

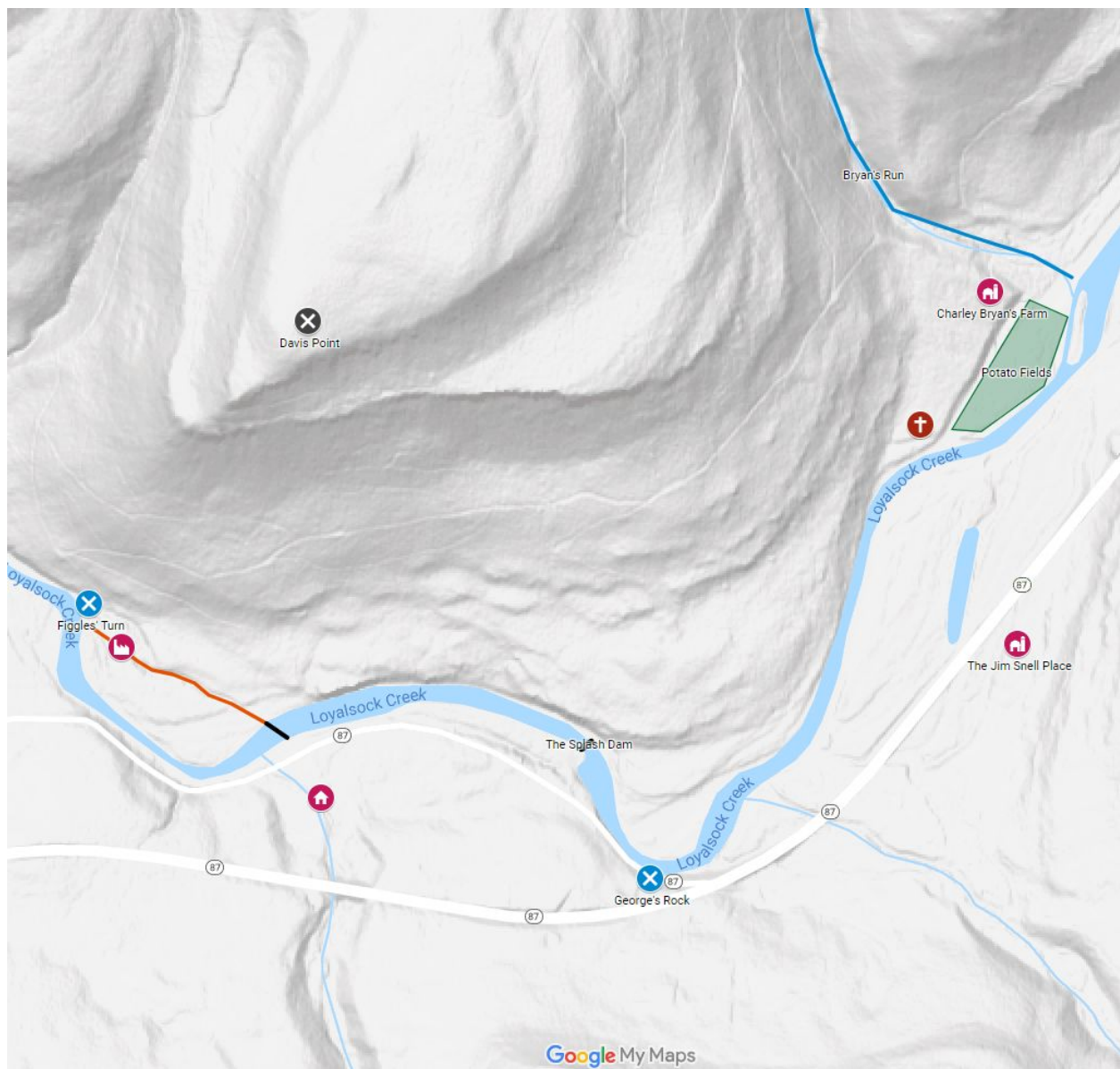
# “Dam Blown Up With Dynamite on Loyalsock”

By George Burgess ([sglburgess@gmail.com](mailto:sglburgess@gmail.com)), with Logan Burgess

This was a column headline in the local Laporte newspaper, *The Republican News*, on April 7, 1904.

