



Fiddler Turned Failed Ax Murderer

For one brief not-so-shining moment in 1904, an unknown farmer was northern Missouri's most notorious character since "that dirty little coward" shot Mr. Howard.

Richard Byron "Doc" Martin served his Schuyler County neighbors with his skills as a lay veterinarian (hence the nickname) and a musician (hence the fiddle). He was also a skilled drinker, whose tipping ways and bad temper got him booted from his home. On May 30, 1904—Memorial Day, oddly—Doc returned, seeking reconciliation with wife Louisa. Finding their teenage daughter Maude home alone, Doc whiled away the day honing an ax and knife, terrorizing the girl with dark threats against Louisa should she refuse. On

Louisa's return, Doc stated his case. When Louisa rebuffed him, he charged with his ax, striking three blows on her head and shoulder. She was spared mortal injury by her period bun-top hairdo and the intervention of adult son William, who ran to her defense, pummeling his father until he desisted. Apparently convinced he'd murdered Louisa, Doc staggered into a neighbor's orchard and used the freshly sharpened knife to slit his own throat. He died almost instantly. Louisa recovered from a fractured skull and lived another 20 years.—by J.R. Sanders, a great-grandson of Doc Martin; the photo is from the Sanders Collection. To read a 1904 newspaper account of the tragedy, see www.historynet.com/magazines/wild_west. **ww**