



Tiera Farrow, dressed for graduation from the Kansas City School of Law, 1903.

“But I’m Only a Woman”

Tiera Farrow’s Defense of Clara Schweiger

by Gerald R. Butters Jr.

On May 1, 1915, Louis Schweiger lit a large cigar in the main corridor of the Kansas City, Missouri, courthouse. His former wife, Clara Schweiger, approached him from behind with a gun and began firing shots into him. Mrs. Schweiger had just learned that her attorney’s motion to set aside her divorce and allow her to obtain custody of her son Norman had been rejected by the judge in the case. Immediately after the shooting, Tiera Farrow, Mrs. Schweiger’s attorney, rushed to her side to provide moral and legal support. These two women would become embroiled in a case that would make national headlines as Farrow defended Clara Schweiger on murder charges. It would be one of the first times that a female attorney defended another woman on murder charges in the United States.

The language used by the press in the media circus surrounding the Schweiger murder trial was highly indicative of contemporary attitudes toward female professionals. As the murder trial continued in court, Mrs. Schweiger took on secondary importance as Farrow became the focus of the media spotlight. This article will examine how the popular press regarded female attorneys in the mid-1910s and why the suspected murderess became less important than the woman who defended her. Farrow worked in a profession that still marginalized its female members, yet her adoption of traditional gender prescriptions in the course of the trial won her the support of male journalists covering the case. Although Farrow was an active feminist, she espoused traditionalist views on gender roles, allowing her to fight for women’s rights while still retaining the support and sympathy of the Kansas City press.

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Tiera Farrow was born in Indiana in 1880, the third of ten children. At age fourteen, her family moved to Garnett, Kansas. Her father, a merchant, owned the local general store. Tiera was active in the family business and could hold her own with men who came to see her father.¹

As a high school student, Farrow dreamed of becoming an attorney. In her autobiography *Lawyer in Petticoats*, Farrow explained, "I was ambitious, but uncertain of how to earn my livelihood and work toward the fulfillment of my dreams. . . . If I were only a man, I'd certainly strive to become a lawyer. Were there any women lawyers, I wondered. I had never heard of any."² Female lawyers actually had been practicing in the United States since the 1860s. Iowa had been the first state to admit a woman to the bar in 1869. A number of successful female lawyers practiced in Kansas during the 1890s, but the marginalization of these women by the press may have led to Farrow's ignorance about her potential role models.³ The 1900 Census Bureau reported 1,010 female lawyers in the United States. Women were a distinct minority in the profession, making up less than 1 percent of all lawyers, and law remained one of the most difficult professions for women to enter in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁴ Quotas and restrictive barriers severely limited the number of women admitted to law schools. Susan Ehrlich Martin and Nancy C. Jurik note that those law schools that did allow women limited the number allowed per class.⁵

Farrow realized that to meet her career goals she needed to relocate to a larger city. In 1899 she moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where she worked as a stenographer for a grain company. Now employed in a predominantly male environment, Farrow quickly recognized the distinct gender prescriptions placed on women in the workplace. She asserted, "The men [at the office] exhibited a dictatorial and haughty manner toward me. . . . Frequently I was reminded . . . that was no place for a pretty girl. . . . I noticed that the men took office liberties that were not permitted to

me. . . . The men also had more freedom in their manner of dress."⁶ Within the confines of the grain company office, distinct yet unwritten rules separated the sexes.

Farrow began writing to law schools, only to be informed that women were not admitted. Her research, however, eventually led her to the newly opened Kansas City Law School, which had an evening program of study. She met with the hesitant registrar, William Borland, who insisted she have a male escort walk her to and from classes if admitted to the program.⁷ She was accepted, and from 1901 to 1903 Farrow dedicated her life to law school. As the only woman in her class, she was initially considered an oddity but quickly became "one of the gang." As Farrow learned about the legal inferiority of women in her studies she "began to see existing laws through the eyes of a woman in a man's world." In 1903 Farrow became the first woman to graduate and practice law in Kansas City, Missouri.⁸

Marriage was problematic for professional women in the early twentieth century. Farrow became engaged to a classmate while in law school, and her fiancée spoke enthusiastically of having them open a practice together. However, she broke off the engagement when she discovered that he intended for her to do the office work while he went to court. Farrow would only be married briefly once during her lifetime. Like the majority of female lawyers in the early twentieth century, as an independent professional woman, she would remain single.⁹