Having grown up on the Little Loyalsock, about four miles upstream from Forksville, and being descended from loggers on both sides of the family, and having two great grandfathers who drove logs on the Loyalsock, and having a grandmother related to the perpetrator, I heard this story in the 1960's.

The dynamited dam was The Big Dam, or The Splash Dam. The location of that dam on the Loyalsock is still known to this day as The Splash Dam. [Click here](#) to see an interactive map of the area and click on individual locations to learn more about each place.



In the last half of the 1800's and into the early 1900's hemlock bark, rich in tannic acid, was utilized to tan cow hides. Tanneries were constructed in close proximity to large stands of hemlock, as it was cost effective to transport the raw cowhides rather than the hemlock bark.

The hemlock bark was hauled to the tanneries on horse-drawn or oxen-drawn wagons in the summer and on sleighs in the winter.<sup>1</sup> The hemlock logs were floated to big sawmills at Slab Town (now Loyalsockville) and Williamsport. During this era, Williamsport claimed (probably rightly so) to be the lumber capital of the world. Splash dams were constructed and operated to produce a "splash" to float the hemlock logs downstream to a sawmill when the normal water level was inadequate.

Large tracts of hemlock were harvested for the bark. The peeled trees trunks were bucked into log length and skidded by horse or oxen to a landing on the bank of a stream. Where possible the main landing would be alongside the pool created by the splash dam, but many landings, piled high with peeled hemlock logs, were located on the banks of the Loyalsock downstream from The Big Dam.

When a splash was needed, the gates of the splash dam would be closed, backing up the water. When the dam was full, the landing would be "busted" and the logs rolled into the pool, the gates would be opened and loggers wearing caulk (pronounced "cork") boots and wielding canthooks or pikepoles would go out on the logs and guide the logs into the chute. Dangerous work. Grandpa Rightmire told me that one time McEwan (Superintendent for Emery Lumber Company, the boss over the logging and log driving operation) was observing this operation from the bank and a logger fell off a log and went under. McEwan said, "By Jesus, if he comes up he better have that goddammed cant hook with him!" And he did.

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<sup>1</sup>Grandpa Rightmire told me the following story: "Dad (*Ed Rightmire*) was walking over to Forksville to visit a relative, (*probably Albert Rightmire*) late in the winter. When he got to the Hillsgrove covered bridge, there was a sleigh loaded with bark on the bridge, and the teamster was whipping his horses bad, but they could not pull the sleigh. The driving surface on the bridge was of course dry and had dirt on it, and the sleigh wouldn't slide. Dad told the teamster that it was too much of a load for his horses on the bridge, and that he would help him unload half the bark, take the half-load across, off load it, and go back get the other half, and then reload. The man told him it was none of his business and that his horses would darn well pull the load if they knew what was good for them. Dad climbed up on the load, pulled the man off, and beat him up. They then handled the load the way Dad had suggested. Dad (*who lived in Lycoming County*) said he didn't go over to Sullivan County (*both Hillsgrove and Forksville are in Sullivan County*) for a while because he figured there was probably a warrant out for his arrest on assault charges. (*I asked at the Sullivan County Court House in 2018 and no record of such a warrant was found.*)

Following are some newspaper articles regarding work on The Big Dam in 1882:

Wyoming Democrat  
(Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania)  
4 Aug 1882

**Forksville.**  
Haying and harvesting is progressing finely under the favorable weather.  
—Corn is growing very fast and will no doubt be a good crop.  
—I. C. Brown has his haying and harvesting done.  
—The Burrows portable steam saw mill is being removed to the Cape Dam four miles below here. Arrangements are being made to rebuild the large splash dam at that place. Mr. Pardee, the wealthy coal operator, owns a controlling interest in the stock.  
—Moses Miller, who cut his foot badly a few days ago, is able to be out on crutches.  
—The temperance meeting Saturday evening was well attended. Judge Bedford and other speakers were in attendance.  
—Mrs. Rebecca Molyneux, of Forks, was buried last Tuesday. Mrs. Molyneux was one of the oldest persons in this part of Sullivan county. Her age was eighty-six years. She was the first white child born in what is now Sullivan county. She was the mother of thirteen children, had eighty-four grand children, and seventy-four great grand children. The deceased was a quiet and unassuming Christian lady, beloved and respected by all. The weary itinerant always found a welcome under her hospitable roof, with food for both body and soul. She will be greatly missed by all, but our loss will be her eternal gain.  
ANON.

