Sheila McCann, 2015: The Trial of Joe Hill: What the Jury Did and Didn't Hear, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Below are excerpts from a Salt Lake Tribune *article that summarized major topics in Joe Hill's trial. Find the whole article here. [Changed for easier reading.]*

The case against Hill didn't include a murder weapon, a motive, or even a certain witness. It was built on this reasoning: Someone who looked like Hill was in the neighborhood and inside the store on the night of the murders, someone was shot by young Arling Morrison, and Hill was shot that night. The verdict has been analyzed for the past 100 years. People have said that the jury was unfair or that Hill was framed by Mormons, copper bosses, or people who opposed unions. One historian blames Hill's lawyers. **Here are some of the issues the jury considered:**

The eyewitness: Merlin Morrison, then 13, was in the back of the store when his father and older brother were shot. After seeing Hill in jail, Merlin said that he looked somewhat like the attacker who shot his father. But Hill later claimed that Merlin "spoke his mind right out" at their meeting, saying, "No, that is not the man at all. The ones I saw were shorter and heavier-set." Later at the trial, Merlin could only say that Hill's general appearance was the same as one of the killers, who both wore hats and had bandanas over their noses and chins.

The attorneys: Partway through the trial, Hill tried to fire his attorneys, but they ended up staying. Hill said that they were not catching problems with witnesses' stories. For example, at the first hearing, no witnesses mentioned scars on the faces of men walking near the Morrisons' store. Yet later at trial, several witnesses said that they remembered a man with scars. (Hill had scars on his face from a medical treatment in Sweden.)

Arling's shot and Hill's gunshot wound: The attorneys argued over whether Arling Morrison had actually fired a gun back at the attackers. The bullets fired by the attackers were all found in the store, but Arling's bullet was never found. The bullet that struck Hill exited out his back, so it was strange that it was not in the store. Also, the bullet hole in Hill's clothing was several inches lower than his wound. A defense doctor testified that Hill must have been holding his hands over his head when he was shot. But the prosecuting attorney suggested that Hill may have been leaning over the store's counter to shoot Arling.

There were also issues the jury did not consider:

The revenge theory: John Morrison had stopped two earlier attempts to rob him. Between those failed attacks, he had briefly served as a police officer. He told several people in the months before the murders that he feared someone from the neighborhood wanted to kill him. But the judge refused to hear from a reporter who had interviewed Morrison about his fears.

A motive: The assassins made no attempt to steal money from the store before fleeing. There was no evidence that Hill had known John Morrison and had any disagreement with him.

Hill's confession: Physician Frank McHugh, the doctor who treated Hill's gunshot wound, claimed decades later (in 1946) that Hill had confessed to him. McHugh said that Hill admitted to have shot the Morrisons in self-defense as each reached for a gun. There was no evidence John Morrison, who had been moving potatoes when he was shot, ever reached for a gun. Some historians dismiss the confession story and others call it a mystery.