



Murdering Holiness: The Trials of Franz Creffield and George Mitchell (Law and Society)

Jim Phillips, Rosemary Gartner

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This work explores the story of the "Holy Roller" sect led by Franz Creffield in the early years of the 20th century. Creffield, a charismatic, self-styled messiah, taught his followers to forsake the worldliness of material goods and their families and seek only salvation. As his teachings became more extreme, the local community reacted by tarring and feathering him and incarcerating his mainly female followers in the asylum and other institutions. Creffield himself was imprisoned after a conviction for adultery, but revived the sect shortly after his release. George Mitchell, the brother of two of Creffield's female followers, pursued him to Seattle and shot him dead. In a trial that made headlines across America, Mitchell was acquitted, ostensibly on the basis of insanity but in reality due to the "unwritten law" that justified killing in defence of a female relative who had been sexually "wronged". Mitchell himself was then murdered by his own sister, Esther, whom he had claimed to be defending. In a final twist to this story, Esther did not stand trial for the murder of her brother but was placed in an asylum, ultimately taking her own life by poison a few years later. In this micro-history, Phillips and Gartner explore the relationships among formal and informal law, gender relations and religious repression. It should interest scholars and general readers in law, religion and gender, as well as anybody interested in the history of Oregon and Washington.

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