Wyoming Democrat  
(Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania)  
8 Sep 1882

**Forksville.**  
Thunder shower yesterday afternoon, thermometer up to ninety in the shade.  
—Mrs. A. L. Smith, of New Albany, who has been sick for some time, has so far improved as to be able to visit her parents, Judge Wright and wife, of this place.  
—The saw mill and turning shop at Elk Creek, Hillsgrove township, owned by Aaron Lewis, was consumed by fire the morning of the 27th. Supposed to be the work of an incendiary. No insurance.  
—Work has commenced on the large splash dam four miles below this place. A large number of hands will be employed. The old dam is being taken out and the new one will be built on the old foundation. Mr. S. S. Rogers, of this place is foreman.

*Note that "the old dam is being taken out". I have not yet found when the original dam was constructed.*



Wyoming Democrat  
(Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania)  
17 Nov 1882

were more than  
ONE.  
**Forksville.**  
The political canvass is over.  
—A great Democratic victory won and Don Cameron is vanquished.  
—Hon. M. A. Rogers & Son, of Forksville, have just returned from New York and Philadelphia, where they have purchased and are now receiving the finest and largest stock of goods that has ever been brought into Western Sullivan, and are selling at greatly reduced prices.  
—The large splash dam, four miles below here, is about finished. It is built in a workmanlike manner. Much credit is due the foreman, Mr. S. S. Rogers, of this place, for the neatness and despatch with which the work has been done.  
—We are at last to have a railroad. The Williamsport & Binghamton R. R. for which a charter was obtained at Harrisburg, Nov. 5, 1882, with a capital of \$2,600,000, is now a sure thing. The road will be one hundred miles long, eighty miles from Williamsport to State line and twenty from there to Binghamton, being a direct line from Boston to St. Louis. The route will be from Williamsport up the Loyalsock creek to Forksville, thence up the Little Loyalsock to Dushore, down Sugar Run to Wyalusing, then up Wyalusing creek to Binghamton. The chief engineer, the president of the company and several of the directors drove over the route a few weeks ago and were highly pleased with the situation. A meeting of the directors was held at the City Hotel in Williamsport, Thursday last, the proceedings of which we have not learned.  
—Capt Miller of Lake Run is mak

Note: "Mr. S. S. Rogers" is Sadler Rogers, the man who supervised the construction of the covered bridge at Forksville in 1850, when he was 18-years old; and later the covered bridge above Hillsgrove.

Note: A railroad was planned from Williamsport through Dushore!  
Never built.



Excerpt from letter Charles W. Kehler to George Burgess, August 29, 2001:

I am not sure of the date of construction of the splash dam but the picture was taken in November 1895 by Jacob Shufelt. Men in picture standing on the dam was J. Leroy Chilson (my grandfather). The gates were blown up April 4, 1904 and the dam was taken out in December 1905 by Leroy Chilson and his brother Hartley Chilson.

**Transcription:** I am not sure of the date of construction of the splash dam but the picture was taken in November 1895 by Jacob Shufelt. Man in picture standing on the dam was J. Leroy Leroy Chilson (my grandfather). The gates were blown up April 4, 1904 and the dam was taken out in December 1905 by Leroy Chilson and his brother Hartley Chilson.



Charles Bryan had a farm just upstream of this large splash dam. He raised potatoes in what was then known as "the Bryan Potato Fields." When the bear-trap gates on the dam were closed, water backed up over Charlie Bryan's potato fields, much to his detriment and consternation.

On August 18, 1902, one Robert McEwen of the Emery Lumber Co, owner and operator of the Splash Dam, filed a Criminal Complaint before a Justice of the Peace, related to alleged actions taken by Charles Bryan (**transcription follows**)::::

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT. The Reporter-Journal Series of Blanks.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Sullivan County, ss.