After graduation, Farrow made the rounds looking for a position at a law firm. When the male partners realized that she was a law school graduate rather than a would-be stenographer or secretary, they treated her as "just another woman freak." Eventually the firm of Dail and Carter hired her at a lower salary than she had received as a stenographer at the grain company.¹⁰

After the Dail and Carter partnership dissolved, Farrow decided to try her hand at politics. She ran against Democratic candidate Avid Chadborn for the position of city treasurer in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1907. The press duly noted the unique situation of two female candidates vying for the same position. Farrow defeated her opponent, becoming the first woman elected to office in that municipality, and she was re-elected for a second term in 1909.¹¹ She

1. Perl W. Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and its People* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911), 965–66.

2. Tiera Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats* (New York: Vantage Press, 1953), 10–11.

3. Lorraine Dusky, *Still Unequal: The Shameful Truth About Women and Justice in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1996), 138; Susan Ehrlich Martin and Nancy C. Jurik, *Doing Justice, Doing Gender* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996), 105; Linda D. Elrod, "Women in the Legal Profession," in *The Law and Lawyers in Kansas History: A Collection of Papers Presented at the 116th Annual Meeting of the Kansas State Historical Society, October 4th and 5th, 1991* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991), 104.

4. Virginia G. Drachman, *Sisters in Law: Women Lawyers in Modern American History* (Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173–74.

5. Martin and Jurik, *Doing Justice, Doing Gender*, 107.

6. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 14–16.

7. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

8. *Ibid.*, 14–16.

9. *Ibid.*, 33; Drachman, *Sisters in Law*, 178.

10. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 33.

11. Dawn Bradley Berry, *The Fifty Most Influential Women in American Law* (Louisiana: Lowell House, 1996), 78.

lived in Kansas City, Kansas (where today a street is named after her), but she practiced law in Missouri.

Following her terms as city treasurer, Farrow applied once again to numerous Kansas City law firms for a position. After having been turned down by every firm, Farrow opened a practice with another young female graduate of the Kansas City Law School, Anna L. Donahue. Donahue and Farrow worked not as partners in the same firm but as independent contractors, sharing the same office. The new "firm" was a first for Kansas City, Missouri, and the local press found it noteworthy. A *Kansas City Star* article on the two women appeared in the January 4, 1914, issue. It read, "Donahue and Farrow — Attorneys at law. Are either of the attorneys in? Both are pretty and young and fresh looking and both are simple and sincere in manner. Like most intellectual women, these clever young lawyers are sweet and frank."¹²

The *Star's* choice of adjectives to describe the women is indeed fascinating. Young male lawyers certainly would not be described in such physical terms, but clearly the newspaper did not want to portray the women as "man-nish," a negative term frequently used to describe professional women of the period. The *Star* continued, "Since the two girls opened their law office two years ago in the New York Life Building they have served hundreds of clients, most of them women."¹³

Women who received legal work often labored in low paying specialties deemed appropriate for women, such as probate law and domestic relations.¹⁴ Later in her career, Farrow emphasized the difficulty the two women had in making ends meet in their practice. Most men would refuse to hire the services of female lawyers, while most women had little independent wealth of their own to pay Donahue and Farrow for their services. Farrow claimed, "I nearly starved the first five years of my career."¹⁵

Many female lawyers held on to the belief that women were a unique client group based on the argument that they would feel better talking to other women. Other female attorneys rejected this notion, arguing that if women in law were to be truly successful they had to have clients of both sexes. The economic realities of practicing law in Kansas

12. *Kansas City Star*, January 4, 1914; Donahue and Farrow, 1912–1916 file, Tiera Farrow Papers, Wyandotte County Historical Society, Bonner Springs, Kans. All newspaper citations for this article were obtained from the Tiera Farrow Papers at the Wyandotte County Historical Society. Many of the clippings were incomplete in regard to their sources, dates, and page numbers. These papers are cited according to the data Farrow transcribed in the clipping file.

13. *Kansas City Star*, January 4, 1914.

