Shotguns Loaded with Ball

On the afternoon of Aug. 16, 1843, Congresswoman Alice LaBranche strode into the billiard saloon of a New Orleans hotel and singled out a newspaper editor named Hueston. Exactly what happened next became a matter of hot argument, but it is certain that the result was death on the field of honor.

LaBranche, a New Orleans Democrat, had been under Whig attack ever since his recent election. But he had just shrugged — until an article signed by Hueston appeared in a Baton Rouge paper. The article was a personal attack which claimed, among other things, that when the congressman had aroused another man's anger, he "valiantly took to his heels and implored shelter behind the skirts of several passing ladies."


It so happened, Castellanos said, that Hueston had come down from his home in Baton Rouge shortly after the inflammatory article had appeared. That was when LaBranche found him in the hotel billiard saloon.

As to what happened then, Hueston claimed that one of the congressman's friends held him as LaBranche himself beat the editor. LaBranche's friends said that this was untrue. Both men were highly popular; both were brave and sincere in their convictions. The only answer was to resort to the Code of Honor.

The grounds: near the intersection of Gentilly rd. and Elysian Fields. The weapons: double-barreled shotguns, a heavy ball in each barrel. The distance: 40 yards. The word of command was to be "Fire one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five," both combatants to discharge their barrels after the word "fire" and before the count of five.

Both men were cool as they stared at each other on the field. LaBranche's features were like marble. In Hueston's face a nerve twitched spasmodically.

"Fire! One . . ." The roar of the two shotguns was almost simultaneous. The crowd stared, holding its breath. Both men had missed, though one of LaBranche's bullets had punctured Hueston's hat, and the other had creased his lapel.

Hueston demanded a second fire. Both men missed again, though LaBranche's bullets moaned close around the newspaperman's ears. Hueston demanded another fire. This time one of LaBranche's bullets knocked the editor's hat off and creased his scalp. The blood poured down Hueston's face.

Wiping the blood away with a handkerchief, Hueston demanded a fourth fire. The crowd cried, "No!"

"Feel my pulse," the newspaperman said. "Does it not beat with regularity?"

It was now nearly 6 p.m. on the summer day. The duel continued. "Fire! One . . ."

Four barrels blasted out as one. Hueston fell mortally wounded. His remains were put on a Baton Rouge boat and carried upriver to his wife and young children.