Before me, one of the Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Sullivan, personally came Robt. McEwen of Emery Lumber Co of Williamstown in said County, who being duly sworn according to law, saith that on July 26<sup>th</sup> 1902 at about sunset delivers other times Charles Bryan feloniously willfully and maliciously and wantonly did go on the premises of the said Emery Lumber Co carried off one lever from the Wolf Trap Iron works and by such means also he destroyed an other lever and cut the iron lever that worked the wicket-gates and and took limbs of off plant from the said dam and he also made threats that he would destroy said dam by blowing it up with ammunition

Sworn and subscribed before me this 18 day of August 1902

John W. Rogers J.P. Signed, Robt McEwen

**Transcription** of the Criminal Complaint, filed August 18, 1902:::

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT.

The Reporter-Journal Series of Blanks

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Sullivan County, ss

Before me, one of the Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Sullivan,

personally came *Robt McEwen Agent for Emrey Lumber Co.*

of *Williamsport* in *Lycoming* County, who being duly sworn according

to law, saith that *on July 26, 1902 on or about and at divers other times Charle Bryan feloniously, wilfully and maliciously and wantonly did go on the premisses of the said Emrey Lumber Co. carried off one lever from the Woolf Trap Dam in Sullivan Co owned by said company also he destroyed an other lever and bent the iron lever that worked the Dual(?) gates and and toss timber of off platform on said dam. And he also made threats that he would destroy said dam by blowing up with dynamite.*

Sworn and subscribed before me this

*18 day of August 1902*

*John W. Rogers JP*

Signed, *Robt McEwen*

**The District attorney, W. Howard Hill brought the above complaint before a Grand Inquest during the September 1902 Sessions of the Sullivan County Court.**

This resulted in an "Indictment for injuring a dam, a misdemeanor" against Charles Bryan, filed Sept 15, 1902. Witnesses were: H. M. Chilson, H. K. Dewer, C. Williams, Tracy Bennett, R.D. Lancaster, and Robert McEwen.

No 10 Sept Session 1902	Commonwealth vs Charles Bryan	Indictment for injuring a dam, A Misdemeanor	Robert McEwen - prosecutor	A True Bill J. C. Jennings for me Sept 15, 1902	Filed Sept 15, 1902 Thomas Estlin Clerk	Witnesses	H. M. Chilson H. K. Dewer C. Williams Tracy Bennett R. D. Lancaster Robert McEwen
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There appears to be nothing further in Court House records regarding this Indictment.



A year and a half later, in 1904, Bryan carried out his threat to blow up the dam, under "advice of an attorney"; and subsequently a warrant was issued for the arrest of Charles Bryan:

Philadelphia Inquirer, April 5, 1904

### **Farm Flooded: Blows Up Dam**

Special to The Inquirer.

**WILLIAMSPORT, Pa., April 5.**—Acting on the advice of an attorney. Charles Bryan to-day blew up a dam on the Loyalsock Creek with dynamite.

The dam was used to splash logs down the creek, and Bryan alleged that it backed water over his farm. A warrant is out for his arrest, charging him with interfering with navigation of a public stream.

An article published April 6, 1904. Note the partial destruction of the dam "is reported by Charles Bryan"

### **BLEW UP BIG DAM**

#### **ON THE LOYALSOCK**

A dam used for splashing purposes above Hillsgrove, on the Loyalsock, by the Emery Lumber company, was partially destroyed by dynamite. It is reported by Charles Bryan, upon whose land it is alleged water was backed by the dam. Bryan stationed guards on the road to protect the public, and is said to have acted upon the advice of a lawyer, but it is stated that nevertheless he is amenable to the law if the Emery Lumber company, which will sustain considerable loss, desires to prosecute him.



Transcription follows below.