14. Martin and Jurik, *Doing Justice, Doing Gender*, 107.

15. *Olathe Daily News*, October 20, 1971.

and Missouri meant that female lawyers had to take any clients and any form of payment that they could obtain. Farrow pointed out, "When I first began to practice . . . women did not have much money of their own. And not infrequently I have had to take fruits and vegetables or a set of crocheted doilies or other handiwork in return for legal services."¹⁶ Farrow, therefore, was eager to take on any clients, even if their economic resources might be limited. One such client was Clara Schweiger.

Clara and Louis L. Schweiger were married in February 1902 and lived together until Louis filed for divorce in October 1913. Schweiger, vice president of a construction



Clara Schweiger, whom Tiera Farrow represented in a divorce case and subsequently defended for the murder of her husband, Louis L. Schweiger.

company, filed for divorce on the grounds that Clara had an uncontrollable temper. When the divorce was granted, Louis was given custody of their nine-year-old son, Norman.¹⁷ Clara Schweiger approached Tiera Farrow about contesting the initial divorce decree. Clara was determined to preserve her marriage and to keep custody of her son.

16. "Legal profession Gaining Ever Increasing Number of K.C. Women," *Kansas City Journal*, May 3, 1931.

17. Inventory Folder, KC242, Clara Schweiger Trial Records, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri–Kansas City; "Shot at Courthouse," *Kansas City Star*, May 1, 1915.

A passage in Farrow's autobiography is telling in regard to the attorney-client relationship. Farrow begins by describing Schweiger in predominantly physical terms: "She was in her late thirties, tall and thin with light hair and pale blue eyes. Her complexion was sallow and drab; she used no make-up. Lines of worry marked her face." The physical description perfectly complemented Farrow's claim that Schweiger was a "woman of colorless personality."¹⁸

But Schweiger's bland characteristics stood in sharp contrast to her emotional traits. Farrow claimed, "She was extremely nervous and upset as she related, interrupted by spells of crying, the many details of her domestic difficulties through the years, stressing the unfair and harsh treatment she has received at the hands of her husband."¹⁹

Like many of Farrow's female clients, Schweiger had little money of her own but Farrow took the case anyway. She explained that she would file a motion to have the divorce set aside. If that motion was successful, the judge would grant a new trial; if the motion was denied, Farrow would file an appeal.

The court date for the divorced couple was May 1, 1915. Farrow commented on the acute differences between the former husband and wife who refused to acknowledge each other in court. Mr. Schweiger was "a well-dressed man . . . stockily built, the picture of health. Mrs. Schweiger, in comparison, was shabbily attired and her physical appearance was certain evidence of her ill health."²⁰

The judge ruled unfavorably for Mrs. Schweiger. The attorneys and their clients walked out of the courtroom after the judge's decision and entered an elevator. As it descended, Farrow explained to her client that she would have to drop off records at the clerk's office and asked whether Clara would like to accompany her. Obviously distraught, and now in close proximity of her ex-husband, Clara failed to answer her attorney.

The elevator opened on the ground floor, and Farrow walked immediately into the clerk's office. She then reported hearing a series of shots. People began heading for cover, into the clerk's vault or crouching behind their desks.

At this point the media's retelling of the events and Farrow's account in her autobiography differ sharply; neither version is fully reliable. The press, in this heyday of

sensationalistic journalism, realized that it had a "hot" story on its hands. On the other hand, Farrow gave her account almost forty years after the events, which calls into question the reliability of her memory.

Farrow claims she realized her client was in trouble and rushed into the corridor. Hysterical, Clara kept crying out, "I loved him! My darling! . . . I want Judge Bird [the judge in the proceedings]." Quickly attempting to size up the situation, Farrow went to Clara's aid, noticing that her client was bleeding. She then discovered that Clara had shot both herself and her ex-husband several times each. Louis Schweiger was stretched out on the floor with blood flowing from his abdomen. Farrow sternly informed her semi-conscious client not to say another word. When she inquired as to how Clara had received her wounds, she received conflicting reports. Some witnesses claimed that a deputy sheriff had attempted to dislodge the gun from her hand, causing her to accidentally shoot herself, while others claimed that she attempted to commit suicide after shooting her ex-husband. Ten shots ultimately were fired: three in Clara, three lodged in the courthouse walls, and four in Louis.²¹

