug of wine, of which they led LaBella to drink heavily and while under the influence of it they managed to kill him with the wagon standard after they had reached a place safe from observation. A copy of a Havana paper was found around LaBella's head in the grave, and this is thought to show that LaBella was sleeping at the time of attack, with the newspaper as a protection from flies.

Today other witnesses for the state will unfold the revolting story in its fuller details and startling revelations are expected during the progress of the trial. It is expected that the court room will be crowded daily. The defense will have a number of witnesses present, and it is believed that an attempt will be made to prove an alibi.

Had Hard Work

Considerable trouble was experienced yesterday in getting a jury to try the case. Many excuses were made by jurors, and the questions asked by both State's Attorney Phillips and Macfarlane & Davis, for the defense, were close and dealt with circumstantial evidence. Before a jury could be secured, the regular venire of fifty had been exhausted and two additional ones of eight and twelve respectively had to be summoned. The jury is as follows: L.B. Cooper, R.W. Pritchard, C.W. Whittle, R. L. West, R.W. Trapnell, John Browning, J.M. Byrd, G.W. Gause, G.D. Wiggins, W.M. Harding, C.A. Gause and S.B. Burnett.