# BLEW UP GATE OF BIG DAM ON LOYALSOCK

## Charles Bryan, Acting Under Advice of Counsel, Uses Dynamite.

### AFTER PLACING GUARDS ALONG THE HIGHWAY

#### But Special Act of the Legislature Makes Him Amenable to the Law—Watchman Was Absent.

Yesterday at noon a big dam used for splashing purposes on the Loyalsock creek, four and one-half miles above Hillerroy, was partially destroyed by dynamite. The work was done by Charles Bryan, who took the precaution to station guards above and below the dam, to keep people who might be passing along the road out of danger. Mr. Bryan did the work believing that he had a right to destroy the dam, which he alleges backs the water over his property. The dam is located not far from the headwaters of the Loyalsock. It is controlled by the Emery Lumber company, and is used to splash the logs down the stream when the water is too low to float them successfully without it. It is also used to splash the landings below the dam as they are broken and the logs dumped into the stream. It is a very important structure for the company, as without it it would be very difficult to get the logs out of the upper Loyalsock.

Employed a Watchman.

Bryan is known to have complained

Loyalsock.

Employed a Watchman.

Bryan is known to have complained about the dam. To prevent him carrying out threats the Emery Lumber company has kept H. J. Chilson constantly on guard. It was while Chilson was at dinner yesterday that Bryan appeared at the dam. With him were two men, who he stationed as guards along the public road which parallels the creek, one above and the other below the dam. Then he placed two sticks of dynamite under the gate and lit the fuses. The explosion tore out the gate and allowed all the water to escape. Just how much damage was done has not yet been determined, but it is known that it is of such a nature that permanent repairs cannot be made without great trouble, and not in time for this year's run of logs.

The Guards Are Known.

The Loyalsock drive had not yet reached the dam. For this reason the work will not be immediately delayed. Landings below the dam had been broken, and the logs were in the stream, but it is thought that by the time the logs reach these temporary arrangements will have been made. Bryan's men who were on guard are known. Aside from being responsible for the damage done, those who took part in the affair may be made to answer for interfering with the navigation of a public stream. For this offense, the legislature has passed a law which provides for the protection of navigable streams and others using navigable streams providing a penalty of three years in the penitentiary. No arrests have been made.

It is said for Bryan that he acted under the advice of counsel and that the

## BLEW UP GATE OF BIG DAM ON LOYALSOCK

Charles Bryan, Acting Under  
Advice of Counsel, uses  
Dynamite

### AFTER PLACING GUARDS ALONG THE HIGHWAY

But Special Act of the Legislature Makes Him Amenable to the Law. Watchman Was Absent.

Yesterday at noon a big dam used for splashing purposes on the Loyalsock creek four and one-half miles above Hillsgrove was partially destroyed by dynamite. The work was done by Charles Bryan who took the precaution to station guards above and below the dam to keep people who might be passing along the road out of danger. Mr. Bryan did the work believing that he had a right to destroy the dam, which he alleges backs the water over his property. The dam is located not far from the headwaters of the Loyalsock. It is controlled by the Emery Lumber company, and is used to splash the logs down the stream when the water is too low to float them successfully without it. It is also used to splash landing below the dam as they are broken and the logs dumped into the stream. It is a very important structure for the company, as with it it would be very difficult to get the logs out of the upper Loyalsock.

### Employed a Watchman

Bryan is known to have complained about the dam. To prevent him carrying out threats the Emery Lumber company has kept J L Chilton constantly on guard. It was while Chilton was at dinner yesterday that Bryan appeared at the dam. With him were two men whom he stationed as guards along the public road which parallels the creek, one above and the other below the dam. Then he placed two sticks of dynamite under the gate and lit the fuses. The explosion tore out the gate and allowed all the water to escape. Just how much damage was done has not yet been determined, but it is known that it is of such a nature that permanent repairs cannot be made without great trouble, and not in time for this year's run of logs.

### The Guards are Known

The Loyalsock drive had not yet reached the dam. For this reason the work will not be immediately delayed. Landings below the dam had been broken and the logs were in the stream but it is thought that by the time the logs reach the dam temporary repairs will have been made. Bryan's men who were on guard are known. Aside from being responsible for the damage done, those who took part in the affair may be held to answer for interfering with the navigation of a public stream. For this offence, the legislature has passed a Law meant for the protection of lumbermen and others using navigable streams providing a penalty of three years in the penitentiary. No arrests have been made.