The press immediately painted Clara Schweiger as a crazed woman. The *Kansas City Star* reported that Clara had shot Louis three times in the back and twice more as he rolled in agony on the floor screaming, "Don't shoot any more! I didn't lie!" The *Star* did substantiate Farrow's claim that Schweiger cried out as she shot Louis, "I want to see my darling boy! I love you! I want my sweetheart back."²²

Another newspaper claimed that Clara even attempted to shoot Sam Strother, Louis's attorney, for testimony he introduced into court. The paper sharply contrasted the behavior of Clara with that of Farrow. Mrs. Schweiger was described as a "mad woman," "screaming," "hysterical," "with a frenzied look in her eye." The headline of the article proclaimed, "Woman Attorney For Mrs. Schweiger is Calmest Person on Tragic Scene."²³

The press immediately pounced on the more sensationalistic aspects of the Schweiger marriage and dissolution, regardless of the legitimacy of the facts. The *Kansas City Star* claimed that Clara received a letter with a live adder during the divorce proceedings. The *Star* noted that the couple had attempted unsuccessfully to conceive a child for years and finally decided to adopt an infant but strongly disagreed over the desired gender. Clara clearly

18. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 84.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 85.

21. *Ibid.*, 84-90.

22. "Shot at Courthouse."

23. Unidentified newspaper clippings, Farrow Papers.

had wanted a female child, but Louis made the decision of a male child at the orphanage. Clara expressed concern about the physical similarities between her newly adopted child and her husband, leading her to the conclusion that the infant really was Louis's illegitimate son. The *Star* even reported that Clara traveled to Cincinnati for proof of Louis's infidelity.²⁴

Perhaps the most far-reaching story was Louis's "last statement to deputy prosecutor Latshaw." He supposedly stated, "She deliberately shot me. She took out her revolver out of her pocketbook and shot me. She threatened to shoot me before we were separated but I thought it was a bluff. I loved her, and wanted to do the right thing by her, but she was so contrary."²⁵

Louis was taken to German Hospital and Clara was transported to City General Hospital, a facility for indigent patients. The *Star* claimed that Clara "tossed wildly on a pallet in the x-ray room" while a representative from the prosecutor's office attempted to obtain a statement from her.²⁶ Farrow argued that she refused to allow the prosecutor's office to interview her client.

That afternoon, Louis Schweiger died. What had started as a straightforward divorce proceeding now became a murder case as the prosecutor immediately brought charges against Clara Schweiger. Farrow eventually agreed to represent Clara, but realizing that she would need help on such an ominous case, she obtained the support of Judge Wade Stanfield, a former employer, and James Shannon, a friend of Clara's family. It must have seemed necessary for Farrow to obtain male co-counsel for two critical reasons. First, Farrow had never represented a client in such a case in which life and death were clearly at stake. Second, in cooperating with gendered prescriptions, Farrow sought male expertise.

For nearly a year continuances and delays plagued the case, as did the substantial pre-trial publicity. In her autobiography, Farrow described it as a double-header—

24. "Had Trouble Over Adopted Son," *Kansas City Star*, May 1, 1915. During the trial, Farrow pointed out that the Schweiger's adopted son looked remarkably like Louis, questioning whether the couple had adopted Louis's biological child.

25. *Ibid.*

26. "Too Hysterical to Talk," *Kansas City Star*, n.d.

woman charged with murder was being defended by a female attorney.²⁷ In the early twentieth century, while many women fought for suffrage, the male-dominated media was quick to categorize women into "types." Clearly Clara Schweiger typified the hysterical type, a pathological category of womanhood. Tiera Farrow, on the other hand, was an ideal type, and the press gave her a favorable portrayal as a womanly woman, strong-minded yet respectful of male domination. Lisa Tickner argues that "journalists lingered lovingly over the details of [the] classification and pathology" of female types.²⁸ Farrow was a female attorney



Tiera Farrow (left) became the focus of the media spotlight in her defense of Clara Schweiger (right). This sketch of the two women in court appeared in the March 1, 1916, *Kansas City Star* with the headline "Husband Slayer and Her Woman Attorney."

but not described as a "masculine" woman, a derogatory phrase that would have made her a threat to the principal discourse of civil society. She was considered a career-minded, womanly woman.

