

LETTERS LEFT BY MR. RAWLS

Contents Were Not Made Public by Relatives Last Night

ENDS HIS OWN LIFE

Ill Health is Reason Assigned for His Tragic Death. Funeral Held This Afternoon

Four letters were written last week, addressed and sealed Monday night, were found in the pocket of Holman Calvin Rawls, 34, prominent business man who shot and mortally wounded himself between 9 and 9:30 a.m. yesterday morning, while in the basement of the Q.E. Rawls & Son store in Main street. The letters were not made public yesterday, and it is unknown whether they contained any information hearing on the tragic self-inflicted death.

The letters according to those closely associated with Mr. Rawls at his store, were addressed to Mrs. H. C. Rawls, his wife; Alphonsus Cobb, his brother-in-law; Miss Jennie Satterwhite, his secretary, and Claire Herndon, chief clerk in the store. They were found in his pocket shortly after the body was discovered. Last night the letters had not been distributed.

Despite the lack of definite information as to the cause of the act, the only reason that could be assigned by those closest to Mr. Rawls in his business and personal affairs, was ill health. It was emphatically declared by each person closely associated with him, that business affairs of the deceased are in splendid condition and could not have been either directly or indirectly responsible.

The death of Mr. Rawls occurred a short time after the store opened. He arrived at the store about 9 o'clock, and was accompanied by his wife. After going through the usual early morning routine in his office, Mr. Rawls went to the basement. His wife had gone on to make some purchases at either stores and none of the employees noticed him as he left his office. A few minutes before 9:30 Ben Leathers, an employee went to the furnace in the basement. Returning he saw the body of his employer stretched on the floor. Not taking time to ascertain Mr. Rawls' condition, the young man rushed to the store and informed Claire Herndon the chief clerk. Mr. Herndon went to the basement where he found the m--- body. Mrs. Rawls had returned to the store in the meantime and was present when her husband's death was made known. Aided by friends and relatives who gathered the employees called physicians and made arrangements for the body to be taken to the Howerton undertaking establishment. It was removed afterwards to the home in Morehead Avenue. Coroner A. C. Jordan decided an inquest was not necessary.

Immediately after news of the death of the young business man, became generally known, a number of rumors concerning his action were circulated. One of the rumors was to the effect that Tuesday night he had attempted to end his life by turning on the gas while in his bath room. Another was to the effect that he had talked of killing himself before going to the store and that his wife had taken a pistol away from him. Members of

the immediate family denied both stories declaring that Mr. Rawls had not signified any desire to die and had given the family no reason to believe he would commit a rash act. He did spend restless night, it was said.

It was declared that for the last three years Mr. Rawls has been gradually nearing a complete nervous breakdown. Several weeks ago he had an attack of Spanish influenza and since that time has been in an extremely nervous and despondent condition. Efforts, it is said, have been made by all members of his family to have him take a complete rest, but pressure of business had kept him from so doing.

Alfonso Cobb, brother-in-law to Mr. Rawls stated yesterday afternoon that the deceased suffered a severe fall during the "big fire" of 1915, when he fell into an elevator shaft and was injured about the head. Since that time his head had given him a great deal of trouble, and his mind has not been as clear as previously, Mr. Cobb said.

Information obtained from employees of the store made it appear as if Mr. Rawls had contemplated suicide or had believed something would happen to him which would take him from business. He often talked of his failing health, and asked employees advice as to what to do, it is said. The employees, however, were of the opinion that their employer was taking his health too seriously, but did not imagine he would take any desperate course.

Last week Mr. Rawls cleaned his Colt's 32 automatic pistol. He remarked at the time, according to his secretary, that a pistol should be cleaned at least once each year. Last Monday Mr. Rawls wrote the letters referred to. He told his secretary that should anything happen to him, he wanted the letters distributed to the persons to whom they were addressed. The secretary stated that she thought nothing strange about the remark.

The death of Mr. Rawls caused a decided shock throughout the city and especially in the business district where he has for many years been a leading and popular figure.

The Q. E. Rawls and Son store which has been in charge of the deceased since his father's death December 18, 1916, is one of the oldest in the city. It was established more than 47 years ago. Since early manhood Mr. Rawls had been associated with the business, and for more than 10 years has been chief buyer and store manager.

The deceased has been a consistent member of the First Presbyterian church, and succeeded his father as treasurer for the church. He has been a member of the Durham Rotary club since its organization, and succeeded his father as a director in the Citizens National bank. He has also for many years been an active member of the Merchants association of the city.

Throughout the war, Mr. Rawls took a leading part in every movement to help push it to a successful conclusion. Without compensation he toured the east section of North Carolina urging the sale of War Savings stamps and establishing agencies for their sale. He offered his services to the Y.M.C.A. for work in France, and regardless of personal

sacrifice made every effort to help the government. Although he has never held municipal office he has taken an active interest in the city of Brunswick, Ga., the marriage taking affairs, and has helped morally and financially in movements for the better of Durham.

In January 1911, he was married to Miss Haddie Parker McCullough, of place at her home. He is survived by his wife and three children, Hannah Majorie, 6; Charlotte Holman, 4 and Mary McCullough, 2. Also, his mother and two sisters, Mrs. Elizabeth Strickler, of Petersburg, VA., and Mrs. Nellie Rawls Cobb, of this city.

The funeral services will take place at the home in Morehead Avenue this afternoon at 3:30 o'clock. They will be conducted by Dr. E. R. Leyburn, pastor of the First Presbyterian church and interment will be made at Maplewood cemetery.

The pall bearers will be: L.A. Tomlinson, Gilbert C. White, H.R. Goodall, Claire Herndon, Ben Leathers and J. L. Morehead.

Floral bearers will be: L. B. Markham, R. A. Knight, J. D. Pridgen, M. E. Newsom, T. C. Worth, D. W. Horton, T. A. Winder, R. L. Baldwin, T. F. Southgate, F. B. Webb, J. M. Lipscomb, and E. I. Bugg.

Among those from out of town who are here to attend the funeral are: Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Strickler, of Petersburg, Va.; Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson, of Athens, Ga.; Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Waff, of Norfolk, Va.; Malcolm McCullough, of Jacksonville, Fla., and Mrs. Helmar of Duke.

[Published in *The Morning Herald*, Thursday March 6, 1919, page 3]

transcription by Parker Agelasto