## Dam Blown Up With Dynamite on Loyalsock.

Charles Bryan, Wallace Snell and Myron Williams Charged With the Offense.

The big dam used for splashing purposes on the Loyalsock creek four miles above Hillsgrove was partially destroyed by dynamite Monday. The work was done by Charles Bryan, it is said, who took the precaution to station guards below and above the dam, to keep people who might be passing along the road out of danger. Mr. Bryan has a farm on the flats above the dam which he finds is damaging to his property at this season of the year. The dam is owned by the Emery Lumber company, and is used to splash the logs down the stream when the water is too low to float them successfully without it.

The owners of the dam knowing that Mr. Bryan complained about the dam, prevented him carrying out threats by keeping H. L. Chilson constantly on guard. It was while Chilson was at dinner Monday that Bryan appeared at the dam and is alleged to have placed twenty sticks of dynamite in the two wicket holes and set them off. With him were Wallace Snell and Myron Williams whom he stationed as guards along the public road which parallels the creek. The explosion tore out the gates, badly damaging the shoot walls and flumes.

Mr. McEwen foreman for the lumber company, was at Laporte Wednesday preparing for legal action against the offenders. Mr. Bryan claims to have acted in accordance with good council. The prospects for a big lawsuit is open and the question to be raised aside from being responsible for the damage done, those who took part in the affair may be made to answer for interfering with the navigation of a public stream. For this offense, the legislature has passed a law meant for the protection of lumbermen and others using navigable streams providing a penalty of three years in the penitentiary. Warrants were served on Bryan, Snell and Williams Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. McEwen said he would commence at once to repair the dam which would require two weeks or more with a large force of men. Draw gates will be put in for temporary use. The Loyalsock drive has not yet reached the dam and for this reason the damaged parts will be hurriedly patched.

Republican News, Laporte, Pa,  
Thursday, April 7, 1904

"Dinner" was at noon. The evening meal was "supper."

Note that it is alleged in this article that "twenty sticks of dynamite" were deployed.

Wallace Snell and Myron Williams were stationed on the road, above and below the dam.

Maybe temporary repairs were made to support the 1904 log drive season. We do know from Charles Kehler, "the dam was taken out in December 1905 by Leroy Chilson and his brother Hartley Chilson."



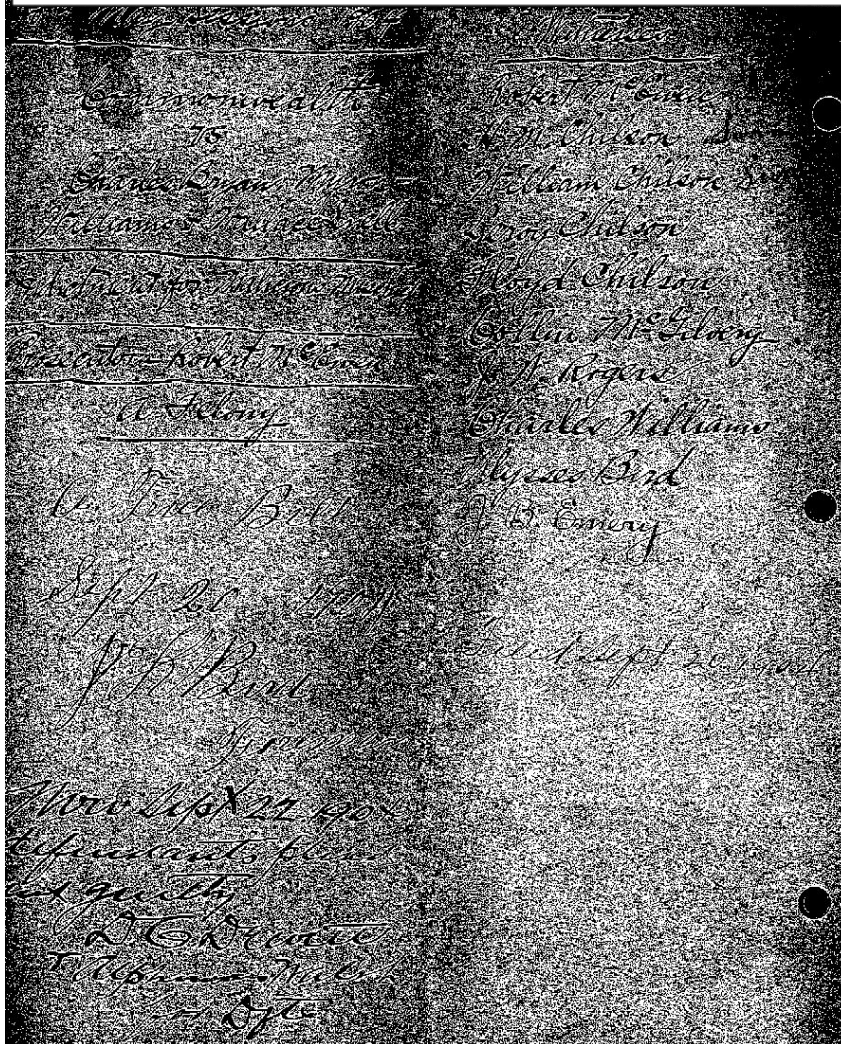
**Warrent for arrests of Bryan, Snell, and Williams, April 9, 1904**