Much of the media focus was on Farrow. The *Sapulpa Daily Argus* claimed, "She has already gained considerable fame as a modern Portia." Another newspaper stated, "[She is] young, good-looking and most feminine in appearance—not at all the sort of person one would connect

27. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 93.

28. Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–14* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 167.

with wranglings of attorneys and the heated debates usually attendant upon murder trials.²⁹

A female attorney defending a client in such an unsavory case was highly unusual. Substantial prejudice and discrimination toward women still occurred in the courtroom in 1916. One female lawyer of the era, Alice McClanahan, stated, "You have all of the difficulties which confront young men lawyers starting and more than double their handicaps because of your sex. You will meet with rudeness, be patronized, swept aside and often have to fight for the merest right. You will find judges inclined to give the best of an argument to your male opponents. You will be condescended to, ignored, and you will have to fight every step of the way."³⁰ Such handicaps as these necessitated that in the Schweiger case Stanfield be chosen as chief counsel for Clara when the trial began on February 25, 1916. Despite this fact, Tiera Farrow claimed that she did most of the pre-trial work, seeking out and interviewing witnesses and providing a verbal report of her findings to the other two attorneys. Stanfield announced to the press that he would enter an insanity plea in his client's defense.

The court had difficulty obtaining a suitable number of impartial jurors. Women were not allowed to serve on juries in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1916.³¹ The prosecutor's chief question in examining the male jurors was whether the defendant's gender would influence the juror's verdict. One potential juror, W. R. Price, was asked, "Mr. Price, the defendant in this case is a woman. If you were selected as a juror to try this case and swore that by a juror upon the law and the evidence, would the fact of her sex cut any figure with you in the trial one way or another?" More than two-thirds of the male jurors disqualified themselves because they felt the defendant's gender would cause them to be lenient.³²

The trial was sufficiently noteworthy to require that special wires be installed in the courtroom to carry news of the proceedings. Wide publicity brought a crowd of spectators from the opening day. Judge Ralph Latshaw presided over the case in the criminal division of the cir-

29. *Sapulpa (Oklahoma) Daily Argus*, April 5, 1915; quotation in Berry, *The Fifty Most Influential Women in American Law*, 80.

30. Quotation in Karen Berger Marelle, *The Woman Lawyer in America: 1638 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1986), 175.

31. In 1945 the State of Missouri passed a constitutional amendment [Article I, Section 22 (b) of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals] making women eligible to serve on a jury in Missouri.

32. Folder 3, KC242, Schweiger Trial Records; "Scores Dodge Jury Service in Schweiger Case," unidentified newspaper, Farrow Papers.

cuit court. The prosecution, led by Floyd Jacobs and assisted by Ed Curtain, subpoenaed more than one hundred witnesses for the state, and the defense subpoenaed sixty. By March 2 the jury had been selected.

Floyd Jacobs began the proceedings by delivering a ruinous opening statement, claiming the Schweigers' marriage "was a tragedy of domestic woe."³³ Speaking of Clara, he argued that despite the "kind treatment her husband had shown her . . . she in turn had berated him." Clara hated her husband, Jacobs asserted; she was simply a gold digger who frequently embarrassed her husband by calling him names in front of others. The attorney went so far as to claim that Clara said, "You should keep your husband under thumb like I do, that's the only way to get along with a man." Clara allegedly would throw Louis out of the house, screaming, "Get out of here you cur! You God Damned Dutchman! Get out of here you dog!"³⁴

Hearing Jacobs's harsh words proved too much for Clara, seated in the courtroom; she cried out, "Oh my God! This is too much!" and throwing up her hands wildly, she sobbed and moaned aloud. Years later Farrow remembered that Clara's actions made the male jurors look restless and the spectators uneasy. After a recess, Jacobs continued his relentless attack, asserting Clara had told a friend that if her husband obtained a divorce, she would kill him. He also claimed that as her husband lay writhing on the courthouse floor, she deliberately continued firing gunshots into him and screamed, "You lied to me!"³⁵ By the time Jacobs finished speaking, Clara Schweiger was hysterical.