**Bond set for Williams (\$600), Snell (\$600) and Bryan (\$1000) to appear at next term of court, September 1904**

**Commonwealth witnesses fees:  
50 cents per day; 6 cents per mile**

**Complaint filed by McEwen, agent of the Loyalsock Logging Co., against Bryan, Snell, and Williams before John M. Rogers, Justice of the Peace, dated 6<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1904. (Note: Emery Logging Co. now Loyalsock Logging Co.)**

**Formal charges filed by W. Howard Hill, District Attorney, May, 1904**



Transcription of Charging Document (highlights added):

<p><u>May Session 1904</u></p> <p>Commonwealth</p> <p>vs</p> <p>Charles Bryan, Myner</p> <p><u>Williams &amp; Wallace Snell</u></p> <p><u>Indicment for malesious michief</u></p> <p><u>Prosecutor Robert McEwen</u></p> <p><u>A Felony</u></p> <p>A True Bill</p> <p>Sept 20, 1904</p> <p>J K Bird</p> <p>Foreman</p> <p>Now Sept 22, 1904</p> <p>defendants plead</p> <p>not guilty</p> <p>D G Dewitt</p> <p>-----</p> <p>for -----</p>	<p><u>Witnesses</u></p> <p>Robert McEwen</p> <p>H. M. Chilson Son</p> <p>William Chilson Son</p> <p>Leroy Chilson</p> <p>Floyd Chilson</p> <p>Collen McGilory</p> <p>J. A. Rogers</p> <p>Charles Williams</p> <p>Ulysses Bird</p> <p>J. B. Emery</p> <p>Filed Sept 20, 1904</p>
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Below is the verdict filed under this case, followed by a **transcription**.

No. 24.—Verdict of Jury  
Sullivan Publishing Co's. Uniform Series of Law Blanks.

In the Court of *Quarter Sessions*  
of the County of Sullivan,  
of *May Sessions, 1904*,  
No. *9*

*Commonwealth*  
VERSUS  
*Charles Bryan,  
Wallace Snell,  
Myren Williams*

**VERDICT.**

And now to-wit: *Sep. 23*, 1904, we, the Jurors  
empannelled in the above entitled ~~case~~ *wherein* *Defendants not*  
*guilty* *Prosecutor, to pay the costs*

*T. Edison Fiester* Foreman.

**Commonwealth VERSUS Charles Bryan, Wallace Snell, Myren Williams  
May Sessions, 1904**

**VERDICT**

**Sep. 23, 1904, Defendants not guilty. Prosecutor, Robert McEwen to pay the costs.**

**T. Edison Fiester, Foreman**

Not Guilty! And so the story ends.

I sought court records of the actual trial proceedings, but apparently no transcription or documentation of the trial itself was made. My only conjecture is to note that all of the witnesses, save Ulysses Bird (and possibly Charles Williams), were witnesses for the prosecution. Ulysses Bird was a noted land surveyor at that time and possibly was called by the defense to verify that the dam would back up water to cover Bryan's potato fields.