At this point in the trial, the two male defense attorneys agreed that Farrow might make a more effective presence in front of the all-male jury because she was more familiar with the facts of the case. Farrow was terrified to give the opening statement. Her experience before a jury was limited, and she only had a few scribbled notes prepared.³⁶ But at her co-counsel's insistence, she agreed to make the opening remarks. Farrow claimed that Clara Schweiger suffered a form of insanity. She experienced "melancholia . . . brought on by some great anxiety and sorrow." Farrow then explained to the jury that Clara had been brought to this emotional state because Louis was "cold, indifferent and cruel," that he "neglected her" and quarreled with her often.³⁷ Portraying a victim of domestic abuse, Far-

33. Folder 8, KC242, Schweiger Trial Records.

34. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 96; Folder 8, KC242, Schweiger Trial Records.

35. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 96.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

row claimed that Louis “slapped her and knocked her against the wall,” “choked her and threw her upon the floor,” and “shoved her head against the wall.” She also asserted that Louis was unfaithful to his wife. Farrow argued that Clara’s inability to conceive children and her unsolennized marriage caused her great sorrow.³⁸

Charging that this “faithful wife” and “good mother” became “frantic with grief” after losing her child and home, Farrow explained that Clara had completely forgotten most of the events of the day of her husband’s death. She painted a vibrant picture of a well-dressed, smiling Louis who spent all of his money on cigars while his poorly clad ex-wife went without much-needed food. Farrow declared that Clara Schweiger had simply lost everything and that Louis was gloating in her face. It was this set of circumstances that caused her to commit the acts that she did, and her client should expect a full acquittal.³⁹

The press paid little attention to Clara Schweiger; Tiera Farrow indeed was the center of attention. The *Kansas City Post* explained, “She wore a simple black dress and white collar. Above the collar was a young, fair, soft face, crowned with light hair. From the opening words, spoken in a clear but natural tone, to the very end, everyone paid close attention. At times she spoke feelingly and the effectiveness of her words and manners were apparent on the faces of the jurors.” This “universal spectacle” played out before an audience that was two-thirds female. The *Post* stated, “Admiration was expressed in whispers after Miss Farrow had concluded.” The *Kansas City Times* also noted that Farrow appeared “calm and collected.”⁴⁰

On March 3 the prosecution began three days of damning testimony against Clara Schweiger. Jacobs claimed the accused frequently called patrolmen to her house because she feared someone was trying to break in. Patrolman W. A. Bauswell eventually concluded, “She was insane.” Policeman Al Bergman was called to the Schweiger home in March 1913. He said that Louis explained, “My wife’s crazy—take her to a hospital.” Bergman explained, “Her hair was disheveled. Her eyes were wild. She resisted efforts . . . to remove her. They were compelled to use force to place her in an ambulance.”⁴¹ The prosecution’s strategy was to depict Clara Schweiger as a hysterical shrew, not as an abused woman.

38. Folder 9, KC242, Schweiger Trial Records; Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 96.

39. *Ibid.*, 96–8.

40. “Women’s Voice Seconds in Murder Trial,” *Kansas City Post*, March 2, 1916; *Kansas City Times*, March 2, 1916.

41. “The Insanity Plea Gains,” *Kansas City Star*, March 4, 1916.

Edith Hiatt and Mrs. W. J. Casey, operators for the Home Telephone Company, also testified for the prosecution. They stated that Clara Schweiger often called and talked to them for as long as twenty-five minutes regarding family members. They eventually sent a “special girl” to investigate her claim that people were listening in on her phone conversations.⁴² The prosecution then called Tiera Farrow as a witness on the stand. Jacobs asked her, “You represented her in fighting a divorce proceeding and you failed to urge insanity then. Why didn’t you tell the judge she was insane? Why didn’t you?” Apparently Farrow’s only response was, “Because.”⁴³



Although challenging the gender barriers, Farrow was held in good favor by the press because they approved of her as a “womanly woman.” Giving attention to her feminine attributes, the press described her as having “a young, fair, soft face, crowned with light hair.”

During the prosecution’s case, the defense team claimed that the state’s attorney used coercion in obtaining signed statements from their witnesses. Two female witnesses swore that prior to the start of the trial they had been pressured in the prosecutor’s office. Geraldine Seigler

42. *Ibid.*

43. “Days of Thrills at Schweiger Trial,” *ibid.*, March 5, 1916.

claimed that Deputy Prosecutor Curtain warned her, "We have a place for obstinate people like you." Seigler eventually signed a false statement out of fear of imprisonment.⁴⁴ Judge Latshaw sharply criticized the prosecutor's office for this and other abuses.

As the defense began its case, the attorneys planned to establish three major points. First, Louis Schweiger mistreated his wife. Second, he refused to give her money. Third, he refused to have their marriage solemnized in the Catholic Church. However, Judge Latshaw threw up numerous roadblocks in the defense of Clara Schweiger. For example, when the defense attempted to show photos of Clara Schweiger during various periods of her thirteen-year marriage to demonstrate her physical decay, the judge rejected the evidence.⁴⁵ The *Kansas City Journal* summed it up by saying, "Latshaw said it would not be proper to defame the dead man. Attorneys for Mrs. Schweiger may introduce testimony to show her mind was unbalanced. But to go further and try to show that Schweiger mistreated his wife would not be permissible."⁴⁶

The defense also faced three huge stumbling blocks. First Stanfield, who cross-examined many of the witnesses in court, apparently came to trial unprepared to defend his client. Both Farrow and Shannon examined most of the witnesses during the second half of the trial. The second problem was Clara Schweiger's emotional condition. Her periodic hysterical outbursts during the proceedings warranted sedation every day of the trial. One newspaper claimed that by March 6 she was near a complete collapse. During the weekend recess it was reported that she "lay awake weeping and moaning."⁴⁷ The third and most devastating blow to the case was the testimony of George Gray, a Kansas physician who had treated Clara for years. He told the defense team in advance that he considered his patient insane, yet on the witness stand he testified that she was sane under his care, completely stunning the defense team.⁴⁸

The courtroom was packed on March 7, the day of the closing arguments. Floyd Jacobs, as prosecutor, made a strident speech condemning Clara Schweiger, but the press largely ignored him. On the other hand, Tiera Farrow's defense of her client in her closing argument proved by far to be the most important speech of her life and one that would change her career. The *Kansas City Star* reported, "Although

she spoke in a low, well-modulated tone, she showed much emotion and at times her voice broke."⁴⁹ The *Kansas City Journal* observed, "Although this was her first experience as a criminal lawyer, Miss Farrow made a dramatic and yet intensely womanly plea that appeared to have a telling effect on the jury. She spoke directly and although at times her emotion made her tones falter and tears glisten in her eyes, she held to her discourse firmly and spectators in the rear of the thronged courtroom could hear every word."⁵⁰

The press considered Tiera Farrow an effective defense attorney specifically because of the "feminine" virtues she displayed in defense of her client. Because of her "emotion" and tears, she played into gender stereotypes regarding women, which the male members of the jury apparently accepted. This is not to discount the true feelings Farrow must have had for her client, but her closing was especially well received because she did not "act" like a male attorney. The first paragraph of Farrow's closing argument substantiates this view of womanhood, being a strictly feminine appeal by a distinctly female attorney: "The defendant in this case is a woman. And when I say a woman, I mean one of those creatures whom God has created as the highest type of humanity." Farrow claimed that women were "filled with love, sympathy and tenderness" and that they were "pure, lovely and lovable." This archetypal woman was all women. They were to be "mates . . . mothers" and by all standards, "ruled by love." Farrow then went through a lengthy list of historical lovers (Antony and Cleopatra; Mary, Queen of Scots, and Boswell; Dante and Beatrice—all doomed lovers, per se) to demonstrate that love is an unreasonable emotion.⁵¹

Farrow clearly attempted to paint Clara as a sick woman and tragic character, and she placed much of the blame on the ex-husband, claiming, "He apparently forgot the marriage vows. . . he forgot what marriage means. . . he humiliated her more and made her worse by calling the police."⁵² Clara was portrayed in standard Victorian garb—nervous, weak, crying. Farrow implied that Louis Schweiger should have been her white knight, her savior. She asked, "Why didn't he take Mrs. Schweiger in his arms, kiss away her tears and tell her all is well?" Farrow then told a story of neglect and abuse that magnified Clara's mental instability. She was terrified in her own home, in-

44. Ibid.

45. "Photos of Mrs. Schweiger Are Barred Out," *Kansas City Post*, n.d.

46. "Court Denies Story of Family Trouble," *Kansas City Journal*, n.d.

47. "Slayer Can't Take Stand," *Kansas City Star*, March 6, 1916.

48. Folder 20, KC242, Schweiger Trial Records.

49. "Woman's Love Her Plea," *Kansas City Star*, March 7, 1916.

50. "No Early Verdict on Schweiger Case," *Kansas City Journal*, March 8, 1916.

51. Closing Argument of Miss Tiera Farrow in case of State of Missouri v. Clara T. Schweiger on Tuesday, March 7, 1916, 1, Farrow Papers.

52. Ibid., 6.

sisting that she heard intruders. She kept a crowbar, a pair of scissors, and an ice pick under her pillow.⁵³ Ultimately, Farrow claimed, on the day of the divorce proceedings Clara snapped. The attorney pleaded that what her client needed was “God’s great out-of-doors . . . sunshine . . . fresh air, and above all, medical care.” Why, Farrow asked, is Clara here? “Because she loved. She has fulfilled the law of womanhood.”⁵⁴

Finally, to truly assert her own womanhood, to defend her own femininity and that of Clara before the all-male jury, Farrow drew attention to prosecutor Floyd Jacobs, observing that “it is his duty to prosecute this unfortunate woman. He can use the prestige of his office. . . . he is making a name, a reputation.” Farrow called Jacobs a man “with a great deal of brains, a bright lawyer, a splendid orator.”⁵⁵ Then, perhaps not in a spirit of denigration but rather of temperance, Farrow noted the contrast between herself with Jacobs: “I have not received one cent for anything I have done. I am not endowed with the brains of Mr. Jacobs. I am no orator. I am not looking for fame. I do not care for a reputation in the legal profession. I am only a woman—first, last and all the time a woman. Just as Mrs. Schweiger is, and I am standing her before you, pleading, pleading for the life and liberty of this woman.” The *Kansas City Star* reported that during the conclusion of Farrow’s closing arguments, Clara Schweiger and many of the women in the audience wept aloud.⁵⁶

Following the closing remarks, Judge Latshaw instructed the jury that this case had only five possible outcomes. Clara Schweiger could be found guilty of first-degree murder and receive the death penalty or life imprisonment; a finding of second-degree murder would sentence her to ten years to life; fourth-degree manslaughter meant two years in the penitentiary; insane at the time and presently insane would require Clara’s forced confinement in an asylum; or insane at the time of committing the crime and sane now meant an acquittal.⁵⁷

After twelve hours of deliberation, the jury returned the verdict: guilty on charges of second degree murder. The judge confined Clara to prison for two years, followed by parole on account of ill health. Tiera Farrow kept contact with Clara Schweiger during the last few years of the ill woman’s life, but the murder of her ex-husband, the subsequent trial, and her imprisonment all but destroyed her physically and emotionally.

53. *Ibid.*, 7.

54. *Ibid.*, 10.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 11; “Woman’s Love Her Plea.”

57. Farrow, *Lawyer in Petticoats*, 101.

Farrow “lost” the Schweiger case but she had secured for her client a lesser charge. The trial significantly propelled her own legal career, marking a new period in her life. She claimed, “The publicity I received during the trial . . . had [the] effect of making me widely known as a lawyer to the public.”⁵⁸ Farrow began to secure more clients and was appointed as a divorce proctor for Kansas City, Missouri.

Farrow proved to be an effective lawyer in the first half of the twentieth century because she often capitalized on



Tiera Farrow proved to be an effective lawyer, capitalizing on preconceived gender stereotypes before all-male juries while practicing her feminist beliefs outside the courtroom.

preconceived gender stereotypes before all-male juries. Outside the courtroom she practiced her feminist beliefs. Throughout the 1920s she conducted legal classes for women, familiarizing them with issues that impacted their daily lives.⁵⁹ She also was the first woman to be sponsored for (and denied) membership in the Kansas City Bar Association. Both a pragmatist and a trendsetter, Tiera Farrow successfully hurdled many obstacles that female professionals faced in the early twentieth century. 

58. *Ibid.*, 112.

59. Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, 3d ed. